

Coffeegrounds:

Let's take another look at Walmart EIR rejection and what happens next

By Jud Snyder



WE SCRIBBLERS IN the Punditry Trade are supposed to point out the not so obvious angles emanating from doom-tainted leaky emotional corridors of city hall. Take for example Rohnert Park's Planning Commission's refusal to accept a 90-page plus EIR from Walmart. They wanted to enlarge their established RP store into a superstore. The Environmental Impact Report did what it was legally required to do.

But it smoothed over the superstore's impact on existing businesses like calamine lotion on poison oak. You know, "Oooo. That feels nice," but the urge to scratch the persistent itch doesn't go away. The impact on Pacific Market just a mile or so to the east of Walmart, was frequently cited at the EIR public hearing last Thursday. So were other local markets.

Also brought up was a tawdry list of other Walmart impacts such as lower wages, few benefits for its employees and its antipathy to organized unions. They're all distasteful and could be labeled "un-American," and they're widespread in this country. But are they illegal? The answer is no. You'll have to blame Capitalism, stock market figures and the prevailing dollar idolatry, but let's not

go down that dark alley.

IN ESSENCE, THE Planning Commission voted 4-0 to deny the EIR based on emotional protests.

They couldn't poke holes in the document's legal requirements except for an admission they're could be traffic problems on Stony Point Road, Millbrae and Wilfred avenues. Even this has a loophole, something called "A Statement of Overriding Considerations." It's a CEQA rule that roughly says, "Yes, there will be a potential problem, but we can't do anything about it."

There's little doubt the Walmart EIR will be appealed to RP's City Council. They have the power to uphold the planners' denial or reverse it and approve the EIR. This is more than a hot potato dropped in their laps. It's a tureen of steaming mashed potatoes. It will have an impact on the entire future of the city.

Or Walmart could sue the city. They had a quintet of public relations people at a separate table, who quite honestly, I thought, did not do a good job in pushing their client's case. But they've got some cold-blooded (in comparison) legalities on their side and the city, considering its financial state, can ill-afford taking on any more legal bills.

IF WALMART WINS ANY appeal, we're told they'll be hiring 85 new full- and part-time

workers. We've also been told if they win it will mean the loss of over 100 jobs in the city as stores and markets are forced to shut down and fire employees. I have no idea how this job loss figure was calculated. Call me skeptical.

But I'm willing to bet if Walmart sends out a pitch to hire 85 new workers there'll be a line outside the door of several hundred jobless men and women filling out applications. Hey. It's a paying job and sure beats unemployment checks.

THE PUBLIC HEARING was held in our new city hall and it pointed out yet another inadequacy. Every seat in council chambers was filled and a TV screen high up on one wall overlooked a large collection of folding chairs crammed together in the lobby for the overflow. It was an amateurish way to handle it.

City hall got a large amount of mail on Walmart, most of it against any expansion. They had plenty of clues as to the civic emotion aroused and did little to cope with the real potential of a large, vitally interested crowd.

But at a recess last Thursday, all of a sudden there were plenty of empty seats. This was an indication telling me the public had had enough of this shoddy method used to stage a key public hearing.

Five years ago when the tribal casino public hearing was held in the former city hall, they moved the proceedings to Spreckels main theater to give everyone a chance to speak. It could've been shifted to the smaller Condiotti Theater but it wasn't. The only result was an-

other black eye for city hall's negative reputation.

TURNING TO BETTER news, there was an article in last week's SF Chronicle about a two-character drama staged by Magic Theater at Fort Mason called, "An Accident." Written by Lydia Stryk, its cast consists of Arwen Anderson and Tim Kniffin. It got a good review from Robert Hurwitz, the Chronicle's chief drama critic. The play's about a hit and run accident victim's slow recovery and her confrontation with the driver of the car in her hospital room.

"Libby's recovery is mirrored by that man's wrestle with his guilt and responsibility, vividly portrayed by Tim Kniffin as the passive, helpless but determined history teacher, Anton," said Hurwitz. "Anderson and Kniffin make every moment count."

Kniffin is well-known to Spreckels stage audiences for his roles in "Death of a Salesman," "The Best Man," and other Pacific Alliance Stage Company productions when Spreckels had the money to work with.

His latest turn was director of "The Seafarer," written by Conor McPherson and staged by Narrow Way Stage Co., based in Cotati. It played three weekends in Spreckels this February. "The Seafarer" was a brilliant drama with comedy overtones and drew capacity audiences to Spreckels' intimate little theater.

Congratulations to Kniffin and to the Spreckels staff for turning out such a talented actor.

Summers of PROMYS

By Yanran Lu



I was still a few months from fifteen when I entered PROMYS, a six-week program focusing on number theory at Boston University. Although I had been to summer programs before, I nevertheless faced this one with some skepticism - was I going to be living with complete nerds for six weeks? And just as importantly, would this program actually teach me something? With some condescension on my part, I had never been truly challenged by "exploration" or "discover!" problems in math class - I assumed five extra minutes would be enough to solve any "difficult" math problems, a couple clever tricks the answer to everything. I was soon surprised.

The first three weeks at the program were characterized by a learning curve as steep as Mount Everest, frequent breakdowns and questioning of returning students, and despairing thoughts that I would never understand rigorous proofs or working in base five.

Asking for help was a source of reluctance, something I rarely resorted to at home and therefore was very out of practice with. However, as I let go of the idea that success is something judged by outsiders, tarnished by any signs of assistance or collaboration, I found I was making progress against those impenetrable problem sets. Eight hours of math a day, broken only by exclamations of "Burn the P-set!" morphed into eight hours of math a day, actually getting somewhere.

"Getting somewhere" was a process that I shared with dozens of like-minded teenagers. Never before had I been surrounded by so many brilliant minds at once, or exposed to people whose brains intuitively made such huge, but often accurate, jumps. The thing

was, though, most of them were not arrogant or self-centered. They were not bloated with their IQ, not so focused on math that they "had no life". If anything, they were some of the most interesting people I have ever met.

Rubik's cubes were popular, as was techno music. I sang duets from High School Musical, P-set in my hand; I explored Boston along with students from all over the country. I was so taken with the program, eleven months later I went back again.

There was even more to do this time as I delved into Linear Algebra and worked on my research lab, studying the properties and structures of continued fractions. As I watched first-years struggle with problem sets that I had pored over less than a year ago, I realized the magnitude of the change that PROMYS 2008 wrought within me. I took out an old book of Dell's Logic Puzzles, one I have revisited again and again after purchasing it when I was in elementary school.

Over old eraser marks and cross outs, I found that my brain whirred around the cryptic clues and while I still could not solve some most difficult problems, I was thinking much more critically and methodically.

For me, the most important thing I learned in PROMYS was not how to solve Diophantine equations or prove Fermat's Last Theorem - computers can do that. No, what I brought home was an entire new mental process, one where being correct, having an answer matching with the one in the back of the book, is not as important as challenging myself to be the best I can be.

One night my second year, I was asked, "Why would you even want to come back?"

My answer: "It gets better, I swear".

Yiren and Yanran Lu live in Rohnert Park. They can be contacted at [lu\\_sisters@yahoo.com](mailto:lu_sisters@yahoo.com).

First step just two months away

California Focus By Thomas D. Elias



Every poll shows that most Californians believe their state government is dysfunctional, plagued with scores of hard-line conservatives and liberals who almost always refuse to compromise, acting as if political party principles and loyalties are more important than the good of the people of California.

Voters can start to fix this less than two months from now, when they vote on Proposition 14, the open primary proposition reluctantly placed on the June ballot by state legislators as part of a 2009 budget deal. The budget won a deciding vote from Republican state Sen. Abel Maldonado of Santa Maria only after his colleagues agreed to give voters a shot at an open primary.

This will be the third time in the last 14 years Californians have voted on open primaries. The so-called "blanket primary" proposition passed as an initiative in 1996, mandating all candidates be placed on the primary ballot together and allowing all voters to participate in whichever party's primary they liked.

That system produced several moderate winners in districts with voter registration leaning heavily to one party or the other, and the two major parties joined in getting the U.S. Supreme Court to disallow the system.

The system proposed this

time is virtually identical to a plan voted on as Proposition 62 in 2004, when the two major parties again combined to defeat it.

Like the blanket primary, it would see all candidate names listed together, but instead of the top vote-getter in each party moving on to the November general election, the two top overall vote-getters would now advance. So there could be some legislative and congressional districts where two Republicans would fight it out in November and others with two Democrats.

Neither the perception of dysfunction nor realities like late budgets with significant deficits, furloughs for state employees and constricted hours at state parks will change immediately if this passes, but there is a solid chance for gradual and healthy change over a relatively short time if Proposition 14 passes.

The current reality of Republican primaries dominated by extreme conservatives and Democratic ones controlled by extreme liberals, offers little chance of getting compromisers into office. Most of the eventual winners never have to appeal to voters outside their own party, as districts are drawn to favor one side or the other quite heavily. But put two Republicans up against each other and the election outcome would be determined by the Democratic and independent minorities in their district, with the converse likely in strongly Democratic districts.

No wonder the party brass and the true believers on both sides hate this idea so much. They often say they object to open primaries (often called a

"top two" system) because it would keep minor parties like the Greens and the American Independents off the fall ballot. But do those parties deserve places on the runoff ballot when their registration numbers and their actual vote count in almost all elections is a small fraction of the major ones? This system allows minor party candidates as much room to qualify for runoffs as anyone else - if they can appeal to voters.

Two neighboring state Senate districts in the northernmost parts of California offer fine examples of the advantages of a top two system. In the Fourth District, covering some or all of counties like Shasta, Butte, Siskiyou and Placer, just short of 44 percent of registered voters are Republican, with 32 percent Democrats and the rest mostly independents.

The two leading candidates to succeed a term-out incumbent here both have impeccable conservative Republican credentials and whoever wins their contest will almost automatically get the Senate seat.

But if they had to face each other in a runoff - and there's a good chance in an open primary both would draw more votes than any Democrat - they would have to appeal to the 56 percent of voters who are not Republicans and thus take fewer hard-line positions or risk defeat.

It's just the reverse right next door in the Second District, including all or much of Humboldt, Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino counties. Democrats dominate here with just under 50 percent of all registered voters, while Republicans are at barely 24 percent.

In a top two system, both runoff candidates might well be Democrats, and their eventual

contest could be decided by the 50 percent of voters who are either Republican or something else.

In both cases, candidates would be forced to appeal to people outside their own party, with a different ideological take. They would become accustomed to compromise and give-and-take before they reached Sacramento.

Because of the power of incumbency, it would take awhile before the full effect of open primaries is felt. But it would surely happen, just as it was beginning to occur before the blanket primary got the boot.

Which means, if voters really want effective government, they'll see past the phony arguments the major parties constantly throw up against open primaries and vote yes on Proposition 14.

Thomas Elias was the West Coast correspondent for the Scripps Howard Newspapers for 15 years. His column appears in over 90 newspapers weekly. Thomas Elias can be reached at [tdelias@aol.com](mailto:tdelias@aol.com).

Birth Announcement:

Jacob Skyler Perez

Patrick and Mandy Perez of Rohnert Park are pleased to announce the birth of their new baby son, Jacob Skyler Perez, born April 15 at 6:17 p.m. Jacob weighed 7 pounds, 7 ounces and was 19 inches long. Siblings Sarah and Patrick, Jr., grandma Nancy Matis and grandpa Louis Perez are thrilled with their new member of the family. Welcome to the world, Jacob!



In Memorium:

Nicole Elizabeth Mattson

May 2, 1987 - September 6, 2004

I thought of you today, but that is nothing new. I thought about you yesterday, and days before that, too.

I think of you in silence, I often speak your name.

All I have are memories and a picture in a frame.

Your memory is a keepsake, from which I'll never part.

God has you in his arms.... We have you in our

hearts!

Today you would have been 23, celebrating with your friends...but that was taken from you.

We miss your smile, laughter, and presence.

Forever in our hearts...Never Forget #22

Love, Dad, Mom, and Sis Kendra



C - C O R P Concerned Citizens of Rohnert Park



Working together to educate and improve our neighborhoods takes teamwork.

We invite you to join us and be part of the dialogue that takes place every month.

**Our Mission:** To build a collaborative relationship between residents and city government in order to identify and address quality of life issues, enhance safety and security within our neighborhoods, promote volunteerism, and to build and establish community spirit and pride.

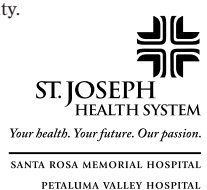
**Our Vision Statement:** To improve the quality, safety, and unity of our neighborhoods.

**When:** Next dialogue is May 12th, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

**Where:** Boys and Girls Club 7450 Santa Barbara Dr. Rohnert Park, CA 94928

**Membership:** Membership in C-CORP is voluntary and open to anyone who lives in Rohnert Park.

- If you have any questions or comments please feel free to contact Phil or Wendy Horton at (707) 664-0577.
- To learn about coordinating a community action group in your neighborhood, please call Teresa L. Hernandez, 525-5300 ext. 3211, Community Organizer with St. Joseph Health System, Sonoma County.



**What's Your NEW Mary's Favorite?**

We have 17 delicious new recipes on the menu. Which one will be your NEW favorite?

**Appetizers**

- Focaccia with Italian Dipping Sauce
- Buffalo Wings & Lemon Herb Wings

<p><b>Salads</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediterranean Salad</li> <li>• Italian Chopped Salad</li> <li>• The Wedge</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sandwiches</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roasted Veggie Sandwich</li> <li>• Chicken &amp; Bacon Club</li> <li>• Italian BLTA</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pastas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rotini Primavera</li> <li>• Fettuccine Alfredo</li> <li>• Pesto Rotini</li> <li>• Rotini Marinara</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pizzas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buffalo Chicken</li> <li>• Spicy Artichoke</li> <li>• Pesto Chicken</li> <li>• Anna's Mediterranean</li> <li>• Mary's Margherita</li> </ul>

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