

Judge rules against town, open-space group in suit over ridge development

By **DEIRDRE McCROHAN**
dmccrohan@thearknewspaper.com

A Marin judge has ruled against the town of Tiburon and a local open-space group in their challenge of the county's certification of an environmental impact report for a proposed 43-lot home development on the Tiburon Ridge.

In his ruling, issued Jan. 22, Superior Court Judge James T. Chou wrote that, having reviewed additional briefs filed since his tentative ruling last November, "the court is not persuaded by petitioners' supplemental arguments that it is necessary to reverse or modify its tentative order."

See **DEVELOP, PAGE 14**

Belvedere and Tiburon retain top marks in tobacco report

By **DEIRDRE McCROHAN**
dmccrohan@thearknewspaper.com

Tiburon and Belvedere once again earned top marks on an annual American Lung Association evaluation of tobacco policies across the country, helping to make Marin the first county in California whose cities and unincorporated areas earned straight A's across the board.

Like last year, both Tiburon Peninsula cities scored an A grade in the association's 2020 report, re-

See **TOBACCO, PAGE 20**

Crushed.



CLARA LU / FOR THE ARK

San Francisco 49er fans packed Sam's Anchor Cafe on Tiburon's Main Street Feb. 2 for Super Bowl LIV, where the Niners were just minutes away from defeating the Kansas City Chiefs and capturing a record-tying sixth championship. But down 20-10, the Chiefs mounted a stunning comeback to win 31-20 for their first Super Bowl victory in 50 years.

Belvedere pushing ahead with plans to upgrade seawalls

City appears to abandon series of forums; package could be OK'd in weeks

By **HANNAH WEIKEL** and **KEVIN HESSEL**
hweikel@thearknewspaper.com

Belvedere is moving forward with a multimillion-dollar plan to

shore up its seawalls, with city officials indicating a design concept may be approved as early as next month — though it appears to have abandoned a pledge to hold a series of public forums dedicated solely to collecting feedback on the proposed project and how to fund it.

Last June, the City Council voted to accept a raft of recommendations from a then-newly formed citizen advisory panel, the Committee to Protect Belvedere's Seawalls, Levees and Utilities. The recommendation included exploration into raised pathways and short seawalls running between the shoreline and roadways on San Rafael Avenue and

See **SEAWALLS, PAGE 15**



STOCK PHOTO VIA SUASNEWS.COM

S. Marin fire district to introduce drone program

Officials want tool for fire and rescue operations by spring

By **HANNAH WEIKEL**
hweikel@thearknewspaper.com

When a massive mudslide swept a house with a woman inside down a steep hill in Sausalito

last February, first responders from the Southern Marin Fire Protection District had a hard time safely navigating the site and searching for additional victims — until another agency arrived and deployed a drone.

Using the unmanned aircraft system, which was equipped with a camera, they were able

See **DRONES, PAGE 17**

Parent with background in research is named to school board

By **EMILY LAVIN**
elavin@thearknewspaper.com

The Reed Union School District board has filled its interim fifth seat with a district parent who heads her own digital marketing firm.

Tiburon resident Liz Webb beat out two other candidates to win appointment to the seat by a 4-0 vote of the board at a special Jan. 27 meeting.

She'll replace Dana Linker Steele, who resigned in December with one year left on an extended five-year term. Linker Steele was first elected to four years on the board in 2011

See **BOARD, PAGE 16**



COMPASS

Let us connect you to homes never seen on the market.

Over 240 homes sold off market in 2018 in Marin County. Don't miss out on the home of your dreams.



Kathleen Brady & Bryan Beaver
415.847.1491 | 415.987.9967
kathleen.brady@compass.com
bryan.beaver@compass.com
DRE 00958832 DRE 01023448

Board, *continued from previous page*

However, board President Sherry Wangenheim countered by saying the board could benefit from having a member who hasn't been in the district long.

"Having a fresh perspective on the board might actually force us to not assume everybody has the same amount of information," she said, adding: "I wouldn't want to discount the lack of experience at schools as a reason to keep someone off the board."

Several board members noted how essential research and data are to making decisions, pointing out both Webb and Natesan's careers gave them experience in that realm.

"One of our main roles is really research," Jacobs said. "We're setting direction, and some of that is based on feedback from stakeholders and some of it is just based on

research and best practices."

In an attempt to narrow the field down, board members eventually chose their top two candidates, with Wangenheim and Brady naming Webb and Natesan and Jacobs and member Afsaneh Zolfaghari naming Webb and Chang.

That focused discussion on Webb.

Brady noted the board makes its decisions based on consensus, and Webb being a top-two candidate for every board member made a strong case.

"She seems to have spoken to each of us as board members, and that means hypothetically we can see her as fifth chair," he said.

Brady then made a motion to nominate Webb for the vacant seat, which was seconded by Wangenheim and voted on by the entire board.

Brady noted he liked that Webb's career experience included familiarity with data,

financials and human resources, and her extra-curricular experience included years of volunteering within the district.

"It would be great to have a jack of all trades on the board, someone who has skin in the game at every single site and I think knows the stakeholders," Brady said.

In an interview with The Ark, Webb said she expects her new position will come with a learning curve, as she will need to spend time learning about school governance and board bylaws.

However, she said her work in market research has given her a strong foundation to ease that transition.

"Just in terms of my work ethic and my background and being a researcher, I feel prepared to be able to kind of participate and be engaged in that regard," Webb said.

She noted she values the district's commitment to academic achievement and so-

cial-emotional learning.

"I feel it's such a wonderfully small district and collaborative, and the parents are so hands-on," she said.

Webb said one of the board's most immediate tasks will be monitoring and executing its recently established five-year strategic plan.

"We're going to track that over time, and I think it's important to talk about that and share the progress toward it," Webb said.

She noted she's eager to get started in her new role.

"I'm honored to be selected to be in this position, and I'm excited to help in hopefully the most effective way that I can as a board member," she said.

Emily Lavin is The Ark's assistant editor and Strawberry reporter. Reach her at 415-944-3841.

Drones, *continued from page 1*

to see where there was unstable debris in the slide site and avoid gasoline-soaked areas from cars that had tumbled down the hillside.

Now, Southern Marin fire plans to deploy drones of its own in emergency situations.

Although its program hasn't been officially launched, Southern Marin fire district officials say they hope to have drones in the air for training as early as March or April.

First, the agency will begin seeking input from elected officials and the public on policies drafted for the program, which aim to address privacy and surveillance concerns, according to Southern Marin Fire Chief Christian Tubbs.

"We've been working through all those questions before we go to the public, because those questions will arise," Tubbs said in an interview. "The catalyst for this is in how we continue to improve our services for the community."

Tubbs said drones could be used in all aspects of fire and rescue services, including search and recovery on land and water, evacuations, monitoring wildfires and fire-prevention efforts.

Southern Marin fire serves parts of Tiburon northwest of Trestle Glen Boulevard, Strawberry, unincorporated Mill Valley and Sausalito. The district also envelops Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the coastline south of Muir Beach and under the Golden Gate Bridge.

Due to the rugged terrain, steep cliffs and remote areas across much of the district, Tubbs said, drones could provide more efficiency and safety during emergency responses.

Ready to launch

Although Southern Marin hasn't purchased drones or equipment yet, three staff members have completed drone flight training through the Federal Aviation Administration, required for anyone who operates a drone, including hobbyists and videographers. Two others are in the midst of training.

The goal is to have two people trained per shift and to eventually grow that number, said Battalion Chief Matt Barnes, who will oversee the program. It takes two qualified people to operate a public-safety drone — one person operating

the drone and another acting as the "visual observer" who watches the drone through binoculars or with the naked eye.

In addition to FAA training, Southern Marin fire would have a separate training program specific to fire and rescue that aligns with its drone policies, Barnes said.

The district's drone training and policy manuals weren't available by The Ark's press deadline.

In its current budget, the agency earmarked \$10,000 for start-up costs and two drones outfitted with thermal cameras and speaker systems. The agency is still researching the type of drone it will purchase.

Moving forward, Barnes said, it's difficult to pinpoint what the annual cost of the program will be because the technology is advancing so quickly.

"Our hope is that there will be a (spending) ceiling and then we would go into a maintenance-type cost," Barnes said. "We are also actively looking for grants ... from federal, local and commercial agencies."

The drone program may also utilize funds from Measure U, a new parcel tax approved by district voters in 2018 to aid fire-prevention efforts.

While the idea of utilizing drones for public safety isn't new, Southern Marin would be the first fire agency in the county with a drone program. Currently, the Marin County Sheriff's Office is the only law-enforcement agency in Marin that uses drones, a practice it began in 2018.

'Not surveillance'

Barnes said the district plans to hold public information sessions in Sausalito, Mill Valley and Tiburon in the coming months to educate the public and answer any concerns about privacy.

"Our missions would be for public-safety purposes only — not law enforcement or surveillance purposes," Barnes said.

Southern Marin officials are scheduled to present the program to the Sausalito City Council at a regularly scheduled

meeting on Feb. 11.

"We want to be 100 percent transparent," Barnes said. "We are developing a plan to have reportable components that can be released to the public at any time, like how many hours our drones have flown, where and on what mission."

There will also be a "robust" data-retention program, Barnes said, which would ensure that all data, videos and photos collected by the drones would be warehoused on a secure server and catalogued so the district could pull records if an interested party made a request through the state's open-records act.

Additionally, the drones' cameras won't always be recording, and district officials would vet any video footage or photos before posting them on the internet or social media, Barnes said.

Privacy concerns surrounding drones arose in Tiburon last year, when a drone was reported hovering over Reed Elementary School while kids played in the schoolyard.

In response, Tiburon officials approved drone regulations that ban flying in Reed Union School District airspace and from intentionally recording children on school property.

Initially, the town had also prohibited drones from flying within 400 feet of emergency vehicles using lights or sirens, of any active emergency responder in a manner that interfered with their work and of town-sanctioned public events without prior authorization from Tiburon officials.

However, those pieces of the ordinance were later eliminated following challenges from The Ark and from state and national media-advocacy groups that asserted the ordinance would violate Federal Aviation Administration rules, state laws and protections under the state and U.S. constitutions. The organizations continue to assert the town's ban on recording students on school property is also illegal.

Tubbs said he's aware of the privacy concerns about drones in Tiburon and said the district would make sure their proposal wasn't in conflict with the town's regulations.

ARANA'S Lic. #1108111
Cleaning Service

Apartments • Houses • Offices • Studios • Condos
Free Estimates • Reasonable Prices

Excellent Tiburon references available!
Ramiroa124@yahoo.com

650-430-8206

Love • Joy • Peace

Discover more about your connection with the God who loves you.

Sunday Service 10am - 11am
Sunday School

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST,
BELVEDERE

501 San Rafael Ave, Belvedere www.christiansciencebelvedere.com

TWICE AS CLEAN

Expert Housecleaning
25 years in Marin • Insured & Bonded
Call Mercedes
518-4516 or 454-3155

CA Lic. #827243

Garden Girl
LANDSCAPE
Design • Installation • Maintenance

415-516-8351

The Largest Marin-Based Alarm Company

Same ownership for 27 years.

Mill Valley 388-5355
San Rafael 459-1122

REDWOOD SECURITY SYSTEMS, INC.

State Contractor's License #426887
Alarm Operator's License #AC0219