

## Big Plans for the City of Larkspur

by Brad d'Alessio

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The owner of some very valuable land wants to sell, cash out. Unfortunately, cashing out could mean selling out, and the townspeople are in an uproar over development proposals. The plan to develop the land, Central Larkspur Area Specific Plan, CLASP, calls for the development of 22.7 acres. Included in this land is the shopping center located on Magnolia and Doherty Drive -due to receive a facelift - and new development of the land located between the shopping center and Redwood High School. The eastern border is marked by Larkspur Creek adjacent to the school. The land is owned by Niven Nursery and consists mainly of abandoned nurseries and weeds.

One of the spotlight concerns of the plan, voiced locals at the September 20<sup>th</sup> town council meeting, is developers' drive for economic gain as the primary goal. Does the plan really consider the well-being of the town? Could the new housing, hotel, and store- fronts create too much traffic? Is the new parking lot efficient? Will it be unsightly? How dense should the housing be and how much should it cost to purchase? Could the plan for two story commercial buildings along Magnolia Avenue create an ominous downtown environment? Why is the park located behind a cinder- block wall?

One concern of Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed is Larkspur Creek. The creek, which carries water from Mount Tam and adjacent mountains directly to the bay, is a fragile, albeit somewhat degraded habitat for many species. If the health of the creek is compromised, the environmental impact could be severe. A key concern is the need for a reasonable size buffer zone around the creek. But CLASP calls for construction of new housing and perhaps a roadway within this area along the southern boundary of the Niven property. A one-hundred-foot buffer zone is recommended by environmental analysts and is designed to minimize human impact.

Two significant hazards that threaten creek health are erosion and chemical runoff from landscape fertilizer and leaking parked cars. A large buffer zone planted with native shrubs and grasses keeps intensive activity away from the fragile creek border zone hence preventing erosion. Furthermore, a large permeable buffer area would enable hazardous toxins from landscape fertilizers and leaking parked cars to get absorbed into the ground before they reach the creek. The plan calls for only a fifty-foot buffer zone along the northern section of creek.

A major town concern is increased traffic circulation. Larkspur streets already appear to be at maximum capacity. Ever drive through Larkspur during rush hour? Local schools, commute traffic, and consumers clog the narrow streets. New residential and commercial buildings, in addition to a hotel, could increase traffic flow considerably. More cars also mean more toxins on the street from leaking fluids, asbestos from brakes, rubber from tires, and exhaust residue. Rain washes these chemicals directly into the creek through storm drains.

After several years of the plan's development, CLASP is still open to much negotiation. In fact, only a preliminary background environmental impact report was undertaken; the comprehensive report is still underway. A completed report may well substantiate environmental concerns and describe ways to minimize the impacts of future development. Monte Deignan, Vice Chairperson of the CLASP committee, is optimistic in regards to effectively protecting the environment and says "there is still opportunity for creative solutions."

One solution could be as simple as the creation or relocation of the proposed park. The park, on paper, is diminutive and located between commercial and residential buildings. The park could be relocated, or a second park which would include native plants could be created between the creek and new housing to act as an increased buffer zone.

Many potential solutions exist, but in order for the plan to be effective the CLASP committee believes that balance must be achieved between economics, environment, tradition, and beauty. Public opinion is very valuable for the formulation of The Central Larkspur Area Specific Plan. Take the time to voice your opinion by attending a planning commission meeting, and on your way be sure to check out

the creek habitat. Look for local critters of all shapes and sizes, listen to the rustling of the grass and young trees in the wind. Once we develop this treasured land, there's no turning back.

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Website design by Karen Peterson, San Anselmo

Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed  
P.O. Box 415, Larkspur, California 94977 phone: (415) 457-6045 fax: (415) 457-6362  
[info@friendsofcortemaderacreek.org](mailto:info@friendsofcortemaderacreek.org)