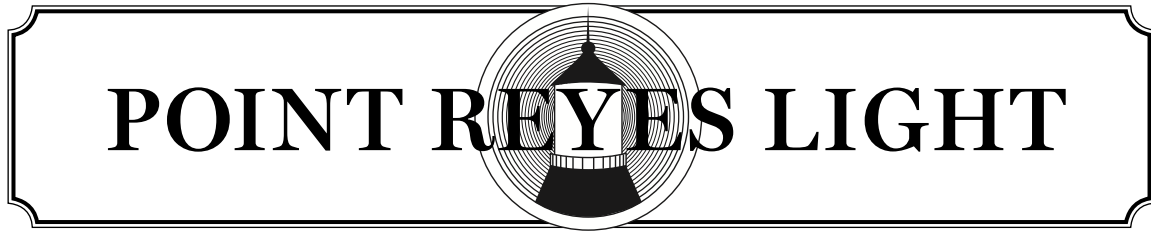


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NEWS

Bo families call for humane ranch housing

by **Ben Stocking**

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A group that has lived in the shadows of Bolinas raised its voice last week with the help of a friend who made their case for safe, affordable and humane homes.

Last Wednesday, spokesman Hector Mora urged a packed community meeting to rally behind a plan to build a temporary R.V. park for the mostly Latino residents of the Tacherra ranch who say they have long lived in housing unfit for human habitation.

“If you hear about 50-plus people living at the Tacherra ranch, that’s just a number,” Mr. Mora began. “But there are real people behind it. They don’t read the Hearsay News. They don’t yet feel like they belong in meetings like this one.”

The ranch families asked Mr. Mora to speak on their behalf because he has longstanding relationships with the immigrant and non-immigrant communities in Bolinas, where he works as a stone mason. He does not live at the ranch and recently moved to Petaluma after losing his rental in town.

The meeting was organized in response to news that the county had granted an emergency permit to allow the Bolinas Community Land Trust to install 23 trailers on a lot between the rundown ranch and the fire station. The R.V. park would be an interim measure while the trust completes a purchase of the 46-acre ranch and builds permanent housing there.

The statement thanked the ranch owners, Jim and Susan Tacherra, for taking the families in when no one else would. But conditions on the property have deteriorated over the years, and last summer the county found numerous code violations during an inspection of the unpermitted and haphazardly constructed sheds and trailers. Some of the dwellings lacked showers and proper toilets, and sewage had been pumped into nearby pits.

“Many of us now live in conditions that are worse than the homes we left,” Mr. Mora read in Spanish from a prepared statement. “It is not normal for us to live this way. We are not accustomed to it. It hurts our dignity.”

Living in such conditions requires strength and resilience, Mr. Mora said. “Our hardships have been hiding in your plain sight for two decades. We may make it look like everything is okay, but it’s not. Our fear of losing what little we have has kept us from speaking up.”

He continued, “We are the parents of your children’s friends, the people you rely on to take care of your garden, clean your house, do construction, grow your food, take care of the farm animals you like to have nearby, cook the food you enjoy and serve you in our local restaurants. We are hardworking people who contribute our labor, intelligence, love and creativity every day to keeping this community going.”

The R.V. park would be located on grazing land purchased by the trust in 2018 with \$1.65 million from a private donor. The trust previously hoped to build permanent housing there but dropped the idea after a consulting biologist told them it would encroach on wetlands.

In the new plan, the R.V.s would be located more than 50 feet away from the wetlands on a previously disturbed site that housed a chicken coop.

The land trust's plan would benefit the entire community, Mr. Mora said. "Please do not use your privilege, your extra time, your money and your better education to fight to deny us the hope of a better future for our children—children who are American citizens and who are growing up to care for this community as much as you do," he said.

When he finished, his daughter, Estella Mora Lopez, read the statement in English. The audience then burst into applause.

"I was nervous," said Ms. Mora Lopez, a student at the California College of the Arts. "I'm not a good public speaker, but it's something I'm passionate about. Everyone needed to hear it."

No one in the audience spoke out against the R.V. plan, which generated heated debate in the Bolinas Hearsay News in the days leading up to the meeting. Some residents had written letters expressing concern that the project would damage wetlands and deprive the community of open space.

Genie McNaughton, a Bolinas resident who opposed the previous plan for permanent housing, attended last week's meeting and said she supports the new proposal. "It's absolutely wonderful that we've come to this place and that we have a solution that should have been the solution from the very beginning," she said.

By speaking out, the Tacherra ranch residents had added a crucial voice to the conversation, said Annie O'Connor, the land trust's executive director. "I hope it inspires more agricultural workers and historically marginalized members of our county to trust their voices are welcome in civic engagement," she said.

The Tacherras, who live on the ranch with their two grown children, would move into the R.V. park and eventually into the permanent housing. Their attorney, Jack Siedman, said the family could have made more money by asking the court-appointed receiver who oversees the property to seek a different buyer. They chose another course.

“The point was to continue their legacy, to continue providing housing for people in the community and provide something that was more than just about the money,” Mr. Siedman said. “The project that has been developed by the land trust is exactly what they had in mind.”

The plan must still get approval from the California Coastal Commission. Once it’s approved, the R.V. park would be dismantled as soon as the condemned structures are removed and replaced. The land trust said it hopes to transform the ranch into an agricultural cooperative with community gardens and perhaps a herd of goats.

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