

LOCAL NEWS

San Rafael neighbors irked by school property surplus process



A path runs through Glenwood Marsh toward homes in San Rafael, Calif., on Wednesday, May 15, 2024. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)



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Neighbors near a surplus school district property in San Rafael say they were stunned by recent notices for the community to submit offers to buy or lease the site.

The so-called “notices of priority offerings” were sent only to nonprofits and public entities, but neighbors say Glenwood community groups were overlooked. They also say they are distressed by the school district’s short deadline to reply: May 31.

“They didn’t send out notices to the surrounding property owners,” David Tattersall, president of the Bayside Acres Neighborhood Association, said Wednesday.

Tattersall said he first heard about the priority offering for the Glenwood Marsh surplus site when a neighbor emailed him on May 2. That was a week after the district had already conducted four public question-and-answer sessions for the site and the Old Gallinas, MacPhail and corporation yard surplus properties.

“We are very organized, but when we get blindsided like this, it’s hard to respond properly,” Tattersall said.

School district officials, however, said they notified area nonprofits and public entities on March 15 that they were seeking community offers of uses for the surplus sites. Then the district ran legal notices in the Independent Journal for three weeks in late March and early April, said Bob Marcucci, assistant superintendent at San Rafael City Schools.

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“We tried to cast a wide net,” Marcucci said. “The district has made an effort to reach out to the nonprofit and public entity community — at this time, there has been no talk to any for-profit developers.”

The 16.87-acre Glenwood property is vacant and undeveloped. It is next to Glenwood Elementary School at 25 W. Castlewood Drive.

Only about 13.75 acres could be developed at the site, and the rest are wetlands. According to a district presentation on April 29, the 13.75-acre portion is zoned for low-density housing development with an estimated capacity of 52 dwellings.

Bonnie Marmor, co-president of the Point San Pedro Road Coalition, said the group has been working for years with environmental organizations to form a plan for a wetlands restoration project that would preserve the land as open space and also offer outdoor education opportunities.

This year, the group was planning to work with Point Blue, an environmental conservation organization, and Glenwood teachers “to pursue a program to restore the wetlands,” Marmor said.

“The goal was to provide the technical assistance and knowledge to help design the project as well as wetland education and laboratory experiences for high school, middle school and elementary students in the San Rafael City District,” Marmor said in a letter to the San Rafael district board.

However, the district’s tight deadline does not allow the coalition enough time to create a purchase or lease offer plan around that vision, she said.

“We believe that the community should have been fully engaged in the process to determine the future uses of the site before the decision to sell was made,” Marmor said. “The process that has been followed by the school district did not allow for any community input.”

Marcucci said the district is still open to discussion with all interested community users. But according to the legal process for priority offerings, there has to be some kind of monetary offer submitted to be able to engage in those discussions.

“We see this time as that time,” Marcucci said, referring to the opportunity for talks.

The district has created a page on its website at srcs.org and is sending packets to parties that request information, Marcucci said. He said the district’s intention was to bring all the surplus properties “up to the same timeline” so their status could be assessed by the new district administration.

“We’re trying to be as efficient as possible in getting all these sites on the same timeline,” Marcucci said. He said the district wasn’t required to go through the priority offering process, but chose to do it in order to arrive at the “highest and best use” for each property.

“We could have gone straight to public bidding,” he said.

While the district is not in a hurry to sell or lease any of the sites, there was some urgency to complete the priority offering process by July 1, Marcucci said. That is when a state law will expire and eliminate the opportunity to do the priority offerings simultaneously, in bulk fashion, and also loop in all four sites together, he said.

After July 1, each priority offering would have to be done separately, he said.

Kristin Maguire, whose home is adjacent to the Glenwood site, said the priority offering process has been rushed and incomplete.

“For a district who prides itself on ‘community, equity, joy,’ how is the community involved in any of this, when hardly anyone was notified, and those who were found out at the 11th hour with little to no time to respond or reflect?” Maguire said in an email.

“These sites are not just pieces of land or unused parcels on a map,” she wrote. “Real community happens in our open space — dog walking, bike riding, tadpole catching, bird watching, walking to school, ball playing, and the list goes on.”

“Our site has multiple thriving wetlands and Native American archeological history that are also at stake,” Maguire added.

“At this point, many community groups have different interests about what the ideal outcome might be,” she said. “But we all agree on one thing: there is no way this process is going to generate enough information or imagination from community voices to yield the ‘highest and best use.’”

Kevin Hagerty, president of the Glenwood Neighbors group, agreed.

“We believe that the school district, as a community partner, should have fully engaged our organization as well as other impacted community groups in the process to determine the future uses of the site before the decision to sell was made,” he said in an email.

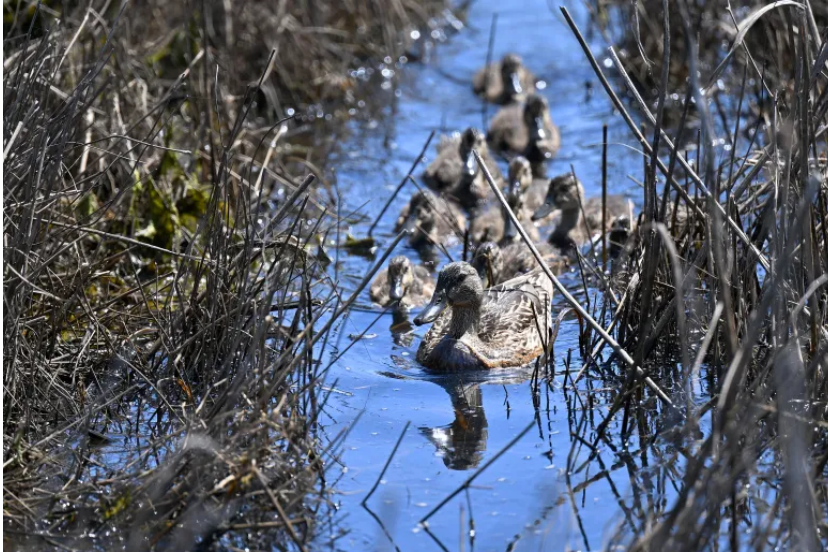
“The school district’s process did not allow for any community input,” he said.

Marcucci said the groups need only make some kind of offer and submit it by May 31 in order to begin the talks. The talks could be ongoing after that, he said.

“The district has received communication from the groups around the Glenwood property — and the other properties,” he said. “We are definitely aware of the feelings around it.”

While the district has to follow the state education code in its procedures and timelines, “it really is an opportunity for public agencies, nonprofits, other groups that are coming together now to make an offer of a long-term lease or purchase, whatever it might be,” he said.

“That offer really allows the district to have discussions and negotiations in good faith,” he said. “While we need to continue to follow the statutory codes related to this, that doesn’t mean that those conversations aren’t going to go forward well past May 31.”



A duck leads ducklings through Glenwood Marsh in San Rafael, Calif., on Wednesday, May 15, 2024. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)

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