

## **Marin Voice: Decoding NIMBYism in Marin**

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Guest op-ed column

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**REPORTS ABOUT the Marin County Office of Education's plans to relocate the County Community School in Terra Linda** and the county Planning Commission to recommend high density zoning for affordable housing in Marinwood / Lucas Valley neighborhoods have illuminated the nature of NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard) and the need to confront the underlying issues that surrounds this term, which are racism and classism.

I am amused but not surprised by the sanitized code words used by neighborhood residents to convey their thinly veiled attempt to admit that they harbor fears and ignorance, which should not be characterized as anything short of bigotry.

A Marinwood resident was quoted as saying, "We're really concerned bringing all of these units into our neighborhood will greatly impact the schools and the value of the education," regarding high density housing. A Terra Linda resident was quoted: "I know neighbors who purposefully didn't buy a house in that North San Pedro area because of the community school." Whether these residents are conscious or unconscious about the implied meanings of their statements, sadly, they represent the perspective of many others in Marin and beyond. To vilify individuals for such statements is not my point. It merely underscores our need to openly talk about and confront issues of racism and classism in Marin because labeling these social diseases as NIMBYism does not accurately characterize the profound and devastating effects of racist and classist thinking, attitudes and behaviors toward people of color and the economically disadvantaged who are direct targets of these forms of oppression.



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To stereotype, fear and blame at-risk youth and potential residents of affordable housing in the decline of property values and quality of education is simply wrong. These young people and families desire adequate housing and quality education. They are no different in their aspirations from what we want for our children, families and our communities. These marginalized members of our community are often in the center of attention but rarely in the center of power – politically, economically and socially. Fearing and blaming them are misplaced and misguided.

Rather, let's place some attention as to why the real estate industry devalues your property when certain "undesirable" people move to your neighborhood. Let's ask why so many students, primarily African American and Latino students are failing in the school system. Let's ask ourselves why we hold on to the notion that co-existing side by side with people who have less than most of us will diminish our quality of life.

Living in the 21st century with changing demographics, the Bay Area is becoming the norm. Diversity is the new reality. We should no longer accept Marin as an enclave for only the few and the privileged while ignoring the needs and aspirations of those who are the community's backbone – the hardworking parents who juggle multiple jobs to make ends meet, the safety and maintenance workers who maintain our roads and keep our streets safe, the health workers who care for our elderlies and the sick, and the aspiring students with dreams to be successful while persevering in the daily challenges of having been told that they don't belong or who have limited resources.

NIMBYism permeates many parts of Marin and it is not defined by political party lines, ideologies or boundaries. Racism and classism are some of the underlying root causes of NIMBYism that we all have been taught somewhere in our social trainings and are responsible for the ways we discriminate against others. I hope we can find ways to examine our own biases and prejudices, to unlearn and find new ways of thinking so that we do not perpetuate the generational recycling of fear and ignorance onto our children and grandchildren.

The future of an inclusive and tolerant Marin starts with all of us.