



**Sonoma County Community Development Commission**

Housing Authority • Redevelopment Agency  
1440 Guerneville Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95403-4107

**Monte Rio Wastewater Task Group**

**October 19, 2009**

**Monte Rio Community Center**

**6:30 pm**

**Meeting Notes**

**Introductions & Greetings:**

**Task Group Members Present:** Doreen Atkinson (Doreen), Chuck Burger (Chuck), Supervisor Efren Carrillo (Efren), Rene DeMonchy (Rene), Dan Fein (Dan), Gary Getchell (Gary), Rich Holmer (Rich), Steve Mack (Steve), Jim Quigley (Jim), Preston Smith (Preston), Lee Torr IV (Lee), Ken Wikle (Ken).

**Task Group Members Absent:** Suzie Baxman

**Staff Present:** Cas Ellena (Cas), Jane James

**Public Present:** Approximately 6 members of the public

**Ground Rules, presented by Dan Fein:**

- One conversation at a time
- Accept the views of others
- Keep the discussion relevant
- Silence or absence is agreement
- Speak for yourself

Dan stated that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to come up with a broad plan and goals. He stated that we need to educate ourselves before going to the public. He went through group facilitation 101 sequences: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. He felt that this group is in the Forming and Storming phases right now.

**Review and Approve Prior Meeting Notes:**

Efren asked if the notes from the September meeting would become organized minutes. Rene commented that it was not clear from the notes what our educational position was going to be. Dan commented that we would first educate ourselves, then the public. He asked for feedback from Rene whether we should bring in the public, Rene replied affirmatively. Rich Holmer said it was confusing for the notes to say "the committee agrees" when only one or two people agreed, it is not correct to say the whole committee agrees. Dan said he has tried to remove those references.

After feedback and discussion from various members, there was a consensus to remove the “Silence or absence is agreement” Ground Rule with the prevailing thought that each member of the group really needs to speak their thoughts and opinions.

There was also significant discussion regarding how to come to consensus or agreement and how to measure this. Whether it be by vote or some other mechanism, this needs to be determined. Dan specified that the group is not a decision making group but rather an advisory group to CDC staff. He said that it is his hope that the group can achieve consensus on issues and if there is serious disagreement, then we will need to take steps to reach consensus. Rene noted that consensus is difficult and if it is not obvious, we may need to come to vote. Steve Mack commented that he does not see voting as a productive way of achieving results, he said it is very important that if we think we have a consensus, that we really do so that members cannot come back later and speak against the consensus achieved. He said he believes consensus can be always be reached if the solution is broad enough. Lee Torr IV requested that his objection be noted that he does not agree with the consensus process – recommendations should come out of a vote. He said historically we have had 12 years of discussion and we will not ultimately have consensus on one solution.

Dan asked if there were any other comments, seeing none, he moved on in the agenda.

### **Discuss and Plan for Task Group Process:**

Dan illustrated the following on a flip chart:

#### **Process**

Problem Definition  
Search for Solutions  
Educate Community  
Public Meetings  
Historical Context  
Strategy  
Goal

Dan brought up the concept of breaking up into focus groups on topics that the group is interested in and would like to learn more about.

Doreen commented that each person needs to talk about what they think the problem is. Then the group needs to look for solutions to those problems. The group needs to get out on the table what all the problems are and what all the possible solutions are. Dan commented that that was the purpose of the previous meeting.

Chuck asked what the task group was created to do. Come up with recommendations and what the ultimate goal is for Monte Rio? He commented that we should identify issues and then come up with methods, first identify all issues then identify solutions. What is the goal of the group? We need to narrow the group’s focus on this.

Rich commented that we need an action plan. We need something that someone from the outside can look at and understand. An action plan would assign tasks for each element. Right

now everything is very loose. Rene said he agrees with Doreen, Rich and Chuck that the group can't get to the goal without determining the problems and creating an action plan to solve those problems.

Dan led a discussion on Problem Definition. The following problems were identified:

**Problem Definition:**

Regulation  
Pollution  
Studies  
Development (new and existing)  
Costs  
Governance  
Growth

Rich commented that one of the things to be included under "Development" is maintenance of the existing housing stock. Efen commented that there is a cross over between "Development" and "Growth".

Rene commented that he would throw out this list and make a new one.

The following additional list was created by the group:

**Problem Definition:**

Pollution of River and Waterways  
Repairs and Maintenance / Additions  
Lack of Downtown Business  
Inability to build  
Septic System Limits use of property  
Regional Board Position  
How many septic tanks are polluting?  
Safety – too much development  
Separate commercial from residential  
Unfair burden/funding sources – grants available for sewer not septic

The above list was derived from the following discussion:

Ken commented that different people have different perceptions and all need to be on the list.

Dan asked if there was anything else to add. No.

Doreen commented that we need the authorities in these various areas to come out and talk with group such as PRMD, some things may not be as big a problem as we think.

Chuck commented that having a septic system on a property limits property owners. For example if you have a septic system you cannot put in a swimming pool because septic systems limit the usable space. This becomes a problem for things like parking which is very important for commercial construction.

Steve provided that he agrees with Doreen, he'd like to see RWQCB come out.

Efren provided that Bill Massey has had meetings and there are resources from the County that are intended to make things easier but won't solve the issue of failed septic systems.

Doreen asked how many condemned septic systems there are. Lee said that only 2 were found to be compliant making the others non-conforming.

Gary commented that safety should be on our list. The roads are substandard. Expansions and additions could be creating some of the problem. Commercial septic use should be separated from residential use. It is uncertain how much commercial will be built, but there is not much demand. It could become an undue burden on residential systems to support commercial building that is not necessary. It does not make sense to pour money into something that will contribute to the problem. It might be better to buy out some of the properties and reduce demand on the system.

Rich expressed concern that there is very little money available to individual property owners and we need to find potential funding sources so that people can upgrade their systems. There is an unfair burden because there is no grant funding available for a failed septic system, and it can be a huge expense. Also, pollution of streams and drainage systems needs to be looked at as well as river pollution.

Rene said that a septic system failure documentation has not been done because no one wants it done. Those with failing septic systems don't want the County to investigate.

Doreen said they have to do something if a septic system fails, and some repairs are not too expensive. It would be good to find out how bad the problem is.

Rene mentioned Starrett Hill as an example because it has a steep slope and if a tank leaks there it would be very difficult to get a permit to repair it.

Doreen thinks that is why it would be beneficial for PRMD to be here to provide alternatives.

Rene explained that under the current ordinance, if a septic system is 20 years old or older, if all things go right, you have enough available land and you have the funds, then the ordinance offers some alternatives but only if you have the land and the space.

Lee offered as a point of reference, that there are 6 problem properties on Starrett Hill within the last 7 months that have become unbuildable.

Preston – These are people's homes, their lives

Gary suspects that these are mostly run down summer homes, the house is probably not worth much, some single walled cabins. We need to filter through what needs help.

Rich said he lives in a single walled, 100-year old home.

BREAK

Dan said that these comments are more or less the same comments as last time. He listed additional problems he is hearing and things the group needs to address and study so that it can come back with information.

**Problem**

Potential for large expenses to fix septic systems  
Measure problem - No clear count of failing systems  
Fear of public exposure  
What are alternatives?

Chuck asked whether we have defined our boundary area. Is it the commercial area, the residential area? We need to know what we are talking about.

Jim believes if we narrow the boundaries, we will narrow the potential solutions and limit a larger system.

Dan is not sure we should define boundaries tonight because that would eliminate some systems.

Gary said we need to know the problem before we can define the area.

Preston commented that since we don't know the rules, it may be valuable for those who do, such as Bill Massey and PRMD, to come discuss with us, provide information, and talk about past EIR's septic rules. We can have a list of questions all in one meeting so it would not be fragmented. Get the problems narrowed down so we can all get answers.

Dan moved onto the formation of study groups, and asked for some topics we'd like to study and obtain additional information on.

**Study Group**

Regulation  
Technical Possibilities  
Other Communities  
Historical Background  
How do septic systems work?  
Debate

Lee said we need boundaries to tell professionals what areas we are talking about. We need professional engineers to bring information together; there are stacks of information and documents to compile.

Dan commented that there is a lot of historical information and we need to be aware of what has been done and what is still useful.

Efren said he and Cas will get together from a staff perspective and discuss what PRMD can do toward this effort.

Preston sees the need for good hard facts, collect and analyze. Someone needs to gather information and we need funds for EIR, since it is very expensive.

Dan explained that for the purposes of this group, we will not be spending money but rather using what staff we have and what the group can contribute, then we can put forth our findings and see what the community says. We can go from there.

Steve clarified that EIRs only contain data, opinions and perspective. They are not necessarily facts, everyone needs to realize this. Also a lot of time has passed since the last septic system effort, there is new technology out there now. We need to talk to someone regarding this.

Rich thinks we need someone to talk about Septic systems themselves so we are all at the same level of understanding.

Dan said Jim offered a tour of other sewer plants. Are there other community solutions?

Lee handed out a proposal he created. He believes we need engineers to debate, and let the competing consultants battle it out.

Preston would like to hear debates from PRMD, RWQCB etc. so they can all weigh in.

Steve clarified that he does not have a lot of time to prepare studies.

Doreen asked if we can only hear presentations from County, who will pay for this?

Efren said he can have County staff attend such as the water agency, flood control, can get a Winzler & Kelly type to attend, perhaps at no charge.

### **Action Plan**

Resources from County  
RWQCB Presentation  
PRMD presentation

Dan asked members to participate in study group. Below is a summary of who signed up for what

### **Study Group**

Regulation (Preston, Ken, Lee, Steve, Rene)  
Technical Possibilities (Doreen, Rene, Chuck, Preston, Ken, Jim, Steve)  
Other Communities (Rich, Jim, Steve, Chuck)  
Historical Background (Rich, Lee, Doreen)  
How do septic systems work? (Gary, Rich, Ken, Rene)  
Debate (Preston, Lee, Rene)

Chuck thinks everyone should bring in a development concept. Are we here so that the task groups can evaluate solutions that redevelopment can start? He is not here to create a handbook.

Preston came up with the following Mission Statement for the group's consideration. "To research and recommend to the CDC, the most cost effective approvable waste water solution(s) for property owners and residences of the Monte Rio area that will allow them to improve and build on their properties and keep the watershed and river clean for future generations."

Chuck thinks having a Mission statement is good but we need goals and boundaries. What is the purpose of the task group?

Cas explained the purpose is to provide feedback to CDC staff regarding what is current the wastewater situation in Monte Rio, what are the needs, what are possible solutions and what do people want to see happen.

Dan said we need to start big and then narrow down rather than start small. It is important to get information out to as many people as possible. He again asked for everyone to sign up for a study group.

**Plan for next Task Group meeting and closing:**

Next meeting we can discuss mission statement and potential boundaries

**What worked and what didn't work tonight?**

**Worked**

- Worked better (Lee)
- We're good (consensus)

**Change**

- No comments

Third Monday in November set as Tentative date for next meeting  
6:30 p.m. at Monte Rio Community Center