

From: [David](#) [REDACTED]
To: -- City Clerk; [Flynn, Peggy](#); [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [m](#); [REDACTED]; [McDonnell, Kevin](#)
Subject: Davidon Project at Kelly Creek
Date: Monday, August 8, 2022 9:35:25 PM

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TO: Petaluma City Clerk, Petaluma Planning Commissioners, Petaluma City Council Members
FROM: David Donnenfield, Suzan Hahn, D.D.S.
RE: Davidon Housing Project
DATE: August 2, 2022

We wish to comment on the Davidon construction project now before the Planning Commission. I have read descriptions of the project put forth by the city, the Kelly Creek Protection Project, the RDEIR, the ecological assessment by Dr. Shawn Smallwood, as well as the city-commissioned response to Dr. Smallwood's survey by biologist, James Martin. I have also looked over the Scott Ranch property from its periphery along D Street and Windsor Drive.

I see the temptation to approve this project: the developer has scaled back the original design in response to criticism, similar development already exists along Windsor Drive, an appealing offer of most of the parcel's acreage for public use, and of course the park extension concept as the answer to the public's use. All of these seem reasonable and persuasive in moving the project along to the City Council for their approval. However, there are very strong considerations that argue against approving the project.

First, why approve a project that locates houses in the WUI, the Wildlands Urban Interface? CalFire has identified this practice as dangerous in light of climate change and long-term regional drought. We have only to look at the Tubbs Fire and the devastation inflicted on Santa Rosa to appreciate how risky it is to put housing next to, if not in fact in, wildlands. As for the houses that are already along Windsor Dr., those homeowners have made a questionable compact to live with increased threat of fire catastrophe long into the future. But the Planning Commission ought not to continue in this line of risky decisions when all evidence suggests that fire on the landscape is inevitable. We have been shown the error of our ways. Now we need to embrace those lessons and take the hard decisions accordingly.

Second, as Dr. Smallwood's report indicates, this is a very significant locale for wildlife. It has a wild creek, for goodness sakes! Of course, it's been degraded by years of access to cattle. I'm sure the banks and streambed have been trampled, the bordering plant life eaten away, and the natural contours impacted. Non-native vegetation, like the giant Eucalyptus, have been introduced and out-compete native plant life. Nevertheless, the landscape supports an abundance of species and would probably support even more if informed ecological

restoration was undertaken. The creek is the critical element that draws wildlife to the property and makes it all the more unique and special. A source of water in a desiccated landscape serves as an oasis: it makes life possible. Locating houses and the attendant infrastructure nearby would render the property less habitable to species of mammals, reptiles, ground-nesting birds, rodents, and other life forms. Light and noise pollution, human intrusion, stray cats, toxic run-off and other pressures would degrade what otherwise is not just amenable habitat but also a wildlife corridor connecting other habitats and populations.

Then there's the matter of a threatened species, the CA Red-legged Frog. The developer goes to great lengths in the RDEIR to assure us that mitigation measures preserving "equivalent" habitat is sufficient to protect this creature. But any further diminishment of the habitat it currently enjoys puts pressure on its survival. Loss of habitat is one of the fundamental reasons it is threatened. Let's be clear about our responsibility to species in peril. If we don't do everything to protect their survival, then they just won't survive. Please understand the critical consequences of this decision and how it either contributes to biodiversity or sabotages it. Species viability is literally left to us now.

Lastly, there is the matter of Kelly Creek serving as an extension to Helen Putnam Regional Park. It seems so appealing, particularly with an idealized bird's eye visualization of a creek created for humans to enjoy. Unfortunately, as another entrance to HPRP, humans will be accompanied by dogs, by bicycles, and by small children who will be drawn to the creek's cool water. With a path on either side of the creek and three bridges, human presence and activity is sure to be concentrated along its length.

Just think about mammals, reptiles, and insects trying to get to the sole water source, and having to cross a gauntlet of bikes, people, dogs, and unattended children occupying the paths on either side. Added to this misguided creek design, the proposed parking lots, bathrooms, amphitheater and museum will intensify the pressure on wildlife trying to make a living on the property. This is far from good stewardship of a critical resource, despite the good intentions of increased "park" acreage.

I am not suggesting that people should be entirely excluded from the landscape, just that the park concept is inconsistent with biodiversity and species protections. So what's an alternative? A Restoration/Regeneration Learning Center. In the Scott Ranch property, we have the opportunity to both recover a damaged riparian landscape and also engage the community in its enlightened recovery. We don't need the red barn turned into an agricultural museum of past practices, we need a hands-on educational environmental science center where students of all ages can engage in the art and science of ecological restoration. This is one of the great environmental challenges that awaits our children. Why are we not helping them to learn this critical enterprise? The irony is, we already have a nationally-proven model right here in Petaluma: STRAW — Students and Teachers Restoring a Watershed. Let's make the property a workshop and laboratory for enlightened place-based teaching, as well as an

inviting facility where students can get dirty doing hands-on work to bring back nature in the place near where they live. This could be a shared facility between Sonoma and Marin Counties, supported by individual schools, boards, and the county's offices of education.

The particular value in utilizing the resource in this way is that, first of all, it's protected from use and abuse by random "park" visitors. All visitors will be under the supervision of teachers and staff so that the natural resource, and the work going on to restore it, is protected. Its connection to Helen Putnam Park is to serve as a riparian corridor for animals to transit, not as another entrance to and parking lot for HPRP. Secondly, the focus is on both restoration of a wild creek and its surroundings, and on learning at various levels about the different communities, their interdependencies, and the habitat they need to survive. Third, it offers a powerful opportunity for community members to participate and contribute to reviving a land parcel and restoring its vibrance and fecundity now and long into the future. Fourth, I have seen this hands-on, place-based approach revive burnt-out teachers who themselves find inspiration and renewed purpose by engaging in such work.

We owe it to ourselves, our children, our wonderful town, and our planet to make smart, informed decisions that protect and enhance our natural world. We know that we are utterly dependent upon it, that enhancing biodiversity also enhances human life and may very well save us from our own demise. Let us exercise visioning and imagination here. Let's not waste time or opportunities to put our care and our concerns into action. If we ourselves are going to succeed as a species, we must learn and adapt accordingly. Now.

Sincerely,

David Donnenfield

Suzan Hahn, D.D.S.

David Donnenfield

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"Those who will not reason, are bigots, those who cannot, are fools, and those who dare not, are slaves."
George Gordon Byron