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the Process of Petition

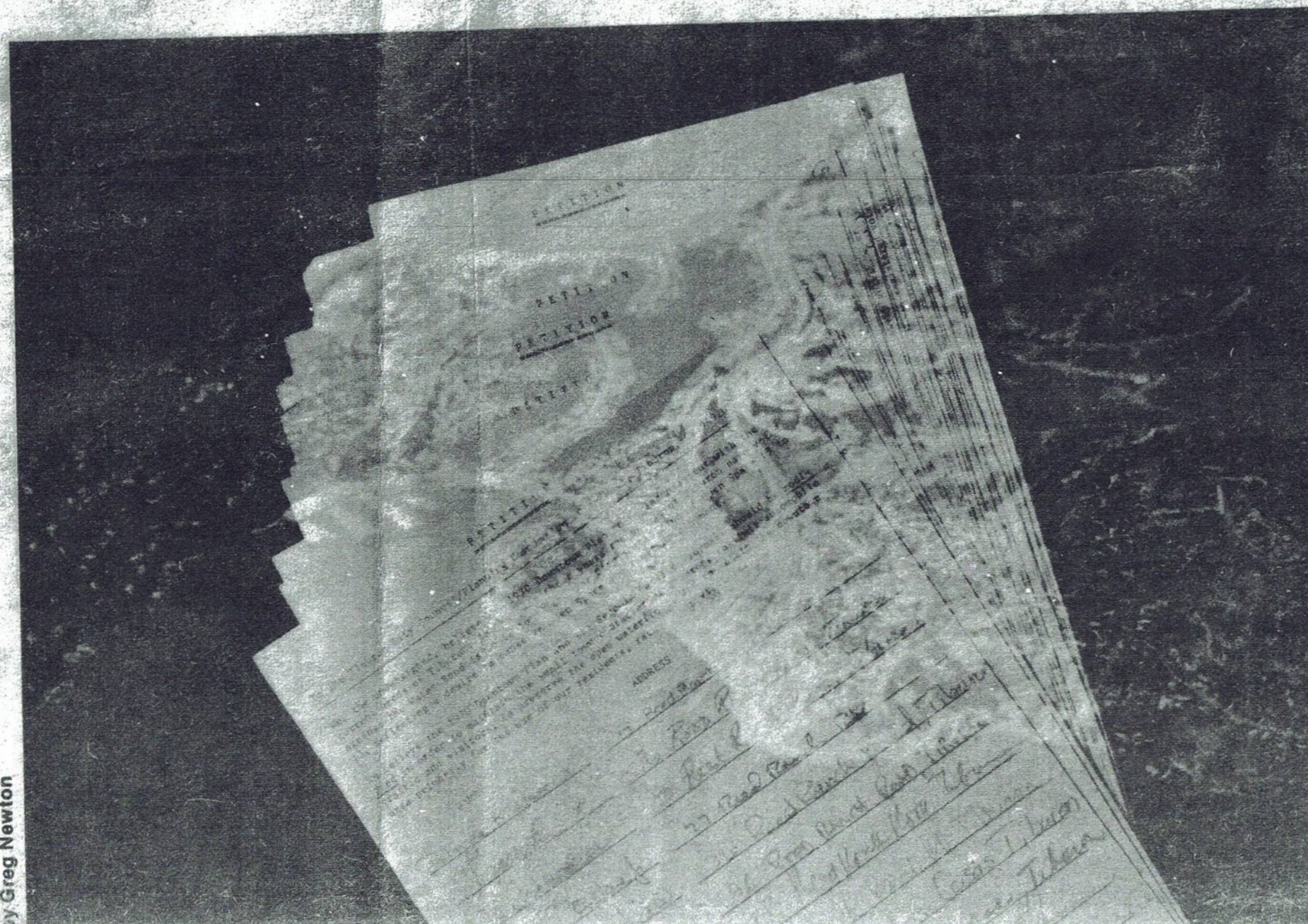
The Story Behind The Petition
To Modify The Downtown Plan
by Mauree Jane Becker

WHEN 2,691 people from two communities (Belvedere and Tiburon) sign a petition requesting change, it must mean something. And maybe a lot of things.

"It means something to me," Tiburon Planning Commission Chairman Charles Bassett explained. "There are a lot of people who would like to see something different down there," referring to development plans for the downtown area, "and that's why we have to consider the petition seriously."

Last month an ad-hoc Committee For a Downtown Plan Review launched an extensive door-to-door petition drive to demonstrate just how strongly the community wants to modify the 1970 Downtown Plan and the Sequoia Pacific's development proposal. Their basic concerns included maintaining the small town character of Tiburon, limiting automobile traffic and visitors,

by Greg Newton



the downtown area primarily for the use of Peninsula residents, rather than visitors.

PURPOSE

Under the aegis of ubiquitous Brewster Morris, enough residents eagerly signed the petition to show him at least he was going in the right direction. Now Morris hopes the results will also mean something to the Tiburon City Council.

"The purpose of the petition was twofold," according to Morris. "It was a case of informing local residents about the plans and determining how much support we really had." In addition, it provided an outlet for the many concerned residents who have tried unsuccessfully since last Fall to get the Planning Commission to review the 1970 General Plan.

When the Planning Commission (with the exception of Chairman Bassett and Commissioner Bruce Ross) officially voted September 5th to "not continue review of the Downtown Plan until Sequoia Pacific has had time to submit its proposal," rumblings about a lack of community representation began.

The issue is complex.

In part, the rumblings were based on a certain Resolution 290 which critics claim required the Planning and Park and Recreation Commissions to render a semi-annual status report on the Downtown Plan. The report was never completed. In contrast, several councilmen claimed that Resolution 290 never intended a review, and at any rate City officials did review the Plan every time a different development proposal was offered.

COMMITTEE FOR A DOWNTOWN REVIEW

By mid-October, more than twenty residents formed an ad-hoc group, later known as the Committee for a Downtown Plan Review, to provide their own review and to encourage community response.

Letters to the Editor flew back and forth between councilmen and Committee members. At one point the level of communication degenerated. Some councilmen dismissed the ad-hoc Committee's efforts with generalized expletives like "radical dissidents and disgruntled newcomers."

The Committee persevered, however. Members Gary and Fani Hansen designed color maps, and the Committee mailed them along with concise critiques of both the 1970 Adopted Plan for Downtown Tiburon and Sequoia Pacific Master Plan, to as many residents as their limited, donated funds allowed.

In the meantime, Sequoia Pacific, the subsidiary of Southern Pacific which owns the valuable 36 downtown acres, also persevered to move ahead on its City Council approved timetable. Much to the chagrin of the Committee for a Downtown Plan Review.

BEGINNINGS OF A PETITION

One night in late October, Tiburon residents Ann and Robert Watson, attended the Planning Commission meeting where Sequoia Pacific first unveiled its plans for a 250 seat Inn-Conference Center, 920 enclosed parking spaces, harbor, restaurant, 120 room hotel, retail shops and office space.

Disappointed with the design and overwhelmed with the lack of opportunity to review the 1970 plan on which Sequoia Pacific based its proposal, the Watsons wondered if they were the only ones who felt this way.

"I wondered what we could do to find out what our neighbors thought and felt" Ann Watson explained. "I knew enough about politics to be afraid the plan could be pushed through. Bob and I spend a lot of time here. We do a lot of walking and we felt any development would be a big step.

"So, for the entire next week-end we walked up and down our street, Spanish Trail, and asked neighbors to comment on a petition we drew up. It read as follows:

We the undersigned City of Tiburon residents are interested in:

- 1] Retaining small town character in Tiburon.
- 2] Keeping automobile traffic at a minimum.
- 3] Orienting the Downtown area for use by Tiburon citizens, not tourists.

We do not feel that the Plan as presented by Sequoia Pacific and Mr. Buskirk meets these requirements.

"Out of 44 people," Ann Watson continued, "32 supported our petition, four supported the plan, four were undecided and four weren't familiar enough with the Plan to decide.

"My reaction was wow, this is incredible. Since Spanish Trail is really a microcosm of Tiburon families with an interesting cross section, we felt our petition could be indicative of the rest of the community."

The setting and timing were perfect for the Committee for the Downtown Plan Review to take up where the Watsons left off.

PROCESS OF PETITION

Working diligently, Morris and Committee members Ann Price and Genny Chapman plotted a course to canvas by petition Tiburon residents.

"Genny Chapman came over one Sunday in mid-November," Mary Price said. "We took a big map of the City and divided it into 35 areas. With a reverse directory, we set up captains for each section."

Armed with a folder that contained enough maps and critiques of both the 1970 and the Sequoia Plan to give each resident, the captains rang doorbells from Paradise Drive to Mar West, the apartments and condominiums up Lyford to the western border of the City limits. Ultimately, 70 individuals passed around the Petition. Within two weeks over 1838 individuals in Tiburon signed it. The majority of the signers were registered voters but nonresident businessmen and children were allowed to sign it also.

As Belvedere residents got wind of a vehicle to air their views too, a similar petition was launched under the direction of Mrs. Stuart Stephens and Mrs. Cameron Baker. To date, 853 residents have signed the Belvedere petition.

"The remarkable thing to me," Betty Stephens observed, "is a great many people would say 'what plan?' when asked to sign the petition. When the proposed development was explained, they immediately wanted to give their support. I don't think there were ten people who refused it."

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