

Save Rural Angwin Quarterly Update

November-December 2015, January 2016

As 2016 begins we want to thank you for being a part of, and believing in, the mission of Saving Rural Angwin. Your continued years-long support - even while “all seems quiet on the mountain” - is vital to accomplishing our goals of protecting the natural environment and preserving Angwin’s unique rural setting and community character. Actually, there is quite a lot going on throughout the county as well as on Howell Mountain.

Once again - and now 1 ½ years since the Board of Supervisors brought the 2009 Angwin Action Item 114.1 (to complete the land use designations for approximately 100 acres on the mountain) back to public hearing in July 2014, the Action Item has been shoved aside by a whole new host of thorny issues that have arisen around the County. Our County Planning Division, though intent on completing the Angwin land use issue in 2015, has been dealt a significant workload that includes response to an earthquake and fires, formation and coordination of the Agricultural Protection Advisory Committee (in response to the March 10, 2015 joint meeting of the Board and Commission), and completion of the Climate Action Plan, Circulation Element and Housing Element updates. In addition, planners are taking critical path actions associated with Napa Pipe, responding to numerous appeals to the Board of Supervisors, and dealing with 120 pending planning applications. The Board did provide preliminary direction to planning staff at the meeting held in July 2014. It appears now that the Angwin Action Item will return to the Planning Commission’s schedule in June 2016. Hopefully, the item will move to the Airport Land Use Commission toward the beginning of August 2016 and then to the Board of Supervisors in late August 2016 for final action. To adopt re-zonings and a General Plan Amendment, there are “due process rights” prescribed in State law and applicable to all interested parties.

Preventing out-of-scale, inappropriate urban development on Howell Mountain is NOT the only battle that Save Rural Angwin is facing. There is increasing concern throughout the community and county about such issues as water availability, water quality, open space preservation and access, climate change, and forest health, resiliency and protection. Angwin has lost over 1,200 acres of old growth forests to vineyard conversions. What is the effect of these conversions on the overall ecosystem of Howell Mountain? Where is the balance point that can sustain both vineyards and a healthy watershed? Save Rural Angwin means to

engage with other groups to discuss these questions and environmental challenges and to seek answers. To open dialogue about planning for sustainable growth and economic balance in Napa County, NAPA VISION 2050 is sponsoring an Economic Forum and has assembled three experts to provide a framework to analyze the benefits and costs of a tourism-driven economy. The forum will be held on Friday, April 1, 2016. Go to www.NapaVision2050.org for specific details.

NAPA VISION 2050 has been very active advocating for responsible planning that also “hears” the voice of our general citizenry of Napa County. Public outcry against “after-the-fact forgiveness” to violators of use and building permits and “variances as a norm rather than exception” has become a front-page standard discussion. Outcomes of many of these topics may play into the final decision-making for the Angwin land use issue. There is a “big picture” effect on Angwin and on the overall health of Napa County that your Steering Committee remains vigilant in monitoring.

Just before his unfortunate passing at the beginning of 2015, Volker Eisele, a founding member and ardent supporter of Save Rural Angwin, said, “Forty years ago we created the Ag Preserve and now we need to do the same for our watersheds.” Natural areas along streams and wetlands play a critical role in protecting county water resources by filtering water for municipal, rural and agricultural use. On January 25, 2016, a Citizen’s Initiative, titled the Water, Forest and Oak Woodland Protection Initiative of 2016, was filed with the county. SRA has not taken a formal position on the Initiative at this time. The purpose of the Initiative is to provide additional protections for county streams and wetlands within the Agricultural Watershed zone district. Much more information about this Initiative will be forthcoming and posted on our website. This Initiative complements the protections the county wisely established decades ago for agriculture and open space in the Ag Preserve.

Recently the Angwin Fire Safe Council was formed to begin addressing the health and resilience of our forests and to create defensible space through neighborhood guided fire-wise projects. Some of our steering committee members have volunteered to work on this committee. The Angwin Fire Safe Council is currently developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, a document necessary for obtaining grant funding. You will be hearing and seeing much more about this group. Save Rural Angwin, the Angwin Community Council, the Angwin Fire Safe Council, Land Trust Napa County, Howell Mountain Vintners, and Pacific Union College all need to come together for the greater good and to collectively “keep the balance” on Howell Mountain.

Please go to www.SaveRuralAngwin.org and “Contact Us” if you can or want to provide any kind of assistance or support to “finding the balance” and preserving Angwin’s unique rural setting and community character as well as its valued resources.