

March 18, 2021

Dear City of Santa Rosa,

We are writing to you today on behalf of residents who live in the SW Santa Rosa area who will be affected by the proposed Dutton Meadows subdivision. We have many questions and concerns about this project, and thought it would be wise to prepare a joint statement summarizing our thoughts.

In short, we vehemently oppose approval of the development as is it planned right now.

Before presenting our specific concerns, we wanted to take a moment to remind you of the obligations the City has to us. In October 2020, the City Council created a statement that their mission is “to provide high-quality public services and cultivate a vibrant, resilient and livable City,” a “tier 1 goal” of which included addressing climate change. In January 2020, the City declared a climate emergency that “threatens humanity” and made a subsequent declaration that it is committed to reaching carbon neutrality by 2030. Relevant to this goal, the City’s most recent “bicycle and pedestrian masterplan” has goals including “designed bicycle and pedestrian facilities that are accessible and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities to use” as to increase the percentage of citizens who walk and cycle to work/school. And lastly, the City has a stated 2030 Vision which includes ensuring the City has “thriving neighborhoods, a multi-cultural community, and breathtaking stretches of open space, creeks, and greenbelts.” The proposed Dutton Meadows development seems to stand in stark contrast to these goals and Vision.

Our concerns are centered around three main areas: (1) traffic, (2) other non-traffic related infrastructure, and (3) general over-population.

Traffic

Every single one of us has serious complaints about the traffic on Hearn Avenue *as is*. Per the traffic studies conducted by the City in 2019, during rush hour, sections of Hearn Avenue see over 2,200 cars per hour. Traffic sometimes slows to 3.5 mph. During busy times, the drive from Dutton Meadow to Santa Rosa Avenue can take up to 25 minutes, despite it taking only one minute and five seconds to make that same drive when traffic is light. As part of the 2009 Environmental Impact Report related to the proposed Walmart, the intersections on Hearn Avenue were given “F” ratings. ...And things have only gotten worse, traffic-wise, since then as the City continues to approve housing developments. We are horrified to think what could happen to one of us if we suffer a medical emergency and ambulances cannot get to us in time, or get us to the hospital in time, because they get stuck in traffic.

Of special importance to the proposed Dutton Meadows development, the intersections of West Ave and Sally Ann Street¹ with Hearn are especially problematic and dangerous. There is only 80 feet between these roads, and the center turn lanes to access both these roads are comprised of the same physical space on Hearn, resulting in traffic confusion, backups, accidents, and more near-accidents than we can count.

¹ The only access from Hearn to this new development is via Sally Ann Ave.

Once a car has turned onto Sally Ann, the only option is to turn left onto Aloise Avenue, which, under the proposed plan, will extend into the new development. Unfortunately, Aloise Avenue is far too narrow to accommodate increased traffic flow. To demonstrate this in a manner we thought you'd find informative, we captured a video showing just how tight the road is—that video can be seen at <https://youtu.be/SoqnamIy6MY>. With cars lawfully parked on either side of the street, it is possible there would be only 18 feet between the parked car's side mirrors. As a result, it is difficult, if not downright dangerous, for cars try to pass one another within this tight space. We have been told that, per code, firetrucks need 20 feet between parked cars to pass. Come trash day, once trash, recycling and green waste containers are put out for collection, the amount of space available for cars to drive on is further reduced.

A nagging issue here in SW Santa Rosa is the difficulty surrounding access to, and departure from, US 101. The Hearn Avenue overcrossing is insufficient to meet the demands of traffic currently, which one can't help but notice in the afternoons—*every* afternoon, weekday or weekend—as traffic on the US 101 southbound Hearn Avenue exit backs up on to the freeway, sometimes backing up almost to Corby. Of note, the City recently approved the high-density housing near the intersections of Petaluma Hill Road, Yolanda and Kawana Springs Road—totaling over 600 new housing units; the residents of that housing will soon be adding more congestion to the 101 on/off ramps. Until the overcrossing is widened, or another overcrossing is put in in the SW Santa Rosa area, the City cannot allow more housing to go into south Santa Rosa.

The stop-and-go traffic resulting from these traffic back-ups is not only bothersome, it's dangerous, affecting the health of residents, and adversely contributing to climate change. The exhaust generated from idling vehicles is poisoning our residents and adding greenhouse gases to our air. And the brake dust generated by stop and go traffic introduces lead and asbestos into the air. Many of our neighborhood kids walk or ride bikes to school, and they have the greatest exposure.

Lastly, with the addition of the just-installed stoplight at the SMART train tracks, there will be even more idling of cars on Hearn.

The City MUST conduct another traffic study before approving any new development in the South Santa Rosa area. That said, please be reminded that it would not be possible to do an accurate traffic survey now due to the COVID shelter in place orders drastically affecting road usage and schools being shut down. If a study were to be conducted during the pandemic, the analysis would be based upon assumptions and predictions for behavior dramatically altered during this period.

Other non-traffic infrastructure concerns

We have serious concerns that other infrastructure may not be adequate. Sonoma County finds itself in another drought, and water levels in Lake Sonoma are reaching historic lows. The City must ensure its growth doesn't outpace its resources. Further, water rationing will certainly become more frequent in the coming years. This affects us not only in the sense that every new house moves the City closer to reaching its water allotment, it can hit us in the wallets as the City

assesses a “water shortage” surcharge between 5-30% during mandatory water conservation periods. Those of us in SW Santa Rosa are among the City’s most financially strained residents already. Also, not only does the City have an obligation to make sure there’s adequate water coming out of our kitchen faucets, given the devastating fires we have had throughout our region, it has an obligation to ensure there is enough water to successfully fight fires. With what appears to be yet another drought in California’s future—which will likely last several years—our water supply and distribution system will be critical. Increasing demands this system should be done very carefully, yet the Dutton Meadows Master Development does not seem to take the current situation into account.

In discussions with Councilman Alvarez, we learned that the City has already made note of the fact that water and sewer infrastructure “needs attention” in our region. We urge you to not approve developments that place additional demand on the City’s finite water resources until after these improvements and replacements have been made.

We also have concerns about the levels of service we can expect to receive from the police. Already, our area feels neglected by law enforcement. Our mailboxes and cars get broken into, the police won’t even respond. Police officers who have been assigned to patrol our area for years tell us they “didn’t even know [our subdivision here] existed.” Our homes get broken into, and the police come out to provide us with written reports to hand off to our insurance companies, informing us they don’t have the time to actually investigate the crimes. This has to stop. We demand that the City not increase the areas over which law enforcement needs to patrol until it can provide us with some real level of policing service.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, every one of the schools in our area is overcrowded. Adding population to this area before ensuring the educational needs of the *current* resident school children are being met would only serve to place the residents of the South Santa Rosa at even more of a disadvantage in school, in their future careers, and their overall lives in comparison to residents of other areas of our City. Without appropriate access to quality education, students will fall further and further behind in achieving academic milestones. In “A Portrait of Sonoma County” a report prepared by Sonoma County Human Development in 2014, the researchers found that “[t]he range in the percentage of adult residents with less than a high school diploma [within the City] is huge, going from a low of 0.4 percent in North Oakmont/Hood Mountain to a high of 46.1 percent in Roseland Creek,” while “level of education is the single biggest predictor of earnings for racial and ethnic groups and for census tracts in Sonoma County” and, in sum, an “[a]nalysis of Sonoma County’s ninety-nine tracts shows a clear positive correlation between life expectancy and education: people in neighborhoods with higher educational attainment and enrollment have longer lives.”

General Overpopulation of this area

We have seen so much population growth within our area, without any real improvement in infrastructure and support services, leading to a deterioration in our quality-of-life. For example, community residents have reported that they drove through the area near a subdivision off Dutton Meadow, and felt the area was so over-congested with parked cars it was hard to navigate the streets.

The City is supposed to be providing six acres of park per 1000 residents in an area. Right now, our area has a total of 24 acres of parks for approximately 18,000 residents. Yes, the new development—in later phases—includes park space, but it is not enough. Related, it is our understanding that the developer doesn't even yet own the property upon which it intends to build the park. How can we believe the park will be forthcoming, when the developer may never be able to acquire the land where the park is to exist. We are falling woefully behind with regards to places in which we can recreate close to home.

It is the group's understanding that the Dutton Meadows Project Plan was initially put into place nearly 20 years ago, however there have been many changes to the City since then. Roseland has been annexed into the city. The population of the SW Santa Rosa area has grown substantially. Multiple subdivisions have been approved and built, and currently there are multiple subdivisions under construction. At the time of that General Plan, SW Santa Rosa did not have a representative on the City Council. All of this begs the question: should the city continue to work to achieve the development goals of an old and out-of-date plan?

The Dutton Meadows Master subdivision plan went before the Planning Commission and City Council just two years ago, and was denied. Little has changed in the developer's plan since then that should make the City believe it's in the City's best interest to move forward with this development now, especially in light of how many ways the development conflicts with the City's goals and vision. The strain it will place on the infrastructure diminishes the quality of the public services we receive and makes the City less resilient. It makes our area feel less "livable." It adds to problems with pollution, making it more difficult to achieve carbon neutrality. It makes riding our bikes and walking along the streets more dangerous to our safety and health. And it takes away yet another open space. So tell us, how can the City believe this development, under the current circumstances, is what is best for us right now?

Honor the commitments you made to this City, and deny the Dutton Meadows Master subdivision until the infrastructure, and health and safety issues have been addressed first.

Questions we have for the City and the Developer:

1. If Sally Ann Avenue is intended to be the main thoroughfare into the new developments, what measures will be taken to control the Hearn intersections with Sally Ann and West Streets, in a manner that allows more safety, and clear right-of-way solutions?
2. The City seems to be moving towards a vision for our city which seeks to accommodate alternative transportation options. What is being done to address the potential for class-1 bike lanes on Hearn Avenue, Dutton Avenue, and Dutton Meadow?
3. There are bike lanes planned for the new development area. Will there be parking allowed in those bike lanes?
 - a. Will that render the lanes essentially useless?

- b. If no parking is allowed in the bike lanes, is there still enough street parking that the cars associated with the homes in the new development aren't spilling into the Aloise area?
4. To accommodate its stated goal of encouraging bike travel, Is the city planning on putting bike lanes on Sally Ann Avenue and Aloise Avenue?
5. We note that Dutton Meadows will be somewhat rerouted in front of Meadow View Elementary. What will become of the current Dutton Meadow there? Is it going to be drop off/pick up for the school?
 - a. What will the speed limit be there?
 - b. It is our understanding that from the presentation by Trumark 2 years ago that the road will be designated as a 40mph zone, but is that proper given its proximity to the school?
 - c. It is our understanding that the entire portion of land from Hearn Avenue to where it's obviously "school" area at Meadow View Elementary is owned by the school, and thus is a "school zone," meaning that when children are present the speed limit there needs to be 25mph. This will drastically affect the movement of traffic during the morning commute, and in the afternoon. It is fair to have commuters be slowed down in such a manner given how few options we have for accessing 101?
 - d. Is that now going to be a 4-lane road (2 lanes in each direction)?
 - i. Are there going to be bike lanes?
 - ii. Given how many school children ride their bikes in the area, is it appropriate to have kids riding their bikes along a 40 mph road?
 - iii. When/if the phase of this project goes in that encompasses the grocery store, shops, etc., that will be a popular destination for bike riding, too. Will it be safe to have folks riding their bikes along a 40mph road?
6. The area of land proposed to be developed is currently open space, home to many wild animals such as rabbits, reptiles, turkeys, foxes, and coyotes. Our region is alleged to be a critical habitat for the endangered Tiger Salamander. Have there been any recent studies of the effect of this development on Tiger Salamander habitat?
7. Given the drought situations this year and the near-drought situations last year, can we be assured the City will be able to supply us with water?
 - a. How close are we to needing to upgrade our water distribution system in our area?
 - b. What needed repairs have been identified?
 - c. When are those expected to take place?
 - d. What impact will those have on traffic?
8. Is the infrastructure in place to provide water to the area in the event of a fire-type emergency?
9. Is the infrastructure in place to support providing sewer service to our area?

- a. How close are we to needing to upgrade the portions of the sewer system in our area?
 - b. What needed repairs have been identified?
 - c. When are those expected to take place?
 - d. What impact will those have on traffic?
10. What has been done to identify how this new development will affect our schools?
- a. How will classroom overcrowding be affected?
 - b. Does the school have truancy concerns with kids being late to school given how long it takes to get to school due to traffic backups?
11. Is there a commitment by the City and the developer regarding a time frame in which the other phases of the 5-stage development plan will be completed?
- a. When will the park be put in?

Thank you for your time,

The concerned citizens of SW Santa Rosa,
Devina Douglas (Rising Moon),
Matt Pierce (Rising Moon),
Andrea Rojas (Aloise),
Tulio Vasquez (Aloise),
Maria Vasquez (Aloise),
Ron Suess (Rising Moon),
Jane Suess (Rising Moon),
Art Deicke (Deep Harbor),
Solita Deicke (Deep Harbor),
Angela Gandez (Aloise),
Jeff Gandez (Aloise),
Dennis Hagemann,
Fred Kreuger,
Patricia Krueger,
Enrique,
Mary Goe Balcerak,
Debra Broner (Aloise),
Whitney Schieve (Aloise),
Taj Schieve (Aloise),
Nancy Lazark (Rising Moon),
Sean Correa (Aloise),
Carmela Biggs,
Emily Cadena (Aloise) and
Jose Cadena (Aloise).