

Stop the San Rafael Airport Expansion/Rezoning

Save the Clapper Rail and Wetlands

The Land:

- Privately owned wetlands adjacent to San Rafael/Smith Ranch Airport.
- Also adjacent to Gallinas Creek and its myriad sensitive wildlife; 750 feet from nearest homes.

The Project:

- Would require City Council to change zoning from current wetlands designation.
- 86, 000 sq. ft. building (Boeing 747-size) for indoor soccer/sports and restaurant/bar.
- Two outdoor soccer fields; 280-car parking lot.
- 12-hours of operation until 10 pm; stadium lighting until 11 pm; 7 days a week.
- Primarily for paid use by adult soccer leagues from greater Bay Area; moderate local/youth usage.

Human Safety:

- Youth and adult activity 160 feet from airport runway; planes landing/taking off day and night.
- Complex falls inside Runway Safety (accident buffer) Zone - California Airport Land Use Handbook.
- Caltrans Aeronautics Division letter warning City that project violates state safety guidelines.
- “Statistically, there is a 100% chance of an incident occurring.” – construction Safety/Risk Analyst.

Environment:

- Strongly opposed by the Marin Sierra Club, Marin Conservation League, Audubon Society & others.
- Gallinas Creek has one of the largest concentrations of the California Clapper Rail, federally protected and listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (i.e., “in immediate danger of becoming extinct.” - USEPA). Audubon Society says “one of the most endangered species in state.”
- Sensitive marshland also home to numerous other birds and wildlife, including river otters.
- Estimated additional 1700 car trips/day; significant air, noise and water pollution.

Environmental Impact Report

- Clapper Rail analysis provides no protection, claiming the bird will habituate to human activity.
- Safety issues are not satisfactorily addressed.

Flaws:

- Insufficient noise study. Unrealistic mitigations offered for noise, light and air pollution.

Deed of

Restrictions:

- 1983 City and County agreement allowed dense development of freeway side of the property (Autodesk, Embassy Suites, Vista Marin homes) in exchange for keeping the remainder of the property open and undeveloped. “Reinterpreted” by city staff and Planning Commission over the objections of a signatory to the deed, former San Rafael Mayor, Larry Mulryan.

The Owner/ Developer:

- Long history of attempts to pursue major development of this property, including suing the City and County to get Deed of Restrictions rescinded (he lost); suing neighborhood property owners (who were outspoken critics of project), claiming he owned the creek where their docks stood.
- Question: Is his offer of a free lease to the private soccer complex operator the last chapter? If he succeeds in getting the property rezoned from its current wetlands designation, what is next?

Politics Vs.

Due Process:

- San Rafael Mayor, Gary Phillips, a pilot with a plane at the airport, has not recused himself from voting on this project, even though the contract pilots have been required to sign with the owner/applicant has included a clause not to oppose any development at the airport site. The Public Hearing scheduled on the project was postponed to have attorneys look into the matter.
- Planning Commission members include the project architect and others with close ties to developer.
- Many more examples of cronyism and cozy relationships with city and county officials.

Liability:

- In the event of injury/death due to runway proximity, lawsuits against the City are likely.

Neighborhood:

- Residents’ quality of life would be irreparably harmed, day and night, by impact of noise and light.

Alternatives?:

- Opponents urge serious exploration of alternative options for additional soccer fields, including improvements to existing sites and public/private partnerships for additional year-round play.