

Golden Gate Village Media Backgrounder



During World War II, Marin City was a thriving shipbuilder's town which turned out 93 Liberty ships before the war's end. Many of the town's 6,000 newly arrived workers were African-Americans from the Deep South, who had been excluded from higher-paying industrial jobs at home. In Marin City they found skilled, well-paying work, and a supportive, tight-knit, ethnically diverse community.

Outside the shipyard, however, was another matter. Many nearby Sausalito restaurants refused to serve Blacks. Discrimination in the form of withheld union benefits was rampant. As the war wound down and the shipyard closed, white workers were welcome to take their earnings and buy homes in other parts of Marin. Black workers were told to "go back where you came from." While white colleagues began to build their net worth through home ownership, homeowner's covenants that prevented selling or renting to minorities and redlining throughout the County effectively eliminated this path for the great majority of Marin's Black and brown citizens. Because of employment discrimination, most couldn't afford to leave; those who could afford to had nowhere else to go.

While restrictive covenants and redlining are no longer permitted, the scarring effects of these racially based policies are still deeply embedded. In fact, Marin County, one of the most affluent, liberal, and educated counties in California, has the highest level of racial disparity in the entire state. As the seminal 2017 Race Counts study noted: "(A) rising tide does not by itself lift all boats and that great prosperity will not necessarily be broadly shared."

As the recent and continuing Black Lives Matter marches, demonstrations, and calls for justice throughout the country and the world have made painfully apparent, white people have a great deal of work to do to redress the imbalances evident everywhere.

And in Marin, there is no more fitting place to begin than at Golden Gate Village in Marin City.



Black shipyard workers in Marin City during World War II.

Golden Gate Village: The Beginning



*Marin Supervisor
Vera Schultz*

Regarded as “Marin’s First Lady” Vera Schultz was a powerhouse in her lifetime. The first woman elected to Marin’s Board of Supervisors in 1950, she was key to securing Frank Lloyd Wright to design the Civic Center in 1957. She was also passionate about low-cost housing and racial integration and was instrumental in lobbying the federal government to secure funding for a new, integrated public housing project in Marin City called Golden Gate Village.

As the *Sausalito News* noted in its October 12, 1956 issue, the hope was that “families who regard the temporary dwellings at Marin City as their homes will be able to avail themselves of attractive, permanent housing suitable to their needs when this community is redeveloped.”

While 23 architectural firms were considered, in 1957 the Housing Authority of Marin chose Wright protege, Aaron Green, and another noted local architect, John Carl Warnecke, to design the 300-unit complex. Green was the lead architect for all building design and campus layout (master plan); Warnecke's office did the construction documents. Green also applied Wright's seminal philosophy of “organic architecture” to the project. Tenets of this philosophy include the idea that architecture should be integrated with the environment and evolve from the nature of the site, itself. Renowned landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin, directed the physical landscaping, including overall layout, plant selection, terraces and play areas.

Green was intensely proud of Golden Gate Village, which he regarded as an early recognition of the Civil Rights movement. The project is described thusly on his firm's website:

“It was clear to the architects and to the Housing Authority that the county would not tolerate the ‘institutional’ architecture commonly associated with Federal housing. (...) A project that would utilize the available land in such a way as to not destroy the natural beauty of the surrounding areas was definitely indicated. Believing that a community has a right to expect federal government projects in its midst be utilitarian without defacing the community, the architects designed the project with care and dedication.”

In 1964, Green and Warnecke were awarded the First Honor Design for Golden Gate Village (from 700 entrants) by the Public Housing Administration. The judging panel cited the Marin City development as “outstanding among top-honor

winners” in that “this highly original design meets the challenge of the site’s topography and dramatic situation.” Further, judges noted, “the buildings on the lower part of the site are intimate in scale, carefully detailed, and show a sensitive selection and use of materials” which was unique for public housing buildings constructed during that era. (And remains rare to this day.)

The Quest for Self-Determination



Detail from an Aaron Green sketch for Golden Gate Village.

Upon completion in 1961, Golden Gate Village’s 300 units were quickly filled by low-income residents, many of them African-Americans relocated from demolished Marinship housing. It was an active, inter-generational community – and the only public housing project in Marin (then and now) that accepted families and children.

The first tenant council met in the mid-‘70s. In 2005, Golden Gate Village (GGV) residents formally incorporated as a 501(c)(3) called the “Marin City Golden Gate Village Resident Council” (GGVRC). The GGVRC received its IRS Determination Letter granting tax exempt status on January 28, 2006. Since then, the GGVRC has been a determined, articulate and persistent advocate before the Marin County Board of Supervisors and the Marin Housing Authority commission to demand that any proposed renovation project for GGV be guided by six principles to protect both people and place:

1. Protect existing Golden Gate Village households and residents.
2. Restore Golden Gate Village economic sustainability.
3. Assure resident participation through the planning and revitalization process.
4. Preserve historic Marinship heritage.
5. Promote high quality open space.
6. Collaborate with the entire Marin County community to expand economic development and job training/education opportunities for GGV residents.

In 1990, in an early, community-driven version of some of these concepts, Royce McLemore, current president of the Golden Gate Village Resident Council, co-founded the non-profit Women Helping All People (WHAP), which provided low-income Marin residents – particularly those in public housing – with information, support services, and educational opportunities, including tutoring for the GED, literacy classes, and computer skills training. WHAP also oversaw all landscaping and grounds maintenance at GGV, including job

training opportunities. For more than 16 years, WHAP was a vibrant thread in the social fabric of Golden Gate Village.

In 2013, after more than two years of research and development, the Resident Council created a comprehensive rehabilitation plan for Golden Gate Village that includes Green New Deal retrofitting throughout the complex, multiple job training opportunities for GGV young people, and a path to home ownership through a community land trust, while maintaining the historic integrity of the community.

And in September of 2017 after much work and dogged persistence on the part of McLemore and others on the Council, Golden Gate Village was placed in the National Register of Historic Places and concurrently listed in the California Register of Historical Resources. As the acceptance letter noted: "Placement on the National Register affords a property the honor of inclusion in the nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation."

The following year, a 2018 habitability inspection report done by Tony Eldon of Bay Area Property Inspectors at the request of the Resident Council determined: "The buildings themselves are structurally sound and we deem could last hundreds of years with proper care."

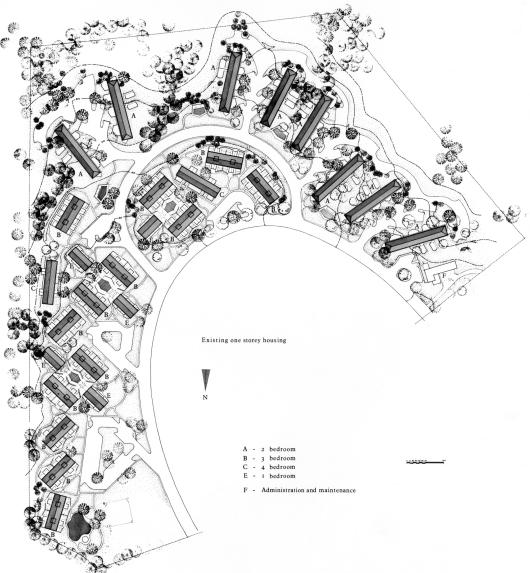
To date, however, the Marin Housing Authority (including all five supervisors) has refused even to consider the Council's renovation proposal despite its clear benefits to the community and the underlying endorsements of outside organizations.

Sadly, it appears that marginalization of minorities and their right to self-determination is still alive and well in Marin despite County government assertions to the contrary that "Black lives matter."

What Went Wrong

Since at least 2007 the Marin Housing Authority (MHA), aided and abetted by HUD bureaucracy, has systematically (many allege deliberately) deferred maintenance to Golden Gate Village, allowing it to fall into shameful disrepair. According to HUD, over the past decade, GGV has had one of the lowest HUD compliance ratings of any public housing project in California.

MHA's neglect has extended beyond the physical structures to encompass the social structure of the community, as well. In 2010 citing a flimsy rationale, MHA illegally took away the right



*Original site plan
(courtesy Aaron Green & Assoc.)*

“This county will not push us out of our homes. If need be, we will sue Marin County. I am ready to resist until Jesus calls me home.”

- Royce McLemore, Golden Gate Village Resident Council president, speaking at a presentation by the Michaels Development Co. to the Marin Board of Supervisors in September, 2019.

of Golden Gate Village to have a duly elected resident council and began methodically reneging on every agreement they had made with the GGVRC. Finally in 2013, after MHA refused to comply with an earlier mediated settlement, Golden Gate residents filed a lawsuit, and on April 4, 2014, they prevailed in court. Along with winning the right to have their own resident council, the settlement required MHA to give the council back their old meeting space on the property.

Unfortunately, but perhaps unsurprisingly, MHA has never honored this agreement. In fact, MHA continues to regard the GGVRC in an adversarial light and to treat it as an impediment rather than recognizing and welcoming its role as key to greater community engagement.

After years of deferred maintenance, in 2019 MHA contracted with the Michaels Development Co., a private developer headquartered in New Jersey, to manage the “revitalization” of Golden Gate Village. As the largest builder of public housing in the country, Michaels interest is in maximizing return for its investors. Given the prime location of the community, privatizing likely correlates to the financially lucrative potential of the site.

Already months behind schedule for presentation, Michaels’ plan includes the construction of new units, which would inevitably lead to gentrification of the area and displacement of current tenants. There would be no path to home ownership for existing low- and very-low income residents, none of whom are in a position to qualify for conventional loans.

And rather than addressing deferred maintenance now, Michaels’ plan for new buildings, which would trigger a Section 106 (historic buildings) review along with CEQA and/or NEPA studies, would further delay the process by as much as 3-5 years. If building units are considered uninhabitable now, consider the state they will be in if MHA allows conditions to continue to deteriorate for several more years by choosing Michaels. For the Board of Supervisors and MHA to prioritize a private developer’s desire for financial gain over longtime residents’ rights to decent living conditions and self-determination is inexcusable.

While many inhabitants are second- and third-generation GGV residents, they still, to this day, have no underlying claim to the land and no equity in one of the most desirable pieces of property in Marin County. And if MHA and Michaels have their way, they never will.

Where We Are Now

The GGVRC plan would empower the community to plan, implement, and administer the three key components of the Green New Deal at a hyper-local level. These include:

- (1) Addressing climate change by utilizing deep green technology retrofitting throughout the complex.
- (2) Offering a path to economic sustainability for young people by providing on-the-job training for skills, such as solar installation, that are increasingly needed in the 21st century.
- (3) Supporting racial equity by creating a path to home ownership for underserved and minority families.

(Note: The Board of Supervisors passed a resolution at a meeting in 2019 enthusiastically endorsing the Green New Deal. More lip service?)

Once implemented the Council's plan could also serve as a template for other underserved communities in Marin and beyond: a model for what public housing could become not only in California but throughout the country.

The GGVRC is also asking for three things:

- (1) Immediate repairs to their units after years of deferred maintenance;
- (2) No displacement of the community; and
- (3) The formation of a community land trust. This land trust would ensure that the property is permanently affordable and that equity is built by the community for the community, not for extractive private developers who transfer ownership and wealth to outside investors.

As the Marin County Grand Jury noted in a 2018 report, the clock is ticking for the county and the residents of Marin City's public housing. Michaels' development plan involves demolition of units and injection of private money and gentrification into the last African-American community in Marin. GGV residents are concerned their community will never recover, and these concerns are legitimate and palpable.

It should be imperative for MHA and the Board of Supervisors to step back from their embrace of Michaels and, instead, develop a path forward with the residents of

Golden Gate Village Resident Council's Green Plan for Empowerment and Equity

- **No outside private money**
- Addresses urgency of deferred maintenance
- Double paned windows, energy-efficient heating and appliances, solar panels,
- Preservation of open space and view corridors
- On the job training and apprenticeship programs for sustainable employment/living wages
- Preservation of Marin City culture and community - no displacement
- "Checkerboarding" vacant units so no one is displaced
- Through court order, the GGV Resident's Council is the official governing organization of Golden Gate Village
- **Home ownership through establishment of a Community Land Trust**

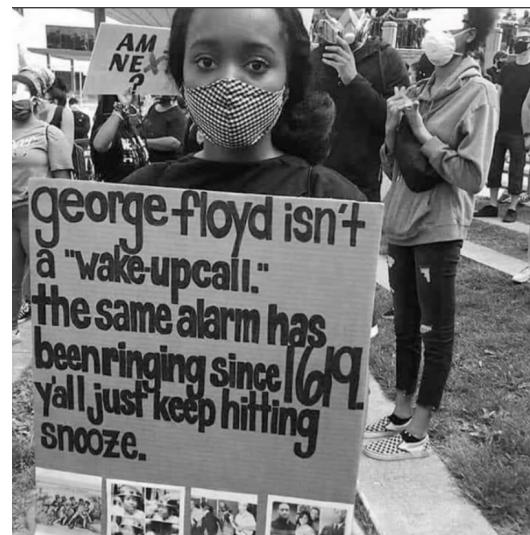
THIS PLAN ALIGNS WITH THE GREEN NEW DEAL

"Keeping this community intact and helping it to thrive is both the right thing to do for this community and would act as a template for other underserved communities in Marin."

To learn more, email us at GreenNewDealMarinCity@gmail.com

Golden Gate Village that ensures not just repairs but reparations for a community that could die on its last, meticulously planned, hill.

Absent such a sensible response from the County, a lawsuit appears to be the only way to help those in power understand that people of color and other minorities really do matter - even in Marin.



Young Golden Gate Village protester.