

Saratoga Planning Commission Study Session

September 27th, 2023

Video

The video recording of the meeting can be watched here:

<https://saratoga.granicus.com/player/clip/1406>

Transcripts of Residents' Oral Communications (v3)

Pat DuBridg

When I moved to Saratoga in 1965 with my husband and 2 young children, the city of Saratoga was only 9 years old. In 1956, a group of residents decided that they wanted a hand in the destiny of their special little village. With the motto 'keep it green' they were able to become the city of Saratoga. For over 66 years our planning commissioners and city council members have remained dedicated to keeping Saratoga green with our beautiful tree canopy, open vistas and low density.

I have spent many hours of my adult life working to help preserve, maintain and enhance for all two of Saratoga's gems: Montalvo and the historic Foothill Club. I care deeply for Saratoga as I know all 7 of you do since you are donating your time and expertise to make decisions that will affect Saratoga for generations to come. In a few weeks you will make a decision on the possible massive expansion of a special spot in Saratoga; another gem, Saratoga Retirement Community. If this expansion occurs, the whole center of our complex will become concrete and black top. We will lose 65 heritage trees, some 100 ft tall and more than 100 years old, and our only central open space for outdoor recreation. I am here to ask you to remember that intrepid band from 1956 and all the planning commissioners who have preceded you in the last 66 years. They have done a fine job. They have cherished our ancient trees and open vistas, and kept over building from our door.

Please, continue their legacy. Keep it green.

Thank you for listening

Colin Whitby-Strevens

Good evening, commissioners, Good evening, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to make a few comments.

Introduction and CCRC implications

My name is Colin Whitby-Strevens, and my wife and I have been residents at the Saratoga Retirement Community for five years. "Retirement Community", yes, but SRC is more than just another Retirement Community. It is a Continuing Care Retirement Community (abbreviated to CCRC) established as such under various Federal and State laws and regulations. One of the implications of moving into a CCRC is that you pay a significant entry fee (anything up to \$1.5 million), but in return you give up control over many aspects of your personal life, trusting the Provider to provide you with the environment and support you would like during the rest of your life.

Why we came and what we oppose, betrayal of trust

My wife and I were attracted to SRC by the calm, attractive and peaceful environment, with its open spaces, outdoor activity provisions, many mature trees, etc. We trusted SRC to maintain this environment. Instead, SRC have betrayed our trust by making the expansion proposal, and there is nothing we can do about it. We strongly oppose the proposal to build on the Odd Fellows Historic Park. That tears the heart out of our bucolic campus. We strongly oppose building B in front of the Manor, indeed we also oppose the second tier car-parking proposal in that location that PRS have recently submitted. We strongly oppose the newly proposed building D. It ruins the view of the Manor and the campus as you enter, again ruining the character of the campus. We see all of these as betraying the trust we originally put in PRS, and, in our view, if you approve any of these buildings, then you are also betraying the trust that we, as Saratoga Citizens and voters, put in you.

One building compromise

When it comes to looking for compromises, we can accept, reluctantly, some new building at the North East corner of the campus – for example building C in the PRS proposal. So we strongly recommend, as a compromise from which all parties benefit (City, Provider and residents) the so-called "One Building" proposal. Please, just this building, and no other.

(remainder of presentation not given due to time constraints)

Level of opposition by SRC residents

Two further points. The level of opposition from among the residents exceeds a super-majority. As of today, SRC has 189 residents in Independent Living. Of these, 157 have joined the Preserve SRC Campus Interest Group, i.e. indicated their opposition to the PRS proposal. That's 83%. Even if you take into account the CCRC residents in Assisted Living, the Health Center and Memory Care, the number of those opposed to the PRS proposal is 78%. Please listen to the super-majority of residents.

Fact or fiction?

Finally, I appreciate that you have an impossible task in distinguishing fact from fiction in the materials that have been submitted to you. There are numerous errors of fact, and in many other cases, those advocating for expansion have been rather "economical with the truth", presenting a very one-sided story. In the words of Mandy Rice Davis "Well they would say that, wouldn't they".

Thank you

Thank you for your time, and the care I feel sure you will take in doing the right thing by the residents of SRC and the citizens of Saratoga.

Bob Berglund

My name is Robert Berglund, a resident of Saratoga since 1969.

It's disappointing to see a last-minute input to the SRC expansion project by the applicant so full of mis-statements aimed at confusing the Planning Commissioners and City Council. I'm speaking of the input on Public Benefits.

The degree to which a portion of the initial fee is returned depends on the specific contract at the time of the resident's admittance. Paying large entry fees and substantial monthly fees is not a public benefit but a commercial contract arrangement.

SRC is not owned by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows It is owned by the Odd Fellows Home of California (OFHC), a nonprofit corporation with two operations, SRC and the Meadows of Napa Valley. The infill proposed to the SRC is not a public benefit as the new units will be used for commercial contracts with future residents from any location, not just Saratoga.

The Affordable Housing provided at the Fellowship Plaza in the adjacent parcel is a separate Odd Fellows organization, that operates thru its tenants with the mission to provide low-income housing. There are no operational or financial ties to SRC and thus no public benefits resulting from the expansion project.

With reference to the Assisted Living (AL) studio apartments, they also will require commercial contracts for consistency with other AL residents. These units are already available to the public today. A discounted monthly fee would only be available from the Odd Fellow Endowment to Odd Fellow members not the public. Furthermore putting the details of this so called public benefit of "Affordable Housing" off to the future is an empty promise with no assurance of realizing any public benefit.

Lastly, The SRC expansion project does not create an opportunity for a public trail connection, under the Open Space and Conservation, Goal 5, as the trail connection has already been approved and is in daily use at the present time without the SRC expansion project.

We trust the leaders of Saratoga will focus on the true facts.

Brenda Niemand

REMARKS ON THE MEETING ROOM ADDITION TO THE MANOR

Good evening. My name is Brenda Niemand, a resident at SRC. I am addressing the plan to attach a Meeting Room to the west side of the Manor, the iconic building that is the heart of our community. For several reasons, I find this proposal ill-considered and difficult to defend esthetically.

The western facade of the Manor will be punched through to provide access to the Meeting Room. This "room" is actually a one-story building, but since it will sit atop a parking garage, it will read as two stories—and will obscure much of that facade. The grassy downslope that would be the Meeting Room's building site is now one of our rare green spaces; we will lose that pleasant area as well as several mature trees.

This architecturally significant structure is a fine example of the Mission Revival style, sited on a knoll that gives prominence to the structure's original purpose: to house the elderly. The stucco-clad building is a glory to behold--graceful in spite of its bulk; proud, with its two bell towers and arched colonnades; and symmetrically elegant. It delights the eye. There is something about symmetry that affects our brain--it calms and satisfies. To destroy the classical balance of the Manor by dangling an appendage off one side would be an egregious mistake.

We are assured that measures will be taken to avoid any structural damage to the 1912 Manor caused by vibrations accompanying construction; and the project will be documented by an architectural historian. If any damaged is sustained, there will at least be a before-and-after record of it. (Meanwhile, I'll cross my fingers!)

Importantly, the City of Saratoga has deemed the Manor a historic structure worthy of preserving and protecting. However, its visual impact will be forever diminished by the asymmetrical addition of the Meeting Room. Future visitors and historians may wonder "What *were* they thinking? Why was anyone allowed to tack on such an afterthought?" Surely, that is not a legacy Saratoga wants to leave to its future citizens. I beseech you to prevent this wrong-headed proposal. And I thank you for the opportunity to share my views.

Barry Lamé

The destruction of the open space proposed by this expansion will severely impact our enjoyment of our home. We have all paid dearly to "buy into" this community and the peaceful lifestyle we all sought. The open space allows us to breathe, and appreciate our interactions with both our neighbors and the wildlife which is attracted here.

We do not want to live in a community that is constructed for "maximun capacity"; we could have chosen to live in San Jose, San Francisco, or Oakland. We need the Odd Fellows Park, the only place for outdoor community, and the trees which surround it.

The Manor building is a community treasure. Our trees provide habitat for many species of birds and other wildlife, and provide oxygen for all of us to breathe.

Our traffic lanes, ingress and egress, and parking are inadequate as is; further cramming more people in will only increase the congestion.

The plans submitted keep changing, as buildings keep being added, deleted, and moved around; I don't know if this is to confuse the residents or the city.

We have been promised, implicitly and explicitly, a certain level of peace, harmony, and community. Let us enjoy these for our remaining years.

Diane Lamé

Within the first four hours of moving to SRC, I learned all about the expansion plans.

It was very distressing, to say the least, because my husband and I spent years looking into many other retirement communities, before selecting SRC.

This proposed expansion has been a worry for most of this community, and created much stress and upheaval to our lives.

We chose SRC for its natural beauty and serenity. It really breaks my heart that these both may be destroyed. If they are, we will be faced with more noise, more dust, more trucks, more congestion, and more chance for difficulty of emergency vehicles to maneuver in and out.

The point is, we will all experience disruption to the peaceful enjoyment of our lives. We will experience nothing like what we expected for the final years of our lives on this earth. We have always been proud to see the sign saying that Saratoga is the "city of trees."

Please do not allow the destruction of 125 trees, many of which have NOT been marked.

PLEASE Don't let our paradise be paved over for a parking lot to be put up.

Tony Vandersteen

Hi my name is Anthony Vandersteen and I have spoken before about the expansion plan for SRC, and about my concern that the plan as currently envisioned will do irreparable harm to the delightful campus of the Saratoga Retirement Community. This environment is what we carefully selected back in 2016 during our search for the finest CCRC in this area. We love the ambience, the open space, the trees and the landscaping, and the parklike atmosphere of SRC, and frankly don't understand the need for expanding the buildings for apparently bringing in more revenue. Our many requests for more financial justification fell on deaf ears, and we have never seen the financial reasoning behind such a decision. We were horrified to learn of this plan within a year of us arriving on campus, and paying out over half a million dollars to be part of this exclusive community.

However today I wish to speak about a specific problem with the proposed plan, which is TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE, and that is the BUILDING A. This completely destroys the residents park, which many of us use for our recreation, and I understand is a stated benefit for seniors at SRC. Building A underground parking area shows an exit onto Pavilion Circle directly opposite the rear entrance to the kitchen that supplies the main dining hall of SRC. This area is constantly used for unloading food and supplies for the kitchen, needed to supply the meals for the entire population of SRC independent-living residents. It is also used for all the residential traffic coming from the central Pavilion. We already have regular traffic jams in this area when the huge food trucks unload their supplies. Making this location the main access to Building A would be a DISASTER of the highest order, and is totally unacceptable. In fact when you look at a map of the proposed building, the area right opposite the kitchen is the one area which any competent architect would choose NOT to use for the exit location of this building.

However this is just one of the many reasons why Building A is completely unacceptable. The central park, which is ironically designated as the Odd Fellows Memorial Park, and is specifically for the residents to use for their recreation. Building A plan also completely does away with the Bocce Ball court, which is used continually by a large percentage of the residents. The building will also be an eyesore to the residents in the adjacent buildings. In years past this park had green grass as well as the beautiful landscaping, and was perfectly suited for picnics for all the residents. The residents have lately attempted to reclaim the small section near the Bocce court as an observation area for the Bocce Ball, and is actively supported by the more than 60 members who regularly play Bocce Ball. Having a large building in the Park Area will completely destroy the environment and open space ambient feeling of SRC. We would all love to see this park area restored to its former glory and NOT converted into 20 more apartments.

Marilyn Manies

My name is Marilyn Manies and I am a 40-year resident in Saratoga, a city named Tree City USA every year since 2006, a city that has won several national awards for its trees like America in Bloom's Best Tree Canopy, Best Urban Forest and Best Tree Heritage Program.

When last winter's storms caused Saratoga to lose 13 large trees due to extreme rainfall and wind, it made the local news. Saratoga loves its trees and they are protected. Now Saratoga is threatened with the loss of 124 trees at Saratoga Retirement Center if a developer succeeds with the expansion project. Some of these trees are redwoods and oaks over 100' tall and 6 feet in diameter. Sixty-five (65) of these trees are protected by the City's code.

They provide shade in increasingly hot weather, a habitat for birds and other animals, and contribute to the beauty of the SRC campus. They buffer noise, cool the environment and remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

SRC does not need all of the proposed buildings at the cost of losing one of the things most valued by the residents. I find it unconscionable that the city would abandon its values and allow this many trees to be destroyed.

I urge you to vote down the proposed development and accept the Resident's Plan which offers the desired increased housing without sacrificing 124 trees.

Betsy Landergren & Bev Wallace

Take a look at us. We are the Expendables.

You know, life is full of contradictions & compromises. We have Save-The-Tree letters printed on paper made from trees. But these letters were not made from 100-year-old redwoods — compromise.

Right now, PRS plans to destroy much more than our heritage trees and our beloved park. Building D, for example, will also destroy 2 resident homes. Bev's home & my home.

Building D will raze our 2 cottages to make room for 11 apartments, a net gain of only 9 units. An apartment, however, generates less rent than a cottage, so realistically it's a gain of only about 8 units. That hardly seems rational for all the expense & years of construction & disruption & angst that would ensue.

And what do Bev & I do? We moved to our cottages because they had little back yards for our dogs. We were told we could stay till we needed additional care in Assisted living.

We paid to fence our yards, & added things like hardwood floors, shutters, & built in units. I moved in only 2 years ago to my newly renovated beautiful place which is slated for the wrecking ball. What a waste.

We don't own these cottages, but they're our homes.

Bev & I (& perhaps others in the future) seem to be deemed expendable by PRS. What they are doing may be legal, (I don't know), but we do know it surely — is not moral.

Please consider the One building plan that does not destroy our beautiful trees, our lovely park, our way of life, . . . our very homes.

Please.

Don Schmidek

I am a SRC resident. My wife and I vehemently oppose the horrible PRS "C" build-out plan as well as the not requested AECOM "B" plan. The 2 Plans are TOTALLY oblivious of the terrible multi-year impact on Senior residents

Please note that the 7 yrs. postponement of the Bldg. A promised by the Odd Fellows President is not addressed in the EIR schedules.

I have reviewed the whole EIR and submitted over 45 letters specific to EIR topics regarding erroneous and oppressive issues, which would affect the SRC senior population.

Here are 6 of the 100s of unacceptable conditions suggested in the EIR that would have a devastating impact on 200 residents during the 4-6 construction years

** Closures of two main streets on the campus, each for longer than 6, maybe 12 plus months, thus blocking vehicle access to homes and garages, is beyond civility. (Par 3.16.3)

** Having as many as 200 construction workers on the campus at the same time, one for each resident, for months or years, is beyond imagination, and let us not forget the Porta Patties everywhere.

** The noise from the excavating, and other activities will exceed acceptable levels, and it is suggested that residents absent themselves from the campus. Similarly walking on the campus will be hazardous.

** Placing the construction staging in the IOOF Memorial Park and across the street from dwellings for many years, is abusive and disruptive to the extreme.

** Obliterating the one Open Space, the IOOF Memorial Park at SRC, by placing a building in it and on it, would be devastating to 100s of senior residents and in violation of Saratoga Policy OSC 3.1 regarding park retention in perpetuity.

** Having dozens of Semis and trucks daily carting dirt or bringing in construction material, would pose traffic congestions, extreme dangers, air pollution and noise to SRC residents and would close some streets.

We are senior residents, we have enjoyed our long stay at SRC. No one told us when we paid our entry fee about these misconstrued, inconsiderate and devastating plans.

There are better solutions and much better plans - please consider either of the Resident solutions and veto all other plans as they are abusive, invasive and ill conceived. And I want to leave you with a typical statement of the EIR:

Park — The overall cumulative impact for C-REC-1 would be potentially significant, however, the Project's contribution would be less than cumulatively considerable.

Would you condemn your parents or grandparents in their last years to such a hell? Please do not condemn us!

Please do NOT approve the PRS or AECOM injurious plans.

John Day

I am John Day, an eight-year resident of SRC.

The Draft EIR revealed that Building B would have a non-mitigatable impact on the historical Manor.

The Consultant found that Alternative 2 had the least Environmental Impact of the alternative proposals. Alternative 2 won this distinction by eliminating Building B with its egregious visual impact on the historically significant 1912 Manor.

Alternative 3 then was proposed to construct an alternative Building D on the employee parking lot, instead of Building B in front of the Manor. However, the objections to Building B equally apply to Building D. This location will obstruct the view of the Manor to any one entering the campus and create another non-mitigatable impact on the historical Manor.

Further, Alternative 3 would eliminate the existing employee parking lot, and require the construction of a new employee parking area on the hill directly in front of the Manor, another egregious un-mitigatable impact on the historical appearance of the Manor. It would result in the permanent and irreversible removal of character-defining features of the setting of the Manor Building. This parking lot also causes the removal of even more trees which have not been tagged in front of the Manor.

Please do not allow the construction of Building D.

Pat McGuire

I'm Pat McGuire of SRC's Conservation Committee

I wish to remind everyone that Saratoga has enacted many sustainability laws, (I SHAKE THEM!) such as promoting energy from Renewable Sources. Perhaps the new roofs should be made of Solar Tiles? Building materials could & should be made sustainably.

And new facilities really MUST take our campus to supporting 75% of our cars, & our employees', and visitors', with battery-charging power.

Perhaps we'll get a cistern to collect rain water to use on landscaping.

Because we know the Odd Fellows organization also has environmentalist tendencies, we want to support these city actions going forward, contributing to the Public Benefits the city is on record as striving for!

Furthermore, in referring briefly to my comments at the EIR review session about our physical address not being our mailing address, think of the wasted fuel over all these years as our delivery drivers, family & friends, prospective employees & future residents search for the place they've been asked to find! So, it's time to solve this, too.

I'll also briefly repeat that the proposed 1000 sq ft of increased exercise space would be woefully inadequate now & certainly so with additional residents

Thank you.