

All About Marin: New bridge over Canal gets good airing at meeting

Brad Breithaupt
Marin Independent Journal

Article Launched:07/12/2007 12:16:53 AM PDT

BUILDING a bridge across the San Rafael Canal drew a lot of support from officials at a forum Tuesday night.

Jonathan Frieman, a San Rafael civic activist, hosted the forum that brought more than 50 people to the Pickleweed Park Community Center. Politicians, bureaucrats, the billion-dollar Marin Community Foundation and advocacy groups were represented around the table.

Even state Sen. Carole Migden and Assemblyman Mark Leno, her Democratic challenger, sent representatives.

But there were few Canal area residents who would use the span to get to school, stores or jobs.

The idea has been discussed before, most recently in 1999 when the city prepared an engineering study that said it could cost millions. A recent list of transportation goals for Canal area residents and businesses placed a bridge as a top priority.

At a recent meeting with Marin Supervisor Steve Kinsey, the idea was raised by local teens as a way to connect the Canal with the rest of the city.

Frieman is trying to build public support for the idea to help get grants to design and build the span.

Where the crossing would take place - even the possibility of a tunnel under the canal - is up in the air.

Theo Posthuma of Ross has plans for a retractable bridge from the end of Canal Street to the 100 block of Third Street, across the street from San Rafael High School and about a third of a mile east of the Montecito Shopping Center.

But others at the meeting questioned whether that might be too far away from the Canal's population center to do much good.

"Can we make it a little more central to the apartment complexes?" asked Olivia Beltran, who works with the Grassroots Leadership Network of Marin.

The Rev. Paul Rossi, pastor of St. Raphael Church, was there to lend his support.

"I would love to see the community down here have more access to the whole town," he said.

"Where there is political will, there is money," predicted David Hoffman, director of planning of the Marin County Bicycle Coalition, which sees the crossing as a bike link.

County planning commissioners aren't going to change their minds about new, strict development limits for the St. Vincent's-Silveira tract. Commission chairman Wade Holland made it clear that planners aren't about to reverse their May vote that curbed development on the 1,260 acres.

That hasn't stopped people from giving them an earful.

Allan G. Bortel, vice chairman of the Marin County Commission on Aging, suggested the county adopt a planning zone called a "senior corridor" - a policy that would make sure seniors aren't priced out of Marin.

He noted that the Redwoods in Mill Valley has a seven-year waiting list to get in.

The aging commission has been pushing for building a 600-unit Redwoods-type retirement center on St. Vincent's-Silveira. The planners' limit of 221 units "wiped out" that hope, he said.

Remember when the Marin United Taxpayers Association announced it was going to stay out of the Ross Valley flood control fee election? The local tax fighters soon changed their mind and jumped in to oppose the tax, fee, charge, levy or whatever you want to call it.

At Tuesday's county meeting, MUTA leader Fielding Greaves called the flood fee election "shocking and shameful" and joined a chorus of opponents who urged supervisors to reject election results that narrowly approved it. The measure won by 65 votes in an unusual mail-in election in which county officials tossed out 21 percent of the ballots because voters failed to sign them. Less than 1 percent of ballots are invalidated in the typical Marin election.

County supervisors endorsed the results anyway. It looks like a sure thing that opponents will sue.

Roy Wolford, a Fairfax property owner, asked for an independent audit of the results and promised to ask for investigations by the county grand jury and the Marin district attorney.

Dave Burns, the Woodacre dad who last week launched a hunger strike to help raise the \$1 million needed to finish the San Geronimo School gym, has lost 10 pounds and raised \$50,000 while on a diet of water, maple syrup and lemon juice.

"Let's see, at this rate, I'll have to lose about 260 pounds," he joked.

He's not that big.

Burns, who has coached CYO basketball teams that have to travel to Fairfax to play and practice, is committed to the cause. For more information, check out www.sgvcc.org

The other day, I was at a grocery store that offers a senior-citizen discount to shoppers 55 and older. I don't qualify.

But the clerk, a high school kid, told me I would be getting a discount.

I thanked her, but declined, saying that I'm not eligible.

"Really?" she responded.

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