

August 16, 2021

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

Re: August 17 Agenda item 4e - Approval of Agreement with the City of Ukiah For Shared Exercise of Land Use and California Building Code Authority on Mendocino County Assessor's Parcel Number 178-210-01

My family and I moved to the Vichy Springs Estates subdivision in 2012. Since that time, the frequency, duration and volume of the activities at the Ukiah Rifle and Pistol Club (URPC) has increased dramatically year round. This comes as no surprise as the membership of the club has grown substantially. An April 14, 2017 article in the Press Democrat reported that "...the club has tripled in size to 1,200 in a little more than a decade." The facilities themselves have been expanded during that time as well.

Membership and use of the URPC aren't the only things that have changed.

Fire risk, frequency, and length of fire season have also significantly changed. According to the 2014 Mendocino County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2020 Mendocino Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, and recent fire data, between 2006 and 2018 Mendocino County experienced 10 large wildfires (5000 acres or more) burning a total of about 665,250 acres. During the 30 years prior to that, only two large wildfires occurred totaling 70,655 acres. In 2020, the August Complex set state records for largest fire in recorded history, burning 1,032,648 acres over six counties. And that data does not include all of the smaller fires that now occur around the county on a regular basis. On October 7, 2020, a fire started near the back of the URPC property. The CalFire incident report (Incident 20CAMEU0012028) confirmed that target shooting was the probable cause of the fire. On August 10, 2021, another fire started in what appeared to be the same location. I'm so grateful to the firefighters who have quickly responded to these incidents and prevented any serious loss of life and property. With one narrow, winding road available to evacuate the residents of this Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, including the Vichy Springs subdivisions, Guidiville tribal housing development, and staff and visitors of the historic Vichy Springs resort, a fire has the potential to be disastrous. Fire would only have to travel a short distance to reach the other subdivisions of the eastern hills as well.

In spite of the changed conditions, it appears that the URPC has been able to expand their facilities and membership with little regulation from either the County or City. Because the property is in the unincorporated County, but owned by the City of Ukiah, it seems that both jurisdictions have taken a regulatory hands-off approach over the years, as evidenced in the Grand Jury report dated February 19, 2011. In May of this year, following receipt of the CalFire report of the 2020 incident, the Vichy Springs Estates Home Owners Association submitted a letter to First District Supervisor Glenn McGourty requesting information on what steps the County and CalFire were taking to protect the lives and property of the people in that area. His response was that the property was under the City's jurisdiction and that he would look into it further.

It's not entirely clear if the agreement proposed under item 4e on the August 17, 2021, agenda will improve the situation, but it's my hope that it would be a first step in enhanced regulation of the property in question and ultimately in improved safety and quality of life for First District residents. If this is the case, then I encourage the board to take this important step. However, before taking action, I ask the board to ensure that this agreement will not limit the County's ability to regulate activities and land use at the URPC property.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Nephele Barrett  
Vichy Springs Resident