

Petaluma Approves Community Impact Report

Marty Bennett, Living Wage Coalition Co-Chair

Historically the City of Petaluma has been a model in Sonoma County for implementing innovative public policy that encourages smart, responsible, and equitable growth. Since the 1970s, Petaluma has led the way by adopting growth controls on new housing, an urban growth boundary (or UGB), 'smart codes' to promote mixed-use and vibrant public space downtown, a jobs-housing linkage fee to fund affordable housing, and a living wage ordinance that sets community labor standards. Many cities in the region have followed Petaluma's example. Today, for instance, every city in the county has established a UGB, four cities have implemented a jobs-housing linkage fee, and three cities have adopted Living Wage Ordinances.

Recently, Petaluma again provided leadership by approving the first 'Community Impact Report' (CIR) requirement for new commercial development of more than 25,000 square feet, including retail and grocery stores and hotels. A CIR is a comprehensive analysis of the fiscal and economic impacts of a proposed major development project.

The legislation was proposed to the city by a broad coalition of community organizations including the Living Wage Coalition, Sonoma County Conservation Action, Sierra Club Sonoma Group, North Bay Labor Council, Petaluma Tomorrow, Petaluma Neighborhood Association, and the Petaluma Independent Business Association.

All too often, particularly during a recession and decline of city and county revenues, there is a rush to provide a new development 'quick fix' which might boost sales tax revenue. The CIR is a 'balance sheet' that will give policy makers and the public complete and objective data with regard to the benefits and costs of a proposed project. The report is much shorter, simpler and less costly than an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The developer pays for it, and a city-designated consultant does the work.

A CIR will, for example, assess the contribution of a proposed project to the local tax base. Will a project generate new revenue such as sales tax, property tax, or the bed tax? Will the project increase city revenue or simply move around part of the tax base from one project to another? A CIR will evaluate the economic viability of a project by analyzing market conditions and projected sales or occupancy rates. The report will also examine the impacts of a proposed development on local business. Will a project fill a market niche or will loss of sales due to increased competition hurt existing local businesses? The report will assess the employment characteristics of new jobs created, including the number of full- and part-time jobs and wage levels and benefits. A CIR will ask: What types of jobs will the project bring to the city?

A CIR will also examine costs to the taxpayer of the proposed project, including necessary infrastructure improvements and increased demand for public services such as police, fire, and road maintenance. Finally, the report will identify hidden costs such as public subsidies for Food Stamps, Medi-Cal, and uncompensated medical care for workers filling new jobs that may not pay a living wage or provide health insurance. A CIR will enable policymakers and the public to evaluate the trade-offs and public costs of a project.

Unlike the required EIR, a CIR does not mandate changes to mitigate negative impacts. However, the CIR can facilitate a public dialogue between residents, the city council, and the developer at an early stage, resulting in changes to the project and the devising of 'win-win' solutions in response to concerns of both policymakers and residents. Moreover, developers will no longer have to deal with community concerns in an ad-hoc or piecemeal way. The CIR will showcase the community benefits of a proposed project and facilitate the development of a community consensus. This should enable a project to move forward expeditiously to obtain permit approvals and thus shorten the time line for the developer. The experience in

cities that have adopted a CIR requirement such as San Jose, Los Angeles, and San Diego indicates that this policy tool can begin to reorient the development process to yield positive and timely outcomes for all.

Petaluma has just adopted a revised twenty-year General Plan that emphasizes city-centered infill development and mixed-use projects. Petaluma hopes to attract employers who provide good jobs with a living wage and benefits, and to enhance the diversity of retail outlets while ensuring that existing local businesses will thrive. The council will be able to use the information collected for a CIR to see if a project conforms to the new General Plan and is a "net positive" for the community. ■

Wal-Mart Stalls In Santa Rosa

Scott Stegeman, Land-Use Consultant, Stegeman and Associates

A high-point for economically and environmentally sustainable planning in Sonoma County was the local Superior Court ruling overturning a proposed new Wal-Mart store in Santa Rosa. Wal-Mart's applied in 2004 to demolish two empty buildings in an existing shopping center in southwest Santa Rosa, and replace them with a new Wal-Mart store.

Early local opposition appeared within weeks, and went into high gear with the release of an EIR in late 2005. Much of the EIR took a "don't worry, be happy" approach, offering up mitigations for noise and traffic impacts where feasible, and justifying unmitigated impacts by pointing to the new jobs to be created, the new vibrancy to the shopping center, and (of course) the new revenue stream to the

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In Support Of A Living Wage Law For Sonoma County

Ken Brown and Ben Boyce, Close to Home, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, December 13, 2008

The United States is now in the midst of the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Unlike previous cyclical adjustments, this economic meltdown is systemic and massive, crashing every economic sector and threatening to wipe out the accumulated wealth of an entire generation. The election of the Obama administration is largely due to the emerging consensus that we need a clean break from the exhausted "free-market" orthodoxy that has dominated national politics for the last 30 years. We need fresh thinking and a new approach that will promote sustainable economic growth and shared prosperity.

Therefore, it was a bit of a surprise to see the pre-emptive strike on the as-yet unannounced county living wage ordinance launched by Sonoma City Councilwoman Joanne Sanders in the Dec. 2 issue of The Press Democrat. This Close to Home exhibited the economic assumptions and social values of this now-failed unregulated, "trickle down" economic model. Sanders recycles misrepresentations about the city of Sonoma's living wage ordinance, passed in 2004 with overwhelming public support.

First of all, the column does not make it clear that a living wage ordinance only applies to a small subset of workers: Those who work directly for the city or businesses that have significant contracts with the city. It does not apply to all private sector businesses. It typically covers less than 1 percent of the entire workforce. Secondly, as a cursory reading of the ordinance would reveal, there are already exemptions written into the ordinance for trainees and part-time, temporary and seasonal workers. Finally, Sanders claims that the living wage ordinance will lead to job losses and reduced economic activity. Well, the law has been in place for years now, yet the city of Sonoma is solidly in the black.

Nationally, contract costs increased by less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the overall city or county budget. Michigan State University economist David Neumark looked at 36 cities that passed living wage laws and compared trends to other municipalities that did not have such laws.



**Taking It To The Street!
Eric Boehm and Evelina Molina**

He concluded, "If someone is getting up on a soapbox and saying these (living wage laws) are a disaster, they may believe it, but there's really no evidence."

UC economists David Fairris and David Runsten completed a comprehensive study in 2005 analyzing the impacts of the Los Angeles living wage ordinance passed in 1997 which covers 10,000 low-wage workers. The researchers surveyed 82 city contractors covered by the law and concluded that employers recovered much of the increased employee compensation as worker turnover declined, training and morale improved and productivity significantly increased. The city of Sonoma has suffered no adverse budget impacts as a consequence of the living wage law.

What a living wage law actually does is establish a standard of accountability for

receipt of public money. The concept is that the city or county will serve as a model employer by paying an empirically determined self-sufficiency wage, indexed to inflation. It also serves to encourage health care coverage by offering a lower wage rate for employers who provide health care benefits.

When a nonprofit organization receives large amounts of free grant money from the local taxpayers, it seems fair and proper to expect that the organizations and its directors make the effort to provide sufficient wages and benefits for their workers so they do not have to rely on food stamps, Section 8 subsidized rental housing, Medi-Cal or local emergency medical services to live in our community.

The living wage movement has arisen in response to decades of stagnant or declining wages for working people. Living wage laws are good public policy and the kind of government stimulus needed -- from the local to the federal level -- to address the current systemic economic crisis, the erosion of the middle class and the dramatic and socially destabilizing polarization of wealth and income in America.

Ken Brown is mayor of Sonoma. Ben Boyce is director of the Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County. ■

Wal-Mart Stalls *(Continued from page 1)*

A loose coalition quickly formed of neighbors, local merchants, and community groups involved in economic and environmental issues. The flash points ranged from the very broad to extremely localized. A number of local social equity/justice and labor groups attacked the very basis of giving Wal-Mart a foothold, in terms of predatory business practices, anti-unionism and hiring practices, off-shore manufacturing history, and the danger of creating civic dependency upon a globally dominant corporation.

Local residents and businesses objected to significant traffic and parking problems that would compromise the shopping center and the neighborhood. Residents pointed out that approving the Wal-Mart at

that location would undercut the effort to redevelop an abandoned shopping center a few blocks away. Merchants that would be neighbors in the same center complained that Wal-Mart planned to meet its parking demands by laying claim to parking spaces directly in front of existing smaller merchants, displacing their customers and employees.

But the strangest (and ultimately most damaging) issue was that Wal-Mart and its consultants could never get on the same page as to what the Project really was. Different sections of the Draft EIR showed conflicting building sizes, conflicting numbers of parking spaces, conflicting internal circulation plans, and so on. Maps provided by the property manager for the shopping center did not match Wal-Mart's.

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Why We Need EFCA – The Employee Free Choice Act

Peter Dreier and Kelly Candaele, American Prospect—Web Edition, December 2, 2008

Three weeks before the November election, The New York Times Magazine ran a cover story that asked, "Will Gun-Toting, Churchgoing White Guys Pull the Lever for Obama?"

When the polls closed, the question was answered: Nationwide, white men, white women, working-class whites, white gun owners, and white weekly churchgoers supported McCain by wide margins. But a significant number of whites in each category broke ranks and voted for Obama -- enough to help him win key battleground states and the presidency. Exit polls conducted by Guy Molyneux, a survey expert with Peter D. Hart Research, explain why.

Molyneux surveyed 1,487 members of AFL-CIO unions -- about half in battleground states -- and compared the results with all voters. What he discovered is nothing short of astounding. Fifty-seven percent of white men favored McCain, but 57 percent of white male union members favored Obama. White gun owners cast 68 percent of their votes for McCain, but 54 percent of white gun owners who are also union members preferred Obama. Among white weekly churchgoers, McCain scored a landslide, receiving 70 percent of their votes. But Obama had a slight edge (49 percent to 48 percent) among white weekly churchgoers who were union members. Similarly, 58 percent of white non-college

graduates voted for McCain, but 60 percent of white union members who didn't graduate from college tilted to Obama. Overall, 53 percent of white women cast ballots for McCain, but Molyneux found that a whopping 72 percent of white women union members favored Obama.

These numbers show the tremendous power of grass-roots organizing. Nationwide, according to Molyneux, 67 percent of union members of all races -- and 69 percent in swing states -- supported Obama. They voted for him because of the unions' effectiveness at educating and mobilizing members. They spent millions of dollars and built an army of volunteers who went door to door, reaching out to other members about key economic issues. Members in "safe" Democratic states staffed phone banks and made tens of thousands of calls to unionists in key swing states.

But unions today represent only 12% of all American employees. This is a dramatic decline from the numbers a generation ago and significantly fewer than in other affluent countries. If unions represented even 20% of the work force, Obama would have won by a landslide. Democrats who narrowly lost their races for Congress would have prevailed.

That's why the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), designed to strengthen the labor

movement, is the most important domestic legislation in decades to advance liberal concerns.

Despite its paltry membership, the U.S. labor movement remains the nation's most potent force for progressive change and the most effective vehicle for electing Democrats. Once in office, pro-labor politicians are typically the strongest advocates of tough environmental laws, funding for public schools and higher education, civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, universal health insurance, affordable housing, and protection of Social Security.

But during his campaign for president, Obama frequently promised to support it, and Democrats will have a much wider majority in Congress. "Fortunately, the political climate has changed," said Mary Beth Maxwell, executive director of American Rights at Work, which is spearheading the pro-reform campaign, "and the tide for workers' rights is turning in our direction."

Peter Dreier is professor of politics and director of the Urban & Environmental Policy program at Occidental College in Los Angeles, and coauthor of The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City. Kelly Candaele is executive director of the Horizon Institute, a progressive think tank based in Los Angeles. ■

Wal-Mart Stalls

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Wal-Mart's response to the barrage of specific and substantive objections was to bus in employees and customers to praise job creation and cheap goods (and did we mention all that money to the City)? The project was approved by split decisions by both the Planning Commission and City Council. To add more controversy, the City delayed seating newly elected Council members in December of 2006 so that the lame duck (and more favorable) City Council could take the vote. As a final accent, the City later became confused and could not clearly show which version of the Project had even been approved.

A lawsuit was immediately filed charging violations of local planning/zoning regulations and an inadequate and

inconsistent EIR. And after months of legal back-and-forth, Superior Court Judge Boyd cut through thousands of pages to focus on some essential truths when he ruled in mid 2008 that the Project Environmental Impact Report was so fundamentally flawed as to be almost useless, and overturned the City approval of Wal-Mart. And in his ruling, Judge Boyd noted that the most fundamental flaw was the inability to explain the amount of parking, vehicles, or buildings that would exist if the Wal-Mart was approved. Since the EIR was inconsistent on the most basic description of the Project and the project setting, it made it impossible to really understand any of the impacts that might result.

Six months later, the November 2008 City Council election produced a new Council

with four to five of the seven Council members being opposed to the Wal-Mart, leaving Wal-Mart little hope of a successful repeat approval.

The community now waits to see if Wal-Mart will appeal to the Appellate Court. ■

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Please consider becoming a member today. Use the enclosed form or visit www.livingwagesonoma.org

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Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

Memorial Hospital Caregivers Seek Effective Voice

Heather Foote, SEIU United Healthcare Workers-West, 707 365-3982

Certified nursing assistants, radiology technologists, respiratory therapists, licensed vocational nurses, nutrition and housekeeping staff, and other employees at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital (SRMH) want an effective voice in the workplace, to help improve patient care, address workplace issues, and provide for themselves and their loved ones. Faced with a history of intimidation by management and a climate of fear as they organize for their union, hospital caregivers seek mutually agreed upon ground rules to ensure an environment free of intimidation prior to a secret-ballot union election.

Such agreements bind both parties and often include mechanisms to enforce rules through a neutral party. Over more than three years, Memorial workers have faced anti-union actions by management, including workers being asked to attend mandatory meetings and being misinformed about their rights. More subtle intimidation, such as one-on-one meetings and surveillance of workers participating in orga-

nizing activities, has continued at Memorial. This contributes to workers' fear of repercussions when they engage in pro-union organizing activities that are legal.

Memorial Hospital is the only Santa Rosa hospital whose service and technical workers do not have a voice through a union. Nurses at Memorial Hospital have had their union since approximately 1980.

In early 2008, Memorial Hospital cut vital services and announced the largest layoffs since the 1980s. A petition calling on management to find a different way won 800 signatures, including those of 36 doctors and 316 registered nurses. As when Memorial outsourced its medical coders to an out-of-state company in the fall of 2007, Sonoma lost skilled caregivers and others devoted to patient care and serving their community. Many Memorial caregivers concluded that they must redouble efforts to win an effective voice in the workplace.

Memorial Hospital workers are calling on

the St. Joseph Health System (SJHS) – the Orange County based corporate parent of the hospital – to reach mutually agreed upon ground rules, similar to those adopted in 2001 by Catholic Healthcare West after talks with its workers and SEIU United Healthcare Workers-West.

Memorial workers believe that now is the time to secure guarantees for a fair vote and win their union. In the late summer, a San Francisco Catholic archdiocese newspaper quoted a SJHS spokesperson who referred to negotiation of a fair election agreement when workers show they have 30% support among co-workers. In the past, Memorial workers in the Union Organizing Committee have demonstrated support significantly beyond that level among o-workers. Their goal is to create a win-win situation that benefits patients, themselves and the future of their hospital.

By mid-December 2008, Memorial workers expressed optimism that their efforts would continue gaining momentum early in the New Year and urged community supporters to join them in calling for a fair election process to complement secret-ballot union elections. ■