

SRA Urges County Supervisors . . .

Save Rural Environment in Heart of Angwin



The green swath across from the core campus has been farmed for 100 years. Save Rural Angwin is urging County supervisors to designate it as Agriculture / Open Space in the new General Plan. PUC is proposing a subdivision of 275 houses and a 105-unit retirement center here.

Napa County supervisors held a hearing on Jan. 27 to hear arguments for and against new policies for the new General Plan to govern the future of the Angwin community and Pacific Union College for the next 25 years.

Numerous Save Rural Angwin supporters stood up to argue for preservation of the community's current definition in the County's General Plan as a "rural community." College faculty and staff led by College President Richard Osborn and Financial Vice President John Collins led the charge for the right to build subdivisions on the college's vast land holdings.

Supervisors were reminded that the threat of urbanization is very real, considering that only a few months ago, the college proposed selling 880 acres to a developer with plans for 580 housing units.

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The College's attorney raised a religious liberty issue, charging that to restrict the college's real estate ambitions would constitute an act of religious discrimination. He cited a law which, it turns out, was intended to prevent a county from adopting any zoning plan which would deny a religious body "the right to assemble." The Save Rural Angwin attorney, from a prestigious land use law firm in San Francisco, effectively rebutted the application of that law to what PUC desires, which is to engage in real estate speculation which has nothing to do with its "right to assemble" for worship.

G. Scott Emblidge, of Moscone, Emblidge & Quadra, declared:

"The College is arguing that (the law) prevents the Board (of Supervisors) from adopting land use restrictions that interfere - not with the construction of a place of worship, and not with the expansion of religious school facilities - but with the development of property to build private housing unconnected to the College or its religious mission."

The Napa County attorney also advised supervisors that the religious liberty threat is not applicable.

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SRA supporters pointed out that to permit PUC to develop without restraint would be contrary to the County's basic land use philosophy, namely that growth must be restrained and agricultural land preserved as fundamental planning policy, Exceptions must not be made in Angwin, SRA supporters warned. "You must not turn back the clock," they said.

The supervisors will resume its deliberations late in February. SRA is encouraged to believe that the existing "Urban Residential" designation over 220 acres of PUC land including and surrounding the core campus will be changed to something more descriptive..

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Save Rural Angwin will continue pushing vigorously for redesignation of these lands to "Institutional, "a policy which would accommodate the College's Master Plan for development of future educational facilities, but which would discourage sales to real estate developers. The 220 acres involved, is far more land for expansion than colleges and universities which accommodate 25,000 students.

Save Rural Angwin was supported in the hearing last month by the Napa County Farm Bureau and the Sierra Club,, politically strong organizations dedicated to the preservation of agricultural land and the natural environment.