

March 10, 2006

Patricia L. Siering, Vice President
Board of Directors
Friends of the Arcata Marsh

Larry Oetker, Deputy Director of Community Development,
Arcata City Hall
Arcata, CA 95521

re: relocation of Endeavor Center and site for temporary homeless shelter.

Dear Mr. Oetker,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Friends of the Arcata Marsh Board of Directors. We are aware that the city of Arcata is considering a relocation of the Endeavor Center and construction of a temporary homeless shelter somewhere along South G corridor, between Renaissance Computers and Highway 101. We implore the city NOT to locate these services near the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary. The proposed South G Street locations are inappropriate because of impacts on the wetland ecology, wildlife habitat, tourism, and use of the marsh as an educational venue.

Homelessness is a major concern in our country, county, and local municipality. As we understand it, the proposed shelter will initially house beds for approximately thirty individuals. Clearly, this will not accommodate all the individuals who are likely to require a bed on any given night, nor will it provide services to individuals with obvious substance abuse or behavioral issues. We are very concerned that this deficient capacity will greatly increase the number of homeless people who illegally camp at the Arcata Marsh. Homeless encampments have long been a problem at the Arcata Marsh, and we fear that a nearby shelter will exacerbate this problem greatly. While we recognize that many homeless people are wonderful, decent human beings, we also acknowledge that others suffer from mental and substance abuse disorders that lead to problems.

I once lived near (and volunteered at) a homeless shelter in the Bay area. I often found my car windows broken and someone sleeping in the car in the morning. I repeatedly had to clean human excrement and trash from my car before going to work, and as a young woman, I was repeatedly hassled. I eventually had to relocate. The Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary cannot relocate. This is why we ask you to consider alternative site locations for this project.

Increased homeless traffic in the marsh will certainly lead to increased trash, excrement, and off trail traffic that will profoundly affect the wetland ecology and wildlife habitat. The Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary annually attracts a large numbers of visitors (~ 18,000 in 2004), and hosts school groups ranging in age from pre-school to college. We fear that increased homeless traffic in the marsh will reduce tourism and our educational effectiveness, both of which we have come to depend on for support. As a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, at Humboldt State, I frequently bring student groups to the marsh for field trips, and have students work on independent research projects at the marsh. I will be less likely to encourage student use of the marsh if there is an increase in homeless traffic within the marsh.

The Friends of the Arcata Marsh beg you to consider alternative sites for this project that will have less of an impact on wildlife, ecology, education, and tourism in our local community. We thank you for your time and consideration of this important and sensitive issue.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Siering