

BAREC and NIMBY-ism

On page 1B of the August 20 edition of the San Jose Mercury News, Scott Herhold wrote a column entitled, *A Nod To Those Who Put The Not In Nimby*. In the column Mr. Herhold identified his top picks for the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) Award. In awarding the grand prize to the people behind SaveBAREC, Mr. Herhold stated, "In sheer drive and imagination, no NIMBY organization surpasses the Santa Clara-based SaveBAREC folks..." The *Weekly* contacted Kirk Vartan, one of the people directly involved in the SaveBAREC group and asked if he wanted to write a rebuttal to Mr. Herhold's column. Here is Mr. Vartan's response:

"Maybe he thinks he is being funny, but instead, he trivialized the issues at hand and the importance of the situation involving the BAREC property. In case you are not aware of where or what this property is, the property is directly across from Westfield's Valley

Fair on Winchester Boulevard. It is a 17-acre agricultural zoned piece of public land that was an agricultural research station for the University of California - Davis from the 1920s until the State of California took ownership of it in January 2003.

There is lots of history on the property, but rather than trying to cover that (to read about it and for other information on SaveBAREC, please visit the SaveBAREC website: www.SaveBAREC.org.) I would like to give a perspective on what SaveBAREC.org, the community based, grass roots group is trying to do. First and foremost, we want to keep public land public. We have a solution to do this and to allow it to retain its agricultural status and function without being a tax burden to citizens of the City of Santa Clara or anyone else. Through conservation easements, this land can provide agricultural resources and education for generations to come...forever. The *Valley*

of Hearts Delight can still retain some of its agricultural excellence and help children learn that apples do not grow in supermarkets.

To be specific, SaveBAREC has put forward a proposal that would make these 17 acres an educational urban farm. This would allow the property to remain a PUBLIC piece of land available for the entire community to enjoy and learn from. There is a stated need in the educational K-12 and higher education for this type of facility to teach sustainable food systems, healthy food and nutrition education. Additionally, senior citizens would benefit with a place to do volunteer work as well as gain exercise and a portion of the organic food that would be grown there. SaveBAREC is promoting an idea that is not new and has been implemented in places like Oakland, Sacramento, Marin County and Goleta, California, as well as Portland, Oregon. We are addressing the large disconnect be-

tween urban adults and children with the source of their food and the obesity problem present in Santa Clara County's children. SaveBAREC is also showing how this facility can be a "center of excellence" in restoring local food production that will become more important as oil gets more expensive.

The suggested alternative use of the BAREC land is well thought of amongst the 4,500+ residents of California who all have voiced their opinions on how this land should be used and have signed the petition that simply states the land should remain zoned as agriculture. They all deserve a say since the people of California own this land.

The real question is this: How can this 17-acre piece of agriculturally zoned State land best serve the public? SaveBAREC has the means and the backing to not only organize the purchase of the land for agricultural purposes, but it has the organizations ready to help build and staff the urban farm and

education center that would remain a public asset in perpetuity.

This is an election year and three City Council seats are up for grabs that will determine the fate of this land. Ask the candidates their opinion. This is YOUR land, not the City's and not the developers.

Think generationally, not politically. What will future generations benefit most from: more housing development or a public open space that integrates with the community, provides needed education, provides healthy food and serves all people, from children to seniors. This is the LAST parcel of prime farmland in the area and once it is gone, it is gone forever. Maximize existing developed land, but don't remove any more public open space. Write the Santa Clara City Staff and the City Council and write the SaveBAREC group to get involved: info@SaveBAREC.org or call 888-BAREC-80. We will gladly meet with your neighborhood and answer any questions."

Kirk Vartan