

Housing Element Update 2009: The Next 5 Years

The County is beginning the process to update the Housing Element of the General Plan to address the housing needs for the next 5-year period as required by State law. Public input is encouraged. The second public workshop has been scheduled for

**October 29th at
5:00PM**

at the Community Development Commission conference room, 1440 Guerneville Road, Santa Rosa. Contact Jane Riley for more information.

Below is a link to the Housing Element document:

<http://www.sonoma-county.org/cdc/hemain.htm>

FORESTVILLE THEISSEN project is scheduled for a Planning Commission preliminary hearing to November 7th

- no specific time has been announced. If attending this preliminary hearing is important to you, please get on the PRMD e-mail service.

They announce the schedules for these meetings hours in advance.

The Project Review and Advisory Committee site is:

<http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/b-c/prac/index.htm>

On the right side of the page above the Agenda Calendar - is a message to subscribe:

Subscribe to Project Review and Advisory Committee Meeting Information updates.

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Successful Charter School now accepting new students

As class sizes get larger and larger at many high schools in the area, the student to teacher ratio at one small school has stayed pretty much the same for six years now: ten pupils for every teacher. With class sizes averaging 15 students, the Russian River Charter High School is able to recognize and develop each individual's needs. And they are currently accepting new students.

The curriculum, which meets both state and national standards, is unlike that found at other schools; it goes beyond the classroom. The progressive college preparatory program helps students learn important life skills in the areas of communication, self-governance and personal ethics that will serve them well beyond their high school years.

"We wrote our charter to give young adults more responsibility for their own choices," said Principal Carol Miller. "We are here to help them improve their academic skills, but we are also here to prepare them for a life well-lived."

Students from all over Sonoma County find their way to the Russian River Charter High School, located near the Hacienda Bridge on River Road just outside of Forestville. They come from all along the river, but also from Windsor, Santa Rosa and Sebastopol. And they bring their diverse sensibilities with them, as do the teachers.

"Our school atmosphere definitely maintains the cultural flavor of the rural west county," said Miller.

The school is driven by Miller's commitment to higher education. She began teaching in Cazadero over 20 years ago, midwifing the highly successful Cazadero Academy into the world. With other teachers and a committed group of parents, she decided to move from a private academy to a free public charter school in 2001 in order to better serve her students. The school opened its doors in September 2002 and has been going strong ever since.

"There were 76 students that first year, but we graduated over 90% of the senior class. In that sense, we were a victim of our own success," said Miller.

Miller said 15 to 20 spaces remain open for this academic year, though the senior class is almost full. And it's not too late to apply, said Miller.

"We have a small, intimate learning environment that is open to anyone between the ages of 13 and 18," she said. "We do our best to structure classes around the needs of each individual student while meeting or beating required standards."

Much of the curriculum is coordinated between classes, so that you might wind up reading literature from the same period that your history class is covering. The result is a deeper understanding of both the books and the cultural period. Another result is shown by the number of students that go on to college: over 90% of each graduating class, many with scholarships.

The school is situated in a remodeled restaurant. The large, airy building is close to the river, allowing students an opportunity to get outside frequently. With four large classrooms, four offices, a computer lab and kitchen, students don't have to fight for space and yet the school remains intimate, fostering a sense of belonging among the students and staff. For Miller, the school is a dream come true, a dream she hopes to share with others, particularly the young people in the community.

"Having a free public school that allows us to serve the community is just so great," said Miller. "We believe that optimal learning focuses on the whole student. Giving kids an opportunity to learn mutual respect, non-violent communication and consensus building allows them to develop critical thinking skills and prepares them to participate passionately and responsibly in the community. I think we have a pretty special school and a remarkable program."

Miller urges students to come and experience the unique setting and progressive education at the Russian River Charter School for themselves. Located at 10940 River Road in Forestville, the school is open to visitors (just check in at the office first). You can also call 707.887.8790 for more information.

Open to all residents of Sonoma County, the charter is organized under the West Sonoma County Union High School District and is a member of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. All required classes meet University of California standards.