

Minutes of the St. Thomas Aquinas Human Concerns Committee Meeting - April 23 2014

Attendance:

Paul Chestnut, Susan Olsen, Terry Atkinson, Chris Lundin, Terry McCaffrey, Winter Dellenbach, Ericka Escalante, Roberta Uebbing, Clif Herndon, Laurie Vavuris

1. Faith-Sharing/Question of the Week

Terry read a prayer from -----

2. Approval of February minutes

The minutes were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

3. Buena Vista May 12 Rally and Hearing

Two guests were present to discuss the Buena Vista situation: Winter Dellenbach and Ericka Escalante. The owner of Buena Vista, a mobile home park, wants to sell the property to a developer. That would incur a mass emigration of low income residents from Palo Alto. Twenty of the residents are parishioners. A summary of the current situation is presented at the end of these minutes. Ericka is president of the homeowners association. Winter is an activist who lives in Buena Park. Their current objective is to generate a large attendance at a rally and hearing on May 12; the hearing will evaluate the relocation plan in light of current law. A written opinion will be published in two to four weeks. The losing side will appeal, and the issue will not come to a head until the autumn. Our group decided that we are in favor of maintaining the 117 units of affordable housing, that the sale and relocation of the residents would be regrettable, and that we will help to try to find a way for the residents to keep their homes. We will create a bulletin insert for May 4 urging people to attend the rally and hearing. In addition, we will create a petition to the City Council requesting the Council to hold firm on the current zoning of the property. We will try to coordinate the petition with other churches in Palo Alto.

4. Social Justice Day results

The Social Justice Day on March 22 was successful, although the total numbers, about 120 people, were less than the goal. Expenses were covered by income. Comments from attendees were positive. We talked about having a day next year. A date was suggested: February 22.

5. Heart & Home Collaborative

We did not have time to review this topic.

6. St Elizabeth Seton Second Grade Book Drive

The current Second Graders at St. Elizabeth Seton school are becoming proficient readers and our parish hopes to encourage and support their reading efforts by giving them new books for summer enjoyment. Book collection boxes and an envelope for cash/check donations will be in the vestibules at our three churches on May 3-4 and May 10-11.

7. Death Penalty news

NEW BUSINESS

8. 2014-2015 budget

9. What's On Your Mind?

10. Volunteer for Faith-sharing/Question of the Week

Next meeting - May 16, 2014

Buena Vista Mobile Home Park - Current Situation

There is a mobile home park in Palo Alto. It's called Buena Vista. It's in the Barron Park district, just west of El Camino Real. This park includes 117 units of affordable housing.

Most of the residents of Buena Vista own their mobile homes, renting space from the property owner. The owner wants to close Buena Vista, forcing the residents to move in order to sell to a redeveloper that says it will build no affordable replacement housing. The owner has a right to sell, but many think that he and the redeveloper also have a responsibility to residents who will lose everything – the homes they own, their jobs and safe community, and the children will lose their good schools and bright hopes for the future. We will all lose nearly 400 neighbors and over 100 units of badly needed affordable housing. And St. Thomas Aquinas will lose eight families.

Here is the current situation: Most residents own homes, renting a space from the property owner. In 2012, Buena Vista's owner filed with the City to close and "relocate" residents. He has the right to do so but must comply with state and city laws. This "closure process" will continue well into 2015, if not beyond. Most residents will lose everything if forced out – homes, jobs, friends, a safe community, good schools, medical and elder services. Many children will lose extended family members (grandparents, aunts and uncles) with whom they have always lived.

Legally required "relocation payments" from the owner to residents will not be enough to afford Bay Area market rents, and other area mobile home parks have few empty spaces, so residents will have to move out of the region. Prometheus Real Estate Group wants the city to up-zone the 4+ acres to build "180 upscale apartments for young tech workers" but no below-market-rate units.

Friends of Buena Vista (<http://friendsofbuenavista.com>) is an organization that is looking for a way out of the dilemma. Their goals:

- Work together to ensure residents have the option to remain in Palo Alto.
- Ensure students will finish their education in Palo Alto.
- Replace any of the 108 units of Buena Vista affordable housing that may be lost.
- Work with residents to guarantee their fair treatment and rights upheld.

Palo Alto City policy states: *To the extent feasible, the City will seek appropriate local, state and federal funding to assist in the preservation and maintenance of the existing units in the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park.* Prometheus wants a zoning change to build bigger than current zoning allows. The City should grant nothing until residents' housing needs and the loss of affordable units must be resolved responsibly.