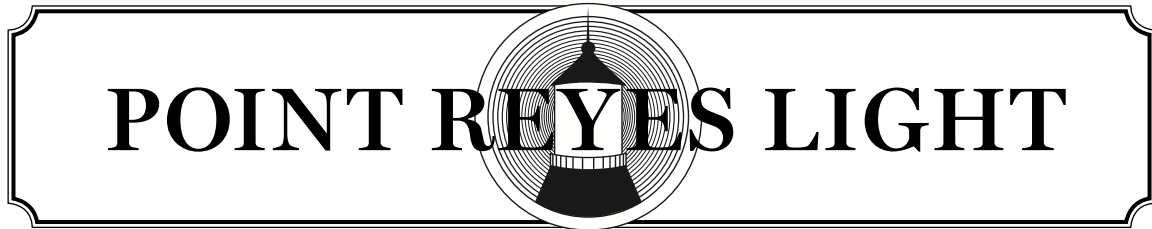


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NEWS

County okays RV housing for Bo workers

by **Ben Stocking**

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The county has approved an emergency coastal development permit for an R.V. park that would temporarily house nearly 60 workers and their families who have been living in condemned housing on a neighboring ranch compound on Mesa Road in Bolinas. ×

Last summer, the county deemed the 23 structures on the property unfit for human habitation. The Bolinas Community Land Trust now plans to purchase the 46-acre site, demolish the dilapidated structures and replace them with permanent and affordable agricultural housing.

“It’s our responsibility to see to it that the situations people are living in are healthy and safe,” said Sarah Jones, director of the county’s Community Development Agency. “That’s what our codes are for. The people living there don’t have another place to live. There’s no other housing available, and they are very much a part of the community.”

Both the parcel that houses the current structures and a 20-acre parcel destined for the R.V.s had been owned by the Tacherra family for the better part of a century. But a court-appointed receiver has been in control of the family's properties since 2006, following a lawsuit filed by one brother in the family against another over alleged embezzlement.

In 2018, the receiver, Stinson Beach resident Larry Baskin, sold the undeveloped 20-acre parcel to the land trust to help pay off remaining debts and tax liabilities. That site, which is adjacent to the condemned properties, would house the temporary R.V. park. An anonymous donor provided \$1.65 million to the trust to acquire the land.

After the county approved the emergency permit on Tuesday, the land trust was given 30 days to seek approval from the California Coastal Commission. In the meantime, the trust will apply for county building and septic permits. Ms. Jones said staff could start reviewing those permit requests immediately. If they are approved, the trust could choose to install the trailers while awaiting the commission's decision, she added.

"If the coastal commission denies the permit for the temporary ag worker housing, then the immediate and very pressing concern would be that the residents would have no place to go." Ms. Jones said.

Nearly all the Tacherra ranch residents are Latino, and some have lived there for as long as 20 years, said Annie O'Connor, the incoming executive director of the land trust. Many have children who were born in West Marin and attend local schools.

The 20-acre parcel, which is located next to the fire station, is the only suitable site in Bolinas for a project of this size, Ms. O'Connor said. "It's an emergency," she said. "We would hope to move quickly and be able to avoid the residents enduring another winter in their current condition."

Last summer, county inspectors found a host of violations at the Tacherra ranch, where residents have been living for years in unpermitted, haphazardly constructed outbuildings and trailers without proper plumbing or septic systems. Dishwater and

sewage have been pumped into pits close to people's residences, some of which have only outdoor showers. Water has been supplied by garden hoses, the county found.

After the inspection, the receiver took temporary steps to alleviate the violations at the ranch, installing porta-potties and channeling wastewater into a holding tank that must be pumped out regularly.

Since applying for the permit, Ms. O'Connor said, the trust has been negotiating with the receiver to purchase the 46-acre lot. They reached a purchase-and-sale agreement with Mr. Baskin and have obtained the support of family members who would benefit from the sale, she said.

The project will not move forward until the sale is completed, Ms. O'Connor said. The trust hopes to have the R.V.s installed by September.

Concerns about the timing of the land trust's announcement of the project and whether the R.V. park would encroach on wetlands or improperly detract from open space have flooded the Bolinas Hearsay News in recent days. Though the land trust requested the emergency coastal permit in March, the move came to public attention only after a resident noticed the application online and wrote a letter to the Hearsay last week.

Ms. O'Connor said the trust had planned to announce the project tonight at its annual meeting. But after news of the plan leaked out, the trust decided to present its plans at a community meeting held last night, after this edition went to press.

Caitlin Hicks, who grew up in Bolinas and whose family still lives there, wrote a letter urging that alternative locations be explored that would not encroach on environmentally sensitive open space. Everyone agrees that Bolinas needs more affordable housing, she said, but it is also important to protect the community's natural resources.

"I don't believe anyone disagrees that a compassionate solution is necessary," she wrote, adding: "Natural resources are silent and can't pound the public discourse table for their preservation."

Much of the 20-acre site, which was carved out of a larger parcel of grazing land, has been designated as wetlands that are subject to strict environmental restrictions. The property is also governed by a county Williamson Act contract, which gives property owners a tax break if they agree to leave land open for grazing.

After the trust acquired the property, a consulting biologist advised them that a plan they were considering for permanent housing at the site would not work due to its proximity to wetlands.

Ms. Jones said the R.V. park would be located outside the wetlands on previously disturbed land that housed a chicken coop. Moreover, she said, the proposal calls for agricultural housing, which is expressly permitted under the Williamson Act.

Jack Siedman, an attorney for members of the Tacherra family, said seasonal flooding affects just a portion of the property near Mesa Road. The area dries out in the summer.

When the R.V. park is eventually removed, Ms. O'Connor said, the trust would work with environmental groups to ensure that the wetlands are not only intact but protected and improved.

Bolinas has strict limits on the number of water connections allowed in town, but Ms. O'Connor said the trust believes it won't need additional connections to move the projects forward. Existing connections at both sites should be sufficient to support the R.V. park and the permanent housing, she said.

The land trust is in the midst of a leadership transition. Longtime director Arianne Dar retired last month, and Ms. O'Connor, who has served as administrative director for the past year, is stepping in to replace her. The change has been long planned, Ms. O'Connor said, and the timing has nothing to do with the announcement of the project.

Two Tacherra brothers, James and Ernest, have an interest in the estate. James Tacherra, who was born on the ranch more than seven decades ago, still lives there

with his wife, Susan, and two grown children. A third brother and a sister settled with the estate several years ago.

If the project goes forward, James will move into the R.V. park with his family and then into the permanent housing.

Mr. Siedman said the Tacherra family has supported the land trust's proposal from its inception.

“I hope that people in the community would come to the conclusion that this is the best solution for providing low-cost, affordable housing to a large number of people who have lived in this community for many years,” Mr. Siedman told the Light. “This is an opportunity to provide them with some really decent housing that they can afford.”

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