

OPINION:

The clock is still ticking for Golden Gate Village residents



Golden Gate Village in Marin City. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)

By Larry Bragman

In 2018, the Marin County Civil Grand Jury published a report entitled, “The Clock is Ticking” which detailed a history of decline and neglect of the Marin Housing Authority’s only low-income family apartment complex, Golden Gate Village in Marin City.

Two years later, the clock is still ticking.

Golden Gate Village was built in 1960 to replace the temporary housing that was hastily constructed for Sausalito shipyard workers during World War II. Many of those workers were African Americans who migrated from the Southern United States to escape Jim Crow and help with the effort in World War II.

After the war, African Americans, including those in Marin City, were prevented from buying homes in our communities through restrictive racial covenants and commercial

loan redlining. Over the decades, GGV evolved into a vital African American community for the residents who remained.

Golden Gate Village was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright's West Coast partner, Aaron Green. Renowned landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin, assisted. Golden Gate Village's modernist design reflects Green's "architecture for democracy." In 2017, its historic and architectural value earned it a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

After 60 years of service, GGV needs updating without further delay. For example, in 2018, the Golden Gate Village Resident Council, the elected representatives of the residents, sent a response to the Grand Jury which included a professional building inspection report. That report noted many GGV apartment have electrical panels which are dangerously defective and need to be replaced. Two years later, inspectors have again noted that these fire-prone panels remain and still need to be replaced.

The Marin Housing Authority recently received a "physical needs assessment" report from AEI Consultants. AEI's report indicates that, under Marin Housing Authority's management, the cost of repairs to renovate GGV has ballooned from \$16 million to \$90 million in the last five years. During that same time, Marin found \$21.2 million to replace the blue roof at the Civic Center.

High quality professional housing managers all know that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development does not provide adequate funds for capital improvements to its assets, including GGV. Hence, prudence dictates that the county should plan in advance for non-HUD funding. This has been notably absent in Marin's handling of its responsibilities.

Instead, it has effectively delegated "redevelopment" of the property to a private nonprofit, the Michaels Group. Michaels' plan involves demolition of several historic low-rise structures and construction of two new apartment blocks with an additional 156 units. Only after construction of these costly new units does the plan address the persistently substandard conditions of the existing historic buildings.

The new structures will also disrupt the design and strain local traffic and utilities in what is already the most densely developed neighborhood in Marin. This will inevitably lead to dispersal of the low-income tenants and gentrification of the neighborhood.

The resident council has instead proposed a deep-green renovation plan, which would bring the structures up to 21st century standards of safety and efficiency, benefit the residents who actually live there and preserve a local landmark that reflects an essential element of Marin's history.

The deep green plan contemplates financing much of the work through grants. It will also provide training and employment to residents. This plan is less costly than the redevelopment approach, preserves the architectural integrity of the district and

provides a small gesture of our county's recognition and inclusion of the local African American community.

GGV is the crucible of our county's conscience. Will we embrace the spirit of the architecture for democracy that inspired it or retreat behind a moat of fear and entitlement? It is not too late to change course.

Following the repugnant killing of George Floyd, our county, like our country, is at a crossroads. The effort to save Golden Gate Village deserves the support of all county residents, their local elected officials and Congressional representatives. Together we need to find the courage to follow the road to equality and justice. The clock is ticking.

Larry Bragman is an attorney whose opinions do not reflect the opinions or policies of the Marin Municipal Water District, where he is on the board of directors. Go to bit.ly/save_ggv to join the GGV online meeting Thursday at 1 p.m. Info: GGVresidentcouncil.org