

The Time has Come for Springs to Have it's Own Voice

This is an exciting time for the Springs and the Glen Ellen/Kenwood/Eldridge communities. Why? Because these communities are about to form Municipal Advisory Councils or "MACs". MACs were established in the early 70's in California to allow unincorporated communities to have a stronger voice and greater influence on their county supervisors. The communities mentioned above are all unincorporated and yet are more urban than rural in terms of their population density and need for infrastructure and services commonly enjoyed by municipalities.

The Springs, including Verano, Boyes Hot Springs, Fetters Hot Springs, and Agua Caliente have a population about one and a half times the population of the town of Sonoma yet, as these communities are in the unincorporated area of the county, they are, for the most part, treated like rural communities in Sonoma County. In other words, the Springs is an underserved urban community with a growing population that demands and deserves a better infrastructure and level of services.

A great example of this disparity is in comparing the number and size of public parks in Sonoma vs. the Springs. The Springs has 37% more land and 41% more people than Sonoma town yet the amount of green space is less than one-third that of the town of Sonoma. Or less than one-quarter if Maxwell Park is considered to serve both communities.

Over the past few years the Springs Community Alliance has been working closely with Supervisor Gorin seeking solutions to a host of challenges, none of which are really new. Just ask some of the community leaders who have been working on these for the past 30 years – Mark Bramfit, Steve Cox, Gina Cuclis, Art Fichtenburg, Penny Hartman, Cathy Wade Shepard – and many others. These include traffic, parking, housing, safety, sidewalks and blight, just to name a few. These efforts have had limited effectiveness due in large part to a lack of influence at the county government level. Sonoma Valley suffers from being "out of sight, out of mind" of the Board of Supervisors being geographically isolated from the 101 corridor and the larger communities.

This is in no way an indictment of the work that Supervisor Gorin and her predecessors have done. Indeed, Supervisor Gorin deserves credit for a number of accomplishments including the still developing Springs Specific Plan, the establishment of the Springs Plaza and helping to finish the Highway Improvement Project that came close to losing the funding for the final phase. She is the first to admit however that the Springs MAC is necessary to give her much needed leverage with the BOS when getting stuff done in the Springs.

So what would this Springs MAC look like and how would it work? Based on the proposed by-laws being submitted to the Board of Supervisors by our First District Supervisor, Susan Gorin, it would be comprised of 7 members of the community – all of whom would have to actually live or work in the Springs to qualify. They will be appointed by Supervisor Gorin out of a pool of nominees to be submitted by mid-January and reviewed by a committee of community members. It is hoped that in the future the members of the MAC will be elected. The MAC will not have any legal authority but will serve in an advisory capacity to the Board Of Supervisors, much as the Redevelopment Advisory Committee operated before the demise of the Redevelopment Agency.

This group will have the ability to evaluate and make recommendations on all of the issues mentioned above and more on matters that are relevant to the Springs community. So the Springs will now have it's own voice - a much stronger voice than it has now. It is hoped that the Springs will embrace the MAC and that there will be a robust response and level of participation.

The Springs MAC needs the full participation of talented community leaders who might otherwise be devoting their time and expertise to Sonoma town initiatives. This is the time to make the Springs a vibrant, thriving, and sustainable community.

Stay tuned for information about qualifications for serving on the MAC and the nomination process.

Finally, what does this mean for the Springs Community Alliance? The SCA will likely continue to work in a support role for the MAC with fewer meetings so as not to compete for meeting time.

Together we can transform the Springs.