



Los Ranchitos Improvement Association
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August 1, 2019

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Dear Executive Director Fried and Marin LAFCo Commissioners:

Thank you for including and working with the Los Ranchitos Improvement Association (LRIA) to compile and document some institutional history and facts about Los Ranchitos in the current Municipal Services Review (MSR) for the City of San Rafael.

Background

A small committee of the LRIA, representing the landowners in Los Ranchitos, began this project planning process on November 12, 2015 by participating in the Marin LAFCo hearing of that date, commenting on proposed policies during the Commission's policy update. Much of our dialogue with the Commission at that time centered on our concerns about a possible aggressive "island annexation" program being considered and our desire to be removed from San Rafael's sphere of influence to avoid annexation into the City of San Rafael. At that time, we requested that the Commission remove Los Ranchitos from San Rafael's Sphere of Influence (SOI).

Then-Chairman Blanchfield explained that the present hearings pertained only to the Commission's policy update and that San Rafael's upcoming MSR was the correct venue for the Commission to consider making any changes to San Rafael's SOI. *He added that the Commission did act in a prior similar circumstance for Indian Valley, removing Indian Valley from Novato's SOI, which could be used as a precedent and guide in considering our proposal.* He recommended LRIA participate in the San Rafael MSR process, work with staff, and attend the meetings.

In the interim we found Marin LAFCo had an absolute lack of institutional knowledge, memory, or planning records as to the process of how and why Los Ranchitos was ultimately placed in San Rafael's sphere of influence over 50+ years ago, and how Los Ranchitos came to be regarded as an "unincorporated island" within San Rafael's SOI. When San Rafael started annexing portions of the Terra Linda Valley in 1959, well before LAFCo existed, Los Ranchitos was bypassed but later placed within San Rafael's sphere of influence to provide Fire and Paramedic services, to replace County emergency services that were downsizing at that time. From then until now, Los Ranchitos has continually voiced concerns to our elected officials and County staff about remaining within San Rafael's sphere of influence due to this transitional emergency services arrangement eventually being mis-used for purposes of proposing and justifying annexation of the area by San Rafael.

Over time, as a consequence of successive piecemeal annexations by San Rafael, Los Ranchitos's access to our lands by county roads was removed. Our last remaining direct access at the south end of Ranchitos Road onto, and off of, Hwy 101 was removed by CalTrans during the Highway 101 widening project. Subsequently, when Ranchitos Road was connected to Lincoln Avenue, Los Ranchitos became an entirely surrounded island without direct access to our lands by county roads. These incremental changes occurred over time and without any typical public process, i.e., without notice to, comment from, or reasonable consideration of the implications for Los Ranchitos landowners. The cumulative consequence of these successive piecemeal annexations by San Rafael now serve to prejudice our future jurisdictional status and enjoyment of our land as residents of the County of Marin.

San Rafael's MSR

During San Rafael's MSR representatives of the LRIA have had several meetings with LAFCo as well as County Planning, Marin County Open Space District (MCOSD), and Novato Planning staff. After exhaustive research of all available records, we have found that Los Ranchitos is recognized by the 2008 MCOSD plan as being within a priority conservation area and included in many Open Space, Greenbelt and Community Separator policies. The current County General Plan policies are not well coordinated with the MCOSD plan to designate Community Separator areas although the Los Ranchitos hillsides and ridgeline of the *Terra Linda/Sleepy Hollow Divide Preserve* carries the RUG (Ridge and Upland Greenbelt) designation. (NB: at the time of the 2005 San Rafael and 2007 Countywide Plan updates, the 2008 MCOSD plan did not yet exist.)

Two proposals

At this time, to resolve this matter, we request that the Marin LAFCo consider approving one of the following two alternatives based on current Marin LAFCo adopted policies: *"State law requires the Commission to consider the following factors in determining a sphere of influence boundary."*

"In reviewing city and district spheres of influence, the Commission will exclude lands in agricultural or open space use that function as community separators."

"Sphere-of-influence lines shall act to preserve the community identity of physically distinct unincorporated communities where those communities receive adequate public services from the County and independent special districts."

Proposal (1) On the basis of Chairman Blanchfield's direction to use the example of Indian Valley as a precedent and guide, where the Commission did act in a prior similar circumstance to remove Indian Valley from Novato's SOI, please remove Los Ranchitos from San Rafael's SOI, or

Proposal (2) On the basis of a suggestion from Executive Director Jason Fried, update and use the existing San Rafael sphere of influence to preserve Los Ranchitos for the purpose of fulfilling Open Space policies and goals of the Marin County General Plan and the 2008 MCOSD.* We have researched this perspective further and find the following applicable policies in the Marin County Parks & Open Space Strategic Plan and the Marin Countywide Plan (MCWP):

*2008 Marin County Parks & Open Space Strategic Plan: "**Central Marin Ridgелands — important community separators and ridges of the Terra Linda/Sleepy Hollow Divide**, Southern Heights Ridge, and Northridge areas should continue to be preserved."

Policy OS-2.2 (MCWP EIR page 4.12-14) Continue to acquire or otherwise preserve additional open space throughout the county by targeting greenbelts and community separators in the Baylands and City-Centered Corridor.

Policy OS-2.c (MCWP page 2-126) Acquire and protect lands according to the Open Space District's mission statement. Lands should principally, but not solely, be **within in the City-Centered Corridor**. Within this corridor, and consistent with its mission, strive to acquire or otherwise protect the following: **Ridgелands that contribute to the completion of greenbelts and community separators surrounding the cities and towns in eastern Marin.**

NOTE: Although the Marin County Open Space District (MCOSD) is a separate legal entity from the County, the MCWP is the tool used to set guidance for open space in Marin County. The MCWP recognizes the number of agencies and non-governmental organizations involved in land management and conservation in Marin. Multi-jurisdictional coordination and management will be necessary during the next decade as ownership is varied between public and private agencies. The emphasis in the MCWP is stewardship and management of open space lands.

We thank the Commission for your attention to this matter and ask that this history be incorporated into LAFCo's archives as an attachment to the SR MSR. We have also appended our suggested augmented text for the MSR itself as well as maps that relate to the history described above.

Sincerely,

Los Ranchitos Improvement Association (LRIA)

Leyla Hill, President

Judy Schriebman, Treasurer

Rick Savel, Committee member

Attachment 1 LRIA's requested/suggested augmented text for the MSR

Attachment 2 Transcription of part of the LAFCo meeting of November 12, 2015

Attachment 3 Map showing serial annexations in North San Rafael, starting 1959

Attachment 4 Map 2.6 from the 2007 Marin Countywide Plan, showing the RUG overlay for Los Ranchitos

Attachment 5 Map from the County of Marin Gallinas Creek Watershed

Attachment 6 Map from the MCOSS Terra Linda Ridgeline Preserve area (has **red hexagon** over LR)

Attachment 7 Map filed with the State of California by the County of Marin showing protected Agriculturally Zoned Lands

Attachment 1. MSR Augmented Text

Los Ranchitos is located west of Highway 101 and north of San Rafael Hill. The unincorporated 230-acre Los Ranchitos community features single-family homes on 1-acre minimum lots zoned A2-B4 for agricultural uses including horses and other livestock. The current Marin Countywide Plan (MCWP) allows low-density development, designating the area as single-family residential at 1 unit per 1 to 5 acres and planned residential at 1 unit per 1 to 10 acres. The area is nearly completely built out.

The Marin County Open Space District (MCOSD) identifies the area as a featured part of its Strategic Plan, a designated "Land Conservation Area."* It appears in the Plan as a peninsula continuation of the Terra Linda/Sleepy Hollow Open Space Preserve. The hilly terrain of Los Ranchitos is under the County's Ridge and Upland Greenbelt (RUG) overlay. The Countywide Plan identifies areas with the RUG designation as community separators. Los Ranchitos fulfills this function geographically and topographically, separating the City of San Rafael south of Puerto Suelo Hill, on the one hand, from the Terra Linda Valley on the other.

The Los Ranchitos Improvement Association (LRIA), established in 1952, represents the homeowners of the Los Ranchitos community. The LRIA's mission is to maintain the spirit of the neighborhood and to help its residents preserve their very special rural residential way of life. Over the 50 plus years since the area was placed within San Rafael's SOI for paramedic and fire services, the LRIA has consistently conveyed to their County Supervisors the landowners' intention to remain in the County and concerns about possible mis-use of their emergency services agreement as a basis for annexation to the City of San Rafael due to remaining in within San Rafael's SOI.

A 2015 proposal from the LRIA to LAFCo clearly indicates LRIA's objective to maintain Los Ranchitos as an unincorporated community separate from the City of San Rafael. In 2018 as the Commission was approving the start of the San Rafael Area MSR, the LRIA leadership met with LAFCo staff to reiterate their interest in not being annexed into the City of San Rafael. Additionally, the San Rafael General Plan 2020 does not identify any specific future vision for this area.

*2008 Marin County Parks & Open Space Strategic Plan: "Central Marin Ridgeland — important community separators and ridges of the Terra Linda/Sleepy Hollow Divide, Southern Heights Ridge, and Northridge areas should continue to be preserved.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pvq3KID0rEc&t=5509s>



Marin LAFCO November 12, 2015

View on www.youtube.com

Preview by Yahoo

Leyla Hill speaks first, that homeowners of Los Ranchitos unincorporated Marin County wish to remain as unincorporated, however, policies and workplaces seem to say something quite different: that Los Ranchitos WILL eventually be annexed to the City of San Rafael. Is there another solution for us? chair asks for policy Language, Leyla Hill introduces Rick Savel for that.

Rick gives precis of his expertise in this area, gives some parallels for Los Ranchitos regarding law suits in Rohnert Park that were analogous and settled in favor of the unincorporated area. This is followed by a discussion of some specific language regarding spheres and planning, as an example of the kind of thing we're concerned about. Then a discussion of whether or not Los Ranchitos is a separate, identifiable area, not a CSD, but a separate area. And why can't we be detached from the sphere and just be in unincorporated Marin County?

1:31:00 on...

Commissioner Judy Arnold: Can we... I have a question I would ask of Keene... Is there a problem with like adding an addendum saying that Los Ranchitos does not want to be in the sphere of influence? ...of San Rafael... [inaudible] doesn't want to be annexed to San Rafael?

Exec. Dir. Keene Simonds: Perhaps not as the commissioners have noted as part of this broad policy document, but one of the suggestions I just shared with Rick a few hours ago so I didn't put it in the staff report. But, when you do sphere updates, there's nothing to stop the commission to create policy statements within a sphere update, whether it's San Rafael or whatnot. And if the commission chose at that time, that would probably be the better avenue at that time to make a statement of that type.

Chairman Jeff Blanchfield: It would seem to me important to have in the file this concern for when we take on this area, working with San Rafael and others, about this issue, and it will come up. It came up in Indian Valley beforehand, and we worked on that. So there's some precedents for us on that. At that time it would be good for you, and whomever the duly elected members of the homeowners association want to participate in that process, we would look forward to that. And so I think this is a good kind of a check on our list of what we have to do when we get to this sphere review...

Commissioner Arnold: Do we have a timeline for when we're going to be looking at this?

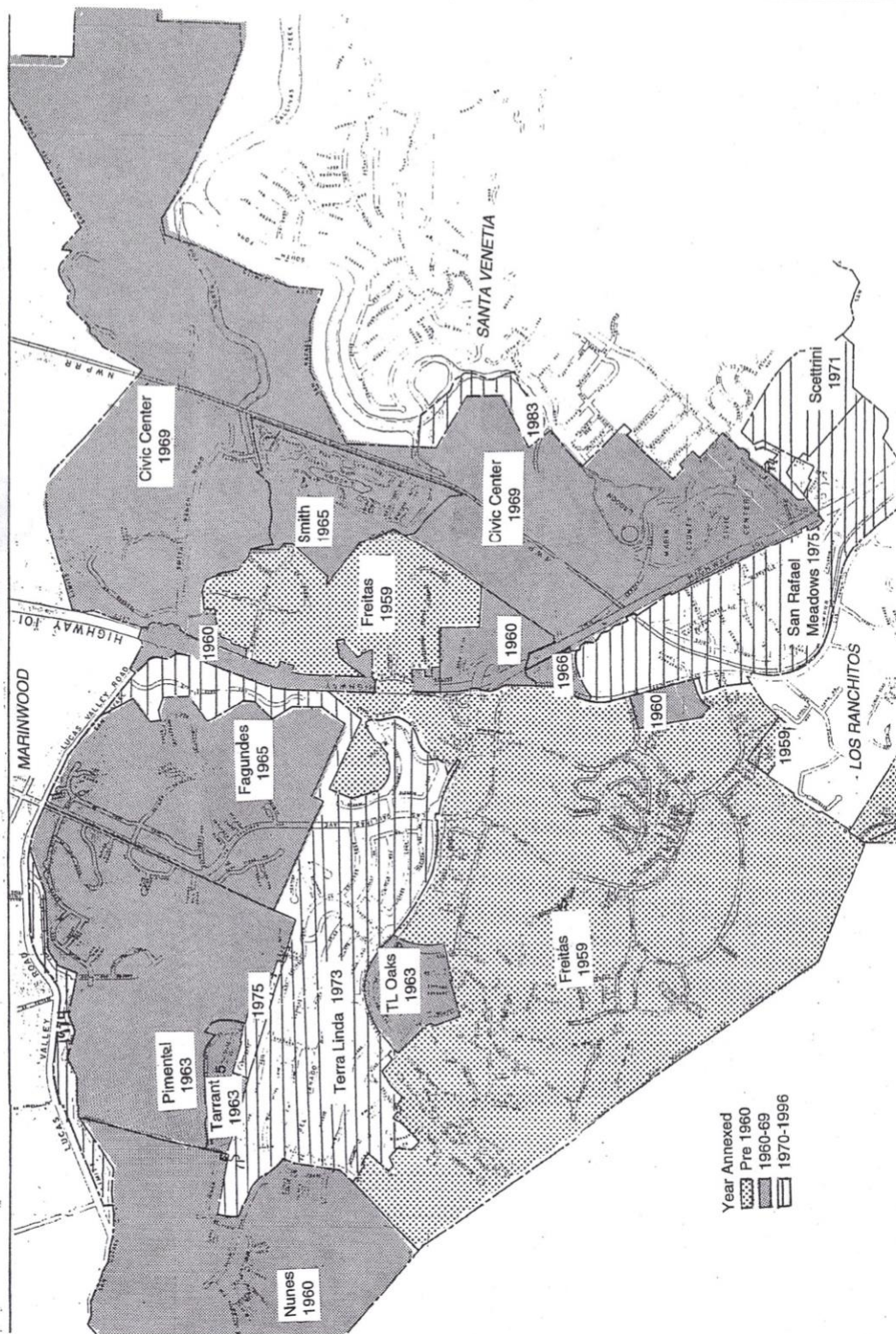
Rick Savel: If I could Mr. Chairman? As I suggested to you, Commissioner Connolly, too, even if it involves, I mean we're talking about San Rafael, but again we need something at the County. We don't vote in San Rafael. This is part of the problem with Rohnert Park. As you know UGBs are voter approved.

Commissioner Arnold: Right.

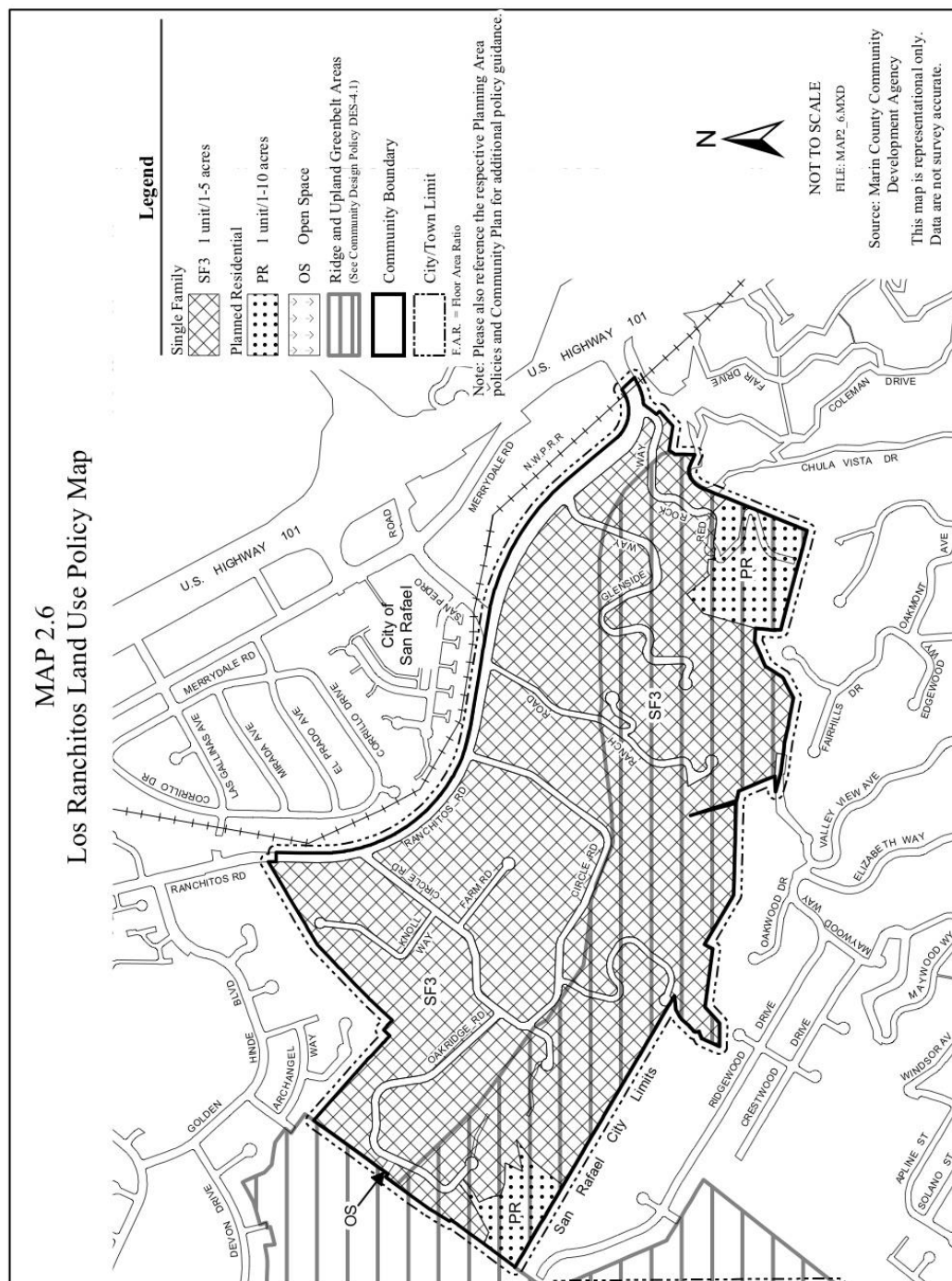
Rick Savel: Penngrove has no vote in Rohnert Park. We have no control over the council members. I mean, we're administered by the County of Marin, so we need something, but I guess my other thing, and I'm impartial, the community, that's a generous offer that you made, and the community may accept that, but I haven't heard a reason yet why we can't be detached if we request it.

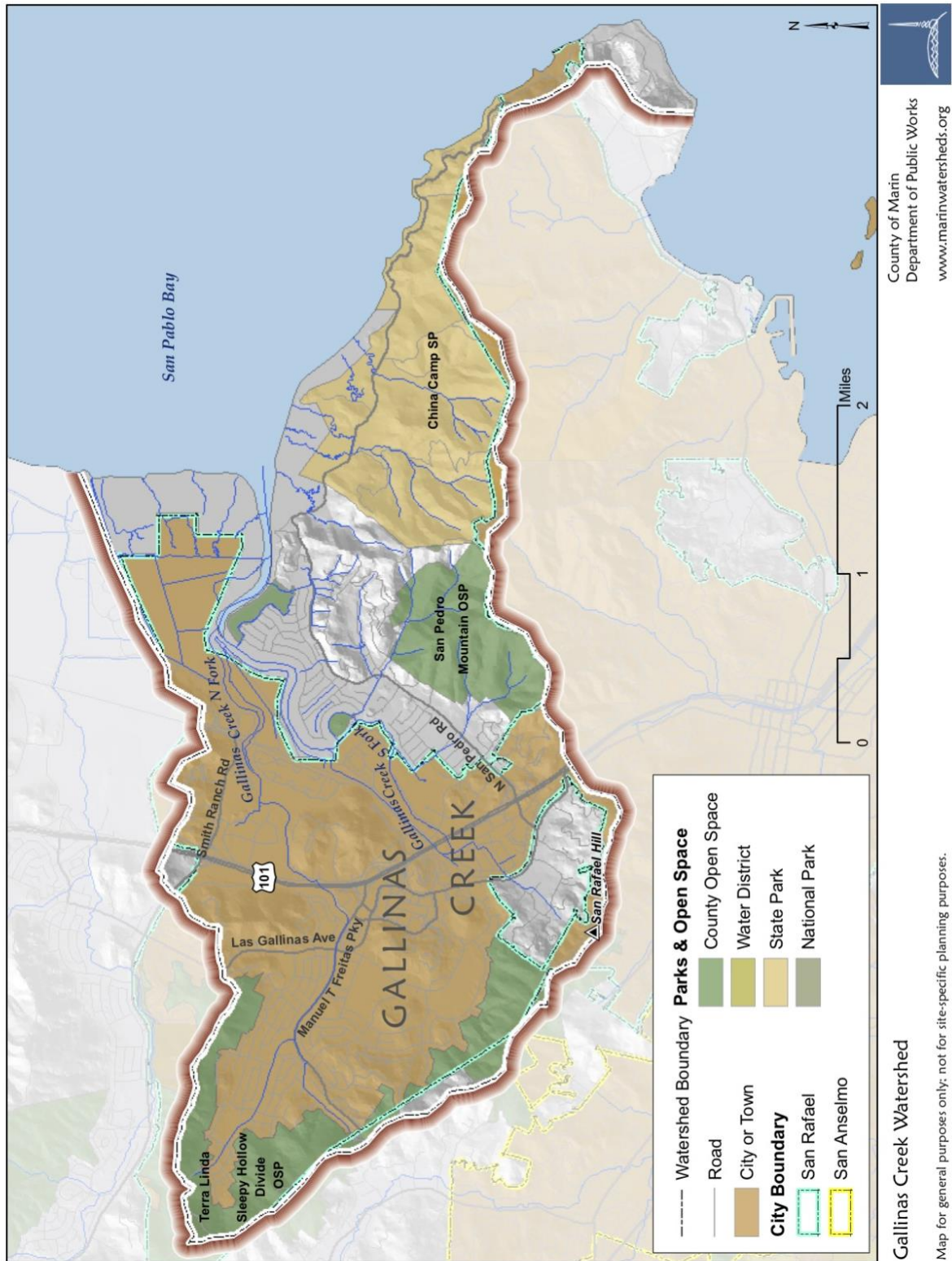
Chairman Blanchfield: Well that would be something we would take up at that time, you know. That's the venue in which to bring this up because then we'll be focused on it.

NORTH SAN RAFAEL ANNEXATIONS

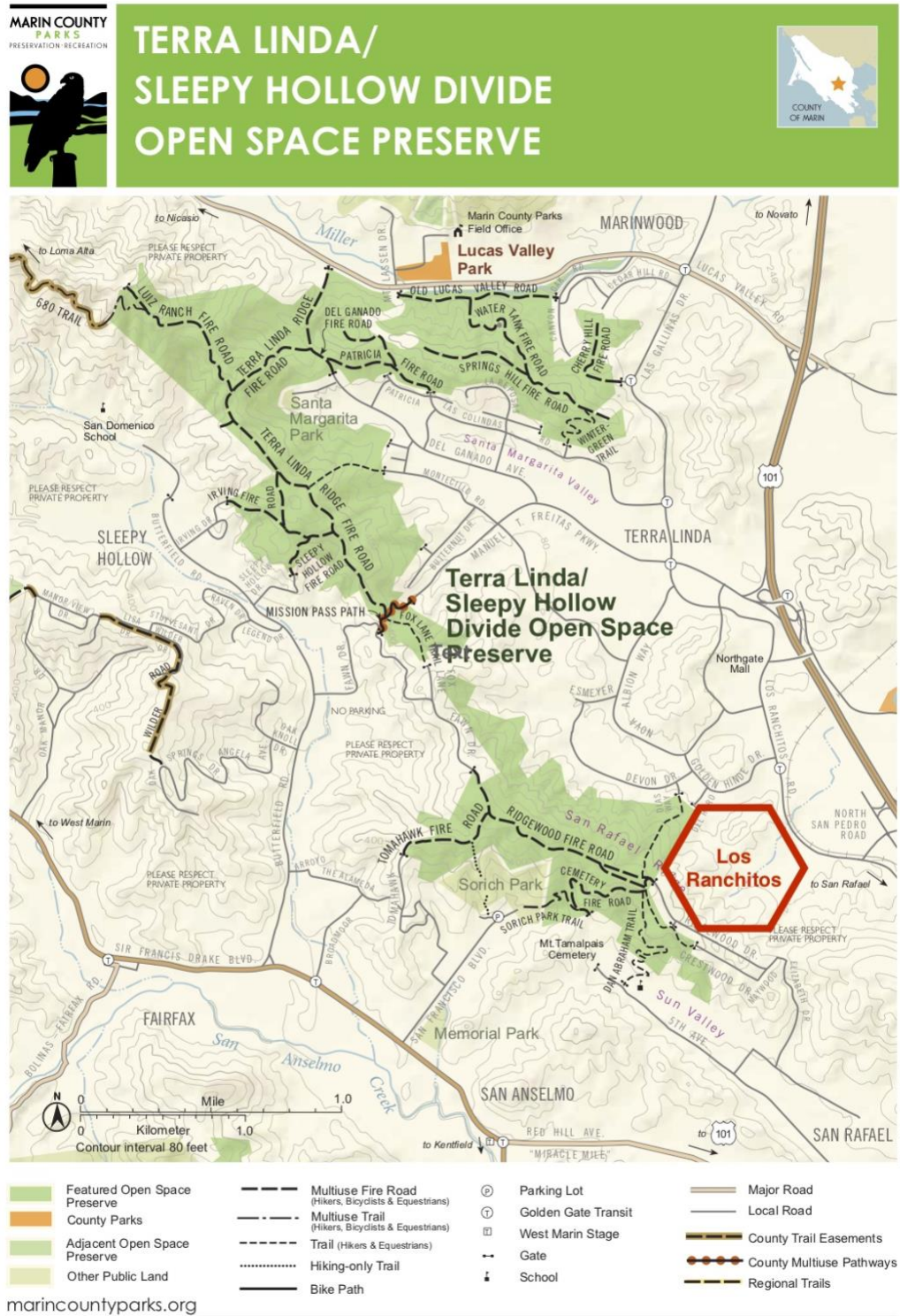


Attachment 3. map showing serial annexations in North San Rafael, starting 1959

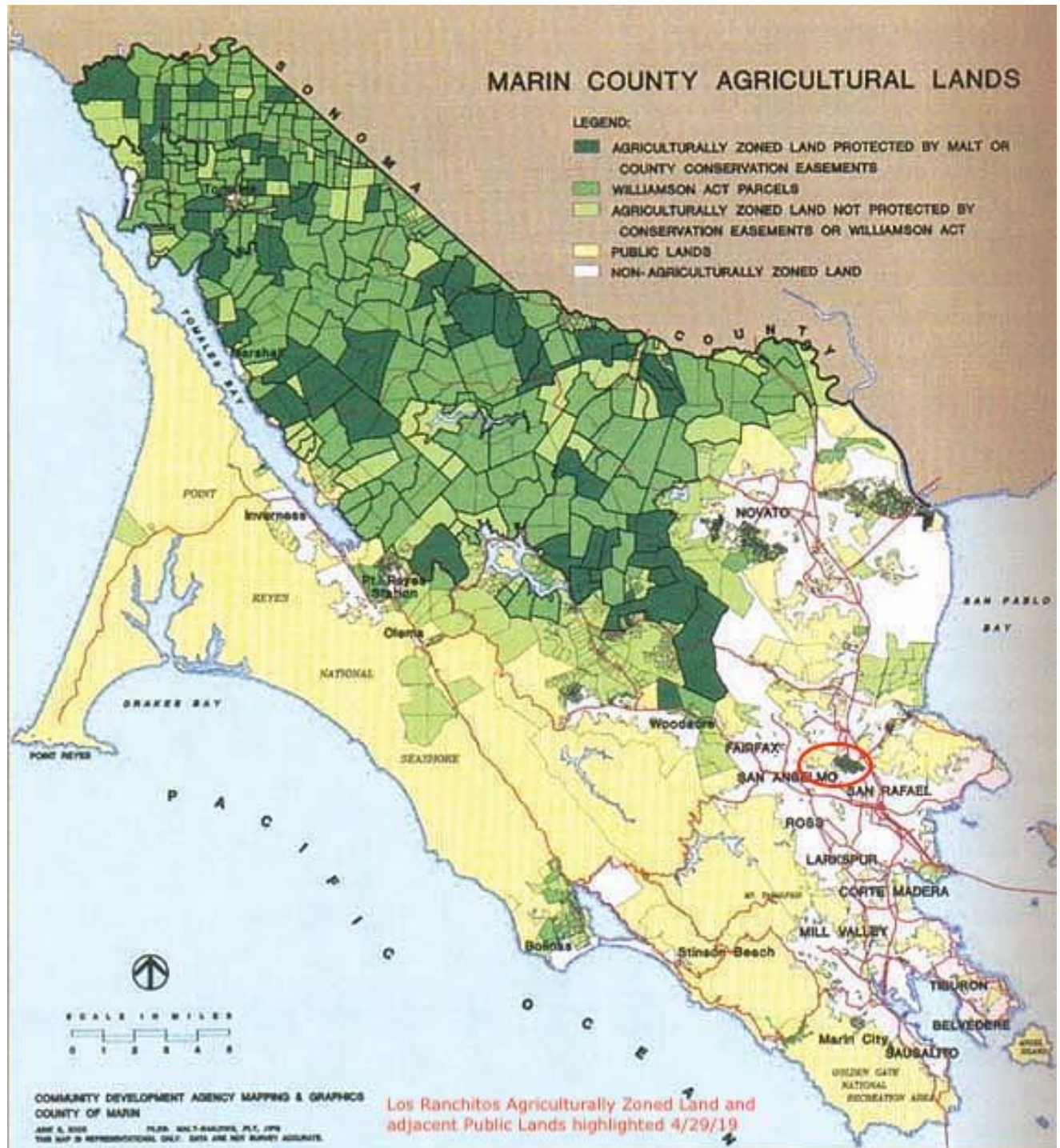




Attachment 5 map from the County of Marin Gallinas Creek Watershed showing how Los Ranchitos can be seen as an extension of the County Open Space



Attachment 7 map from the County of Marin of protected Agriculturally Zoned Lands submitted and filed with the State of California (Los Ranchitos dark green agricultural land highlighted within red circle).



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