



POINT REYES LIGHT

NEWS

Emergency housing set to open in Bo

by **Ben Stocking**
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About 60 people living in condemned housing on a Bolinas ranch could begin moving into an emergency R.V. park next door as early as next week. The project’s organizers are forging ahead even though they are still scrambling to secure all the permits and money they will need to keep the project running after it opens.

“Because this is an emergency, we’re going as fast and as far as we can with the money and permissions that we do have,” said Annie O’Connor, executive director of the Bolinas Community Land Trust. “We are committed to bringing it live by Oct. 20.”

As the move approaches, Bolinas residents are grappling with the emotional fallout of a legal action filed by the ranch tenants, nearly all of them Latino, against the court-appointed receiver managing the property, Larry Baskin, a Stinson Beach attorney, and the ranch owners, Jim, Susan and Ernie Tacherra.

Mr. Baskin was appointed several years ago after Jim and Ernie became embroiled in a legal and financial dispute. Jim and Susan live on the property and are longtime

Bolinas residents. Ms. Tacherra taught for years at a preschool in Stinson Beach attended by a generation of Bolinas children.

The Tacherras have supported the land trust's plans for opening the emergency housing—and for buying the ranch and replacing the dilapidated housing with new, affordable homes.

One major challenge in getting the R.V. park off the ground is ensuring the project has water for the dozens of people who are expected to move in. Bolinas has a limited water supply and a moratorium on new water connections. That complication was resolved last week when the land trust received permission from the local utility district to “stack” water meters at three different properties, allowing them to allocate some water from each to the temporary R.V. park.

“This is huge,” Ms. O’Connor said. “It means we’ll be able to open the R.V. park and serve the residents as soon as the trailers arrive.”

The land trust has signed two-year leases for 27 trailers, which will be placed on a vacant lot the trust owns at 130 Mesa Road, between the fire station and the dilapidated ranch compound at 160 Mesa Road. The land trust is still negotiating a purchase-and-sale agreement for the condemned property with Mr. Baskin. Both parties expect to sign a deal by Oct. 20, although it will take several months before the sale closes.

The land trust has received financial commitments from local donors and foundations but still needs to raise \$1 million to cover the costs of the project. It is hoping to raise \$390,000 by the end of the month.

The project also requires additional zoning approvals from the county, which gave the land trust an emergency coastal development permit last May that allowed the project to proceed. But the permit expires after six months, and the trust must still receive a permanent coastal development permit if it wants to operate the park beyond next month. The project also requires a use permit allowing the trust to operate a campground.

“We’re in an incredibly challenging position given the emergency nature of this project,” Ms. O’Connor said. “We’re being forced to do things in parallel that really should be sequential. Normally, you’d develop the plans, get the permits, raise the funds and then you’d start the work.”

Sarah Jones, director of the Marin County Community Development Agency, has expressed support for the project and plans to ask supervisors to contribute funding for it, assuming the zoning department approves the remaining permits.

“We are very concerned and feel that there need to be different living arrangements for the residents of 160 Mesa before the rainy season starts,” Ms. Jones said. “Time is of the essence in getting people moved out of there.”

State Sen. Mike McGuire has also expressed support for the project and has pledged to seek funding for it, Ms. O’Connor said. Land trust officials met with him last week, and they are appealing to community members for funding, too.

The land trust is not involved in the tenants’ legal complaint, which has stirred strong emotions in the community. The conflicting perspectives on the complaint were reflected in letters to the Bolinas Hearsay News last week.

“This has been our town’s truly affordable and diverse housing, and it grew beyond what the Tacherras could accommodate,” wrote Jennie Pfeiffer. “They were kind beyond their ability to cope.”

Ms. Pfeiffer argued that taking tenants’ concerns to court could divide even supporters of the emergency R.V. park and discourage some from offering financial support for the project.

“Allowing the Tacherra family to be vilified and put in a position to suffer emotional anguish and the financial cost of defending themselves in a lawsuit is appalling,” Ms. Pfeiffer said. “The Tacherras are kindhearted people, and this impending lawsuit is making it difficult for them to go about their daily activities in the community.”

In a response to her letter, Bolinas resident Hanford Woods criticized Ms. Pfeiffer for suggesting that the lawsuit would be harmful to the tenants' own interests.

“Again and again, Jennie goes on about how we are this one harmonious community,” Mr. Woods wrote. “We aren't. This is a class and ethnically stratified community.”

Ms. Pfeiffer's letter was “pious and patronizing,” Mr. Woods wrote.

“I just think it's important to see things as they are, and the painting of these rosy pictures of a Bolinas without conflict, based as they are on willful delusions, are just as likely to bring harm to this community as divisive lawsuits,” he said.

After inspecting the property last year, county health inspectors said the roughly 20 rundown trailers and makeshift structures on the ranch were unfit for human habitation. Many of the dwellings lacked heat and others running water. Most lacked proper plumbing and septic systems. Sewage was being pumped directly onto the property.

The legal complaint was brought on behalf of the tenants by Legal Aid of Marin and the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation. It calls on the receiver to repay back rent to the tenants, who were paying from \$250 to \$2,500 a month.

In an interview with the Light this week, a woman who lives on the ranch with her family said the residents filed the suit not to harm the Tacherras but to stand up for their rights and protect their dignity.

“Nobody should be treated this way,” said the woman, who asked to remain anonymous. “It's not right. It's against the law. Money should not be put ahead of people's quality of life.”

She said the residents were spurred to action after a 5-year-old girl who lived at the ranch developed a staph infection that required her to be hospitalized twice.

For years, the woman said, ranch residents have been afraid to complain about the poor housing conditions, fearing they would lose their homes and have no place to go. But after the county red-tagged the property last year, some of them formed a tenants group and began to speak out.

The woman has attended meetings with a committee studying the county's agricultural and low-income housing needs and learned that the problems at the Tacherra ranch exist elsewhere in West Marin.

“This won't end here,” she said. “We're going to keep fighting to help others who are living in similar conditions.”