



THE CITY OF  
**NOVATO**  
CALIFORNIA

75 Rowland Way, #200  
Novato, CA 94945-3232  
415/899-8900  
FAX 415/899-8213  
[www.ci.novato.ca.us](http://www.ci.novato.ca.us)

Mayor  
Jeanne MacLeamy  
Mayor Pro Tem  
Carole Dillon-Knutson  
Councilmembers  
Denise Athas  
Pat Eklund  
Madeline Kellner

City Manager  
Michael S. Frank

August 10, 2010

RE: Housing Element Update #2

Dear Community Members,

On June 21, I wrote to you regarding the City's General Plan Housing Element process and that the City would be taking a hiatus for a period of time while we conduct more research, provide information, and return with a more comprehensive process prior to any decision making by the Planning Commission or City Council. Due to the significant community apprehension and interest in housing issues, staff felt it was important to step back and allow time for more research, discussions, and community involvement. All of us (staff and many of you) have been very busy since then.

Given the investigation of options and ongoing discussions, I firmly believe that we will be able to come to a collaborative solution that will work for Novato. This memo is to provide an update and also give you a heads up that the Hanna Ranch Project is moving forward (more on that later in this letter).

If you have not visited our website ([cityofnovato.org](http://cityofnovato.org)), please do. We have opened a new housing web page where there are close to fifty pages providing information on the basics of housing law, requirements regarding the number of housing units the City needs to accommodate, potential housing sites throughout the City, and a review of current and past activities regarding housing. Citizen questions and comments are being posted and additional information is being added on an ongoing basis.

We have convened several small groups of residents and stakeholders to help staff learn more about concerns regarding options for Novato. The purpose of these small group meetings was to gain ideas on how to outreach to the community as we move forward, build a comprehensive list of questions and concerns, and rebuild communication between the City and key neighborhoods. More of these groups will be convened in the coming weeks.

Despite some of the rumors, I assure you that we are not trying to engage in a "divide and conquer" strategy. There is no foregone conclusion. Many questions were raised by the small groups and comments from attendees made it clear there are concerns about State and regional requirements being passed on to local communities, the density of any new housing in Novato, where housing should be located, and how affordable housing might be accommodated in the community. We understand that residents want to retain the small town character of the Novato community and their neighborhoods and want to preserve the value in their homes.

Given the concerns expressed by our residents, staff is investigating alternatives to address the housing issues we face and to minimize impacts on existing neighborhoods. Staff has conducted extensive discussions with the State to search out alternative methodologies to address housing needs. As we delve further into the discussion, we will be assessing alternative housing sites, scenarios to reduce the amount of acreage at higher densities, and possible methodologies to lower the maximum housing density.

In that light, there have been calls to require that housing be incorporated into all commercial developments. We will be assessing opportunities to take advantage of mixed use areas where housing can be integrated with commercial areas. We believe that there will be meaningful opportunities to shift some future housing from existing neighborhoods to commercial areas but we also believe that some commercial sites are less appropriate for residential development.

One project that is currently in the news and moving forward in the development process is the proposed office/retail/hotel project on Hanna Ranch south of Costco. Recently, there has been discussion in the community about incorporating housing into the Hanna Ranch project. Staff has reviewed this idea, but believes there are a variety of factors that make this site less appropriate for residential development. The property is isolated from any other residential development, schools, or parks. Because of the nearby freeways, Vintage Oaks, and wetlands areas, any housing developed there will be forever isolated from other residential areas. Due to these factors, City staff is not recommending a change in the project's scope to include housing. The Hanna Ranch project will be returning to the Planning Commission for environmental scoping on Monday, August 16, 2010.

There is much still to be done, and we will need to work together to reach consensus on housing solutions that are right for Novato. As we move forward, it will be important for all to be involved in the community discussions. We are putting together a public outreach program that may include public workshops, educational sessions, neighborhood meetings, and small group sessions. While City staff is working towards these continued discussions with the community you may stay informed of our activities by visiting our housing web site. Please contact us with comments, concerns and suggestions and thank you to those we have heard from already.

Thank you for your passion and commitment to Novato.



Michael Frank  
City Manager

Cc: City Council, Housing Element Distribution List