

TCEC Votes to Oppose Development Proposal...

Union City Hill Initiative under Attack

From the Editor: The Masonic Homes of California wants to build on the flatlands along Mission Blvd. from Whipple Road to O'Connell Lane. This area was included in the 1996 Hill Initiative that was approved by the voters. The proposed plan is a mix of rental and for-sale housing, retail space and community facilities. In order to develop this site, Masonic Homes will have to qualify and place an initiative on the ballot. Union City citizens are concerned and fighting back. TCEC joins them. Below are some of their concerns.....

"The 60 acres of hillside area IS ADJACENT TO THE HAYWARD FAULT AND should not be developed into high-density residential and commercial buildings in an area of extreme EARTHQUAKE hazards. If homes and infrastructure are built in this area, the residents will be subjected to potentially life threatening hazards during a significant earthquake and THE RESULTING potential landslides that would threaten the proposed homes on Parcel B. In addition, the development creates a higher potential of flooding of the new homes between the Bart Station and Mission Boulevard due to inadequately sized storm drain infrastructure as many of these homes currently are within a flood zone. These hazards create great potential damage to property that puts the burden on the taxpayer long after the developer has made profits from selling the homes.

This land is best suited for agricultural, recreational and open space uses as supported by voters in 1996. A U-pick orchard, an agricultural park, an educational center, soccer and baseball fields, a BMX park, an animal sanctuary, botanical garden, an outdoor amphitheatre and a farm to support Farm to School programs among other ideas should be pursued. The City will be receiving approximately \$3.3 Million in Measure WW grant funds and could leverage these funds with other grant funds from Proposition 84 and funds from the East Bay Regional Park District to purchase and develop the land. If the voters decide to approve this proposed housing and commercial project and change the current zoning for this site from agricultural to residential and commercial use, the City or other developer will never be able to purchase the property at agricultural market rates and will lose the opportunity to do something unique in our City. We encourage the Masonic Homes of California to not pursue residential and commercial development but to deliver something more beneficial to our community." Written by Elizabeth Ames, Union City resident The Friends to Save the Union City Hills are asking for Union City (and Tri-City) residents to show their support for a sustainable and compatible development in our hillsides that the citizens asked for when voting to protect this area from future development such as the one proposed by the Masonic Homes of California.

Please see their website at www.saveunioncityhills.com for further information and this link http://www.ci.union-city.ca.us/general/contact_us.htm for meeting address and City Hall contact information.

Contact: unioncityhills@gmail.com or friends@saveunioncityhills.com.

Additional Information about the Masonic Home Proposal

On May 23, the Masonic Development Co. made a few changes to their plan for the land along Mission Blvd. The changes are (1) more senior housing, (2) less retail space, (3) a garden designed for teaching students about agriculture, (4) a trail linking to EBRPD trails and (5) 1.16-acres of open space.

Opponents emphasized (1) the danger of building near the Hayward Fault, (2) retail spaces since are standing empty, and (3) the plan goes against the initiative standards which included: (a) the Mission Corridor should be maintained as open space and (b) specifically, "no development may occur in front of and in the slopes behind the Masonic Home".

The debate has just begun. The ecology center will help the residents as needed.

The History of the Union City Hill Initiative

In 1987, a large-scale development was proposed for the hill area, causing citizens to organize an initiative campaign to stop the threat.

The initiative, known as Measure B, required the City to prepare a Hillside Area Plan. It was placed on the ballot in 1989 along with a competing Measure [C] backed by developers. Measure B passed. For the next six years, the City of Union City worked, through a series of scoping meetings, work sessions, and 1992 draft EIR to develop the required hillside plan. Finally, in 1995, the city council adopted the plan, which contained 53 restrictive over-arching policies to guide all aspects of future development. After the city council adoption, the Hillside Plan was approved by the voters as measure II (double ii) in 1996. Any change to the plan is subject voter approval. Thanks to public watchfulness, no new structures have been built in the Union City hills since 1996.

This was written in 2006 by Cathy Sweeney, a member of the 1989-1996 citizens' group.