From:	Fred Allebach
To:	Eric Gage; Tennis Wick; Jane Riley; Eduardo Hernandez; Gregory N Carr
Subject:	Springs plans synopsis
Date:	Thursday, November 12, 2020 7:27:25 AM
Attachments:	SSP Version 8 zoning map.pdf springs-existing-zoning.pdf Springs_Boundary_LiDAR.pdf springs-boundary.pdf Community-Separator-Existing-Proposed-Sonoma.pdf

---

EXTERNAL

Fred Allebach
11/7/20

Notes and observations for past Springs Redevelopment plans (1984-2008), leading up to the SSP (Springs Specific Plan)

My purpose with this small study is to advocate for social equity, and to insist that the sustainability paradigm can't be complete without more local attention to equity issues. I am a renter who makes less that 50% of the area median income. As a Quaker, equity issues are baked into my cultural DNA. Living on the east side of Sonoma, every day is an ongoing example of a world out of balance.

From SSP website, what was Redevelopment?

"As of February 1, 2012, the Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC) became the Housing Successor Agency for the former redevelopment agencies of the County and the cities of Sebastopol and Sonoma.

Redevelopment is the *reinvestment of local property tax dollars in the community from which they came, under local control, according to a locally approved plan*. This simple statement covers a lot of important ground, however. "Reinvestment of local property tax dollars" means that funds identified for a particular area plan could only be spent for the benefit of that area. At its roots, then, redevelopment is about improving the health and safety conditions and, consequently, quality of life in a designated project area. Redevelopment focuses on eliminating "blighting conditions," a broadly defined term that can refer to physical conditions, economic conditions or social conditions, which adversely affect the local community. Redevelopment also focused on the preservation and expansion of employment and affordable housing opportunities."

What is the Springs unincorporated area?

The Springs unincorporated area today consists of the urbanized/ urban service area from the city northwest to Agua Caliente Rd. neighborhoods. Petaluma Ave. - Sonoma Creek - Verano Ave. to the Montini Preserve comprises the south border; Arnold Drive is the west border; and to the northeast, the border fingers in to the Mayacamas Mtns. foothills. This area (minus areas previously in the city sphere of influence) has been noted since the 1984 Redevelopment Plan, as having adverse physical and economic conditions.

Need for Springs commercial tax revenue

The Springs unincorporated area has been allowed to evolve with residential development

outstripping commercial development, to the point that local tax revenues today do not adequately fund municipal needs.

Springs Redevelopment goals accomplished

Hwy 12, street improvements
Crosswalks
Affordable Housing development infill (MidPen affordable housing projects, 166 units of affordable housing in currently proposed projects, Milestone and MidPen)
Non-profit programs and services (FISH, Teen Services, La Luz etc.)
Art
Health care (the Clinic)
Commercial development (projects in process, hotel, Boyes Food mart, upscale restaurants and boutiques etc.)
Create a more completely community, the Springs MAC or Municipal Advisory Council, is a step but it's not self-governance.

Springs Redevelopment goals maybe accomplished

Preserve character and identity (depends on your cohort, depends if character is seen as visual and/or social)
Green businesses
Physical blight addressed

Springs Redevelopment goals not accomplished (Latino cohort social inequity has grown)

Housing preservation, econ. displacement, rent inflation (Springs Latino community suffering)
Home ownership for a variety of income levels (Springs Latino community suffering)
Local-serving businesses (depends on cohort, many businesses are high end, have contributed to overall gentrification)
Affordable food desert
Parking (visitors and locals have been squeezed by the Hwy 12 bike lanes, a problem for commercial access}
Hubs, plazas, community gathering points (hard to have on a high traffic strip)
Create a more complete community (segregation, lack of living wage)
Better transit to go with "smart growth"
Economic base not adequate to support incorporation or annexation.

Blight

Blight is "broadly defined term"; some concentrate the meaning of blight on physical appearance. The cure for *appearance blight*, gentrification, may be worse than the disease, depending on what interests are at stake.

Blight also refers to economic and social conditions. Segregation, poverty, inflation, and low wages create blight too. A broader definition of blight forces a reckoning for social equity as it pertains to "smart growth" theory and into the sustainability paradigm for communities, where social equity always seems to come in last place.

Springs physical blight has been somewhat addressed, social blight has not. Here is where community character is at once buildings and physical space and a living social, fabric.

Multiple local studies corroborate Mississippi-level poverty for close to half of the Springs 15,800 residents. This poverty is a core sustainability issue that must be addressed, at many local levels. It makes sense that this issue be addressed at the level of the full community here in the lower valley.

SSP

The SSP recaps past Springs Redevelopment plan area goals but forces them into a narrower area along the Hwy 12 strip.

The SSP process from the start had commitment by all stakeholders to preserve the Latino community aka "cultural diversity" and not allow gentrification anticipated by the SSP to run this cohort out. The Plan eventually came up with three alternatives: no change, moderate change, and change with more high density for housing. There were also cohorts preferring more upscale development, and those hoping for more affordable housing. In the end, even though higher density advocates prevailed in one public meeting mapping scenario, the moderates managed to walk the Plan back to the middle alternative.

As I recall, the SSP Version #8 zoning map represented the middle alternative as adjusted to account for the greater housing need after the 2017 fires.

It remains to be seen what zoning map alternatives the SSP will have when the public vetting process starts this December. Regardless of the SSP, current affordable housing projects are mimicking the version #8 zoning map.

SSP and Donald neighborhood

The SSP also integrates the Donald unincorporated area which was abandoned by the city during the retraction of the city sphere of influence that coincided with the city's initial urban growth boundary ordinance in 2000. Before the 2000 UGB and sphere retraction, the county had a "parcel freeze" on the Donald area to respect the city's sphere. Donald was once seen as probably being included in the city. Now that the city has pulled back, this freeze is no longer necessary and its elimination integrates the Donald area back into the Springs unincorporated planning area.

A group of Donald neighbors has protested their inclusion in the SSP, and appears prepared to sue the county on the basis of an inadequate notification process, an SSP-critical grand jury report, among other things. The Donald group seems to be seeking an exit from the SSP.

RCIA (Rural Community Investment Area

The RCIA is an ABAG (Association of Bay Area Governments) designation used to procure development funds. The RCIA designation changed the channel from (post 2012) Redevelopment funding and planning. The Springs area putatively wasn't urban enough to be a PDA (Priority Development Area.)

This brings up that the Springs urbanized area is actually a Balkanized segment of the full lower valley urban area. The Springs and the city are obviously a unified urban area. This total unified urban area equals the fourth largest city in the county. The fourth largest city in the county *would qualify* for PDAs. This illustrates that municipal fragmentation impacts planning, to the detriment of those with the least resources.

As noted, the SSP has shrunk the Springs Redevelopment plan area map, and integrated the

Donald urban residential area for the purposes of urban residential infill. The SSP plan area has however, left out the bulk of Latino immigrant residential areas. This then calls into question just who the SSP is supposed to benefit in the long run?
Maybe the RCIA is intended to bolster commercial development to bring the Springs urban area up to par for self-funding?
(The current Covid-19 situation, where the number of cases in Springs, Latino essential worker households now is holding up county economic re-opening, is finally hitting the BAU system in the pocketbook! Will we get band aids to only surmount the current situation, or an effort at systemic change? Systemic change looks like a need for more resources, but how can more be brought in to an orphaned area? Maybe local valley equity issues will come more into the whole Board of Superiors' (BOS) awareness?)

"Smart growth" theory = advocating for higher density

""Smart growth is an urban planning and transportation theory that concentrates growth in compact walkable urban centers to avoid sprawl. It also advocates compact, transit-oriented, walkable, bicycle-friendly land use, including neighborhood schools, complete streets, and mixed-use development with a range of housing choices. The term "smart growth" is particularly used in North America. In Europe and particularly the UK, the terms "compact city", "urban densification" or "urban intensification" have often been used to describe similar concepts, which have influenced government planning policies in the UK, the Netherlands and several other European countries."

"Smart growth values long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over a short-term focus. Its sustainable development goals are to achieve a unique sense of community and place; expand the range of transportation, employment, and housing choices; equitably distribute the costs and benefits of development; preserve and enhance natural and cultural resources; and promote public health." Wikipedia

Complete streets

"Complete streets is a transportation and design approach that requires streets to be planned, designed, operated, and maintained to enable safe, convenient and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and abilities regardless of their mode of transportation. Complete Streets allow for safe travel by those walking, cycling driving automobiles, riding public transportation or delivering goods." Wikipedia

What does smart growth and complete streets mean for the Springs and Sonoma Valley?

Smart growth is a planning meme for dense infill near transit intended to produce *sustainable communities* that can walk and bike to work and shopping. Consistency with smart growth infill, and preserving rural character of the surrounding areas is presumably what caused the county to zero in on vacant parcels in the Donald area, since it is already an urban service area.
Ironically, the advent of the smart growth meme also coincides with Bay Area housing profile that is one of the most inequitable and segregated in the whole country. Something is not adding up for Bay Area smart growth theory.

The Springs and the SSP are Exhibit A for smart growth. "In other words, the various principles of smart growth (e.g., economic prosperity, environmental protection, housing options, and bike/pedestrian amenities) are implemented through these PDA Place Types, including RCIAs." (Permit Sonoma quote from SSP)

To date, it appears that smart growth has only focused on certain aspects of sustainability. One point here, with local shopping there has to be goods people can afford to buy. With the general price inflation and airport effect of Sonoma Valley prices, anyone with a car and limited income does not and would never shop in the valley. Anecdotally, even people who make 60-80% AMI shop out of town. People without cars get stuck more cost-burdened for food and other goods, or get shoehorned to unhealthy alternatives at the Dollar Store.

Sustainable economy and community?

Since the valley economy runs on wine tourism and associated hospitality and on serving wealthy residents various needs, this is where jobs now come from. Local social and climate justice advocates aspire to change the BAU (business as usual) system into a more sustainable, i.e. equitable economy. To date, no one has produced a viable replacement economy that would be actually sustainable from a triple bottom line standpoint.

Public banking is one solid, systemic change step that could be taken to procure more targeted funds to meet local needs. It would be nice to see the BOS take this up and run with it.

Smart growth comes up short of its goals. In the breach, the wealthy seek to claim environmental sustainability while the poor are exploited and displaced.

Unsustainable Springs residential street grid

The Springs area has been noted by NPR as top 10 most-at-risk in the state for fire disaster evacuation issues. Siesta Way is a dead-end street, "a disaster waiting to happen." So is Robinson Rd/ Michael Dr., and Lomitas Ave. There is very poor to no street connectivity in some of these areas.

This pattern is characteristic of the whole unincorporated Springs area north of Hwy 12 from Serres Drive all the way to 5th Street West. The pattern is of valley floor dense residential areas fading up into the foothills on dead end, limited access, small streets, with more and more expensive property higher up. Norrbom Rd., Gehricke Rd., Thornsberry Rd., and Lovall Valley Rd. follow the same pattern. The more at-risk for fire evac, the higher the property values.

This poor Springs street connectivity is used as an evacuation safety rationale to limit valley floor development for affordable housing. The *urban-wildfire interface* plus poor street connectivity shadows the whole Springs foothills area. The county could use eminent domain powers to break through street barriers and connect isolated areas and sequestered neighborhoods. This would be public safety creation of better evacuation routes.

The public should not pay for fire and water on private roads and *cul de sac* neighborhoods and then have that exclusivity be used to prevent equity in housing there and in other places on the adjacent valley floor. If the county is going to condone rebuilding burned area like Fountain Hills but city UGBs s prevent growth on valley floor areas away from fire danger,

what kind of planning is this?
When there are proposed green separators all around the lower valley and Sonoma's UGB hems in growth to safer valley floor areas that trend toward the sewage treatment plant, where is there to go the create equitable housing where neighbors won't protest?
Many reasons are given for NIMBYism. In the Springs unincorporated area it appears keeping a poor street layout is a rationale to maintain safety, and low density exclusivity. Overall, can development just be stopped and no one else can come? If so, this sanctions the Marin County exclusive pattern. Is it a viable and sustainable plan that Sonoma Valley trends to be a gated community?

Valley *smart growth* can't work if the Springs is Balkanized from the larger unified urban area

Springs socially blighted conditions have persisted and grown while other aspects of "smart growth" are highly touted in well-off Sonoma. This is a major regional planning blind spot, and serves as a strong rationale and justification for urban Springs unification with city.

Systemic problems, systemic answers?

Large structural issues of segregation and valley inequity have remained troublesome and unresolved, mainly because the capitalist economy seems incapable of accounting for the poor, or the environment. For example, there is no incentive for internet providers to put infrastructure in for poor people. The digital divide and the Springs C-19 infection rate are perfect examples of systemic dysfunction.
Pretty much, an economic sea change is needed, to at once provide sustenance for people and environment, and not destroy the foundations of productivity at the same time.

Conclusion

Prior planning documents all sounded good. Some of the goals were realized and others not. What got done was mostly physical stuff (Hwy 12, Springs arch), low hanging fruit (art) and one-offs. Despite decent affordable housing production in the Fetter's Apts. area and the 166 MidPen and Milestone units in the pipeline, 10 more projects just like them are needed to meet the need. Deeper structural problems remain: housing inequity/inflated rents, inflated food prices, segregation, lack of district representation, lack of commercial tax base in proportion to the population, and the constraints of Hwy 12 strip development.
Non-profits have done well to serve needs with band aids but systemic structural inequity issues from the contradictions of capitalism have been left to fester. Sonoma appears content to be an island of privilege and to not take responsibility for its workers on the other side of the tracks.
With wholesale economic system replacement nowhere to be seen, but large changes afoot, and the threat of systemic collapse a real possibility in an era of unstable climate change and extreme political dysfunction, what are Sonoma Valley's options? To keep on with a smart growth theory that is not working?
The next best options in Sonoma Valley are to institute county/ regional public banking ASAP and to unify the contiguous urban area for more efficient government services and district representation for all.

THIS EMAIL ORIGINATED OUTSIDE OF THE SONOMA COUNTY EMAIL SYSTEM.
Warning: If you don't know this email sender or the email is unexpected,
do not click any web links, attachments, and never give out your user ID or password.