

Submitted by:

Martha Barra

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November 17, 2020

“You know you have a good deal when the parties
can shake hands and walk away with a smile on their faces,
knowing that they both were winners.”

Charlie Barra, 1926-2019

TO CHAIRMAN HASCHAK, MEMBERS GERDE, McCOWEN, BROWN, WILLIAMS,
AND TO VARIOUS SUPPORTING STAFF MEMBERS

IN RE: COUNTY OF MENDOCINO PROPOSED PURCHASE OF BEST WESTERN MOTEL
AT 555 ORCHARD AVENUE, UKIAH, CA 95482 FOR THE PURPOSE OF
ESTABLISHING A “HOMEKEY” FACILITY AT SAID LOCATION

I, MARTHA E. BARRA, am writing to express my opposition to the proposed purchase for the following reasons:

1. The main reason is this is the wrong location for such a facility. Orchard Avenue is one of the main thoroughfares into the City of Ukiah and as such, it should be preserved for C-1 zone businesses, and other allowed uses within that zoning (those uses having full review by two bodies of the City of Ukiah) and not exempt from CEQA. It is now developed with a school, pre-school, a church, the DMV office, US Post Office, CHP office, insurance office and other important businesses to our community. Our Board of Supervisors has the responsibility to the Ukiah community to look long range (and not just in the COVID era) to protect the availability of businesses that pay taxes, produce revenue and add resources to the economic base of the community. This is not the place for a permanent residential facility. This would be like putting the same kind of facility in the middle of (1) Pear Tree Shopping Center (2) Airport Way Shopping Center and (3) Orchard Shopping Center is in very close proximity. (See map attached.)
2. The Board was presented a “carrot” with a very short time frame to act in applying for the \$9.6 million grant from the State Department of Community Development. The price tag for the property is \$10.640 million, so the County must come up with another \$1,000,000.00 for the purchase plus another \$550,000.0+ for remodeling to meet the “extra sink in rooms”

condition. This is just the start of a very expensive remodeling project that would convert single occupancy rooms into family units. In addition, the County has taken the purchase of Selzer Realty building into consideration, and even though this writer is not privy to the what the exact amount the purchase price for that business would be, I must assume (from following real estate trends in Mendocino County), it would be in the neighborhood of \$3,000,000.00+. So, now, let's add all that up: my trusty calculator says it is \$14,150,000.00 for 56 single units that will be diminished by at least ten or more rooms (because making rooms for "Families" may take more than two single rooms.) Now we are down to 46 rooms. Divide \$14,150,000.00 by 46 rooms, and you are paying \$307,608.70/per housing unit, and many of those are still single rooms. I won't even do the math for you about what the cost is per square foot for this ridiculous proposal. Plus, you are paying for good will and a "going concern" which you will immediately throw away.

3. Please, please look carefully at the mix of suggested "Client Occupation" on the 7746-18 Homekey Project Description dated August 11, 2020. This facility is not constructed to house people with "severe mental illness", along with "seniors", "Families Involved with Child Welfare Services", or "People of High Risk of COVID". And, who knows who goes into the "flex" rooms. I refer you to the Marbut Report of 2018 on Page 9 that explains the negatives of mixing children with adults, and he goes on to say that Mendocino County is already doing this. "This is very harmful to the future development of the children and presents many unnecessary risks and liabilities to the service providing agencies". Use your good judgment and reject the proposed project as well as this suggested mix of "clients" for this facility and be the watchdog for other programs providing services for our fragile population.
4. I am asking that you step back and consider the management portion of the facility. There is not one company or agency committed to take on the huge task of supervising and enforcing rules, protecting the health, nutrition and safety needs of the clients, and maintaining the facility so the value goes up not down. There is an RFP out for a management company to run the Crisis Residential Treatment Facility on Orchard Street that is to be built with Measure B funds. To date, there is not one applicant for that position. (Aside: that is another facility that should not be built prior to a long-term management contract being put in place.) Where is that management team going to come from? And, I ask you, "Where is the budget?"
Let's get our priorities straight. We currently have three facilities that have failed management: Look at "Building Bridges" at 1045 South State Street*, Ukiah; Willow Terrace on Gobbi Street in Ukiah**, and Madrone House on Sems Lane in Redwood Valley. To put another facility with poor management in the midst of respectable businesses and schools and churches is using poor judgment....no matter the size of the "carrot".
5. I want to congratulate our BOS for sending out an RFP for a "locked mental facility". I have long been an advocate for separating out the various components that make up our homeless population. My associates have heard me say many times that it is criminal for the homeless to be housed overnight and then thrown back out on the streets come 8:00 a.m. the following morning. This exacerbates the problems they cause for the City police,

- the neighbors to the facility where they sleep, why they are more likely to have predatory behaviors toward each other, etc., etc. But the location of a “whole person” facility is critical to its success. There has to be activities, medical respite, open air spaces, places to store their belongings **other than in shopping carts**, and even park their cars if they have them. Most are truly needy people. (And, we need to kick out the ones who are scamming the system!)
6. Another reason not to move forward with this proposal is because the Rural Communities Housing Development Corporation (RCHDC) has a very large (over 60 units) mixed use facility much like Willow Terrace being constructed on Orr Street in Ukiah. The inventory for low-income, subsidized housing is substantial in Ukiah. Use these units up first. This proposal is the wrong time, wrong price, wrong location. There is no redeeming value to it. When a project is only predicated on “free money”, it usually turns out not being so.
 7. Have you talked to anyone outside of staff on this issue? Have any members of the Board (besides John McCowen and I arguing vehemently) reached out to other members of the business or members of the community? Or even other social services agencies? I am aware of the letter from the City of Ukiah, but now I understand there is a disclaimer to that one also. The movement of this proposal along has been without input from those most affected. I did engage about 16-20 people in an open-air discussion on this topic at the winery a couple of weeks ago. There were lots of strong opinions against it, and it was defended only by staff. Because of the importance of the placement, and the community’s experience with the other failed homeless facilities in our area, there needs to be face-to-face discussions before going forward with the purchase. As you all recognize, computer engagement does not suffice for the right of citizens to express themselves. I am good at communicating with each of you; but that is not true of all residents.
 8. I have also said many times before, I don’t criticize unless I have suggestions/or options to pursue. The County just paid \$2.2 million for the convalescent hospital (that I call “COVID Hotel”) on Whitmore Lane. It has barely been used by COVID patients. It is an older, but sound (except for the roof and some plumbing issues) condition. I am suggesting HHSA look carefully at this facility, plus the poorly-maintained lot to the west, to evaluate the potential **of furnishing the most housing for the buck**. I have a vision for that property that I would like to discuss with each and every one of you. WE CAN DO BETTER.

This letter to you will be widely disseminated in hopes that others besides myself will contact you.

Attachments:

*Pictures of “Building Bridges”.

**Comments from police and neighbors about “Willow Terrace”

Map of area

Martha Barra