



January 15, 2012

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GP Submitting Mill Site Reuse Plan for EIR and Public Comment

by George Reinhardt and Jim Tarbell

This week, almost a decade after the last sawmill shut down, Georgia-Pacific's (G-P) final plan for the reuse of the Fort Bragg Mill Site and preparations for the attendant Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be presented to the community at two successive meetings. This is the beginning of an historic transformation of Fort Bragg's ocean front and deserves the attention of all concerned citizens

The environmental impacts of the various elements of the Mill Site reuse — including the *Specific Plan*; the remedial action plan for the cleanup; the resolution of the highly polluted and geophysically-fragile mill pond complex; and approval of the water rights for the site — will be investigated in one big EIR. The first meeting, on Tuesday, January 17 at 6 PM at Town Hall, will begin the process of choosing which environmental impacts will be investigated for each element of the Mill Site reuse project.

The next night, January 18, also at 6 PM in Town Hall, the City Council, Planning Commission and public are invited to provide feedback on G-P's proposed Specific Plan. The proposed plan asks for a rezoning of the property to accommodate: 520 housing units; 295,500 square feet of industrial space; 290,000 square feet of retail and commercial development, 210,000 square feet of research, office and education facilities; and 450 hotel rooms. It also designates 92 acres as Urban Reserve — "for the next big idea" — and preserves 58 acres for parks and/or open space.

These two meetings are the beginning of a long and complex process that will determine the character and economy of Fort Bragg and all of the Northern Mendocino Coast. We invite all interested and concerned citizens to come to these meetings and participate in this important process.

Scoping Session Key To Creation Of The Restoration Economy

by Susan Kelley

The environmental investigation of the reuse of the Fort Bragg Mill Site, which culminates with the publication of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), is both a grand and daunting undertaking. It will analyze all the issues involved in the entire reuse of the Mill Site. Besides the *Specific Plan*, it will analyze the environmental impact of the remediation plan of the clean up — even though that plan has not even begun to be developed in a public process. It will look at the changes to the water rights on the site, which are crucial to any future development. It will also deal with the clean up of the mill pond, the future of the old dam and sea wall, along with the daylighting of creeks. That is a lot for the community to deal with all at once.

The purpose of the EIR Scoping Session being held on Tuesday, January 17th at 6 PM at Town Hall is to identify what the environmental investigation will analyze concerning the elements of the reuse described above. The Scoping Session can also deem certain impacts as unimportant and eliminate them from consideration. There are 16 environmental factors required by law to be considered at some level including: aesthetics; biological resources; hazards and hazardous materials; mineral resources; public services; utilities/service systems; agricultural resources; cultural resources; hydrology/

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G-P to Present Final Mill Site Reuse Plan

by Jim Tarbell

Almost a decade after the last sawmill shut down, Georgia-Pacific's (G-P) final plan for the reuse of the 318-acre Fort Bragg Mill Site will be presented to a joint meeting of Fort Bragg City Council and the Fort Bragg Planning Commission on Wednesday, January 18 at 6 PM at the Fort Bragg Town Hall. It is the culmination of years of work and collaborative meetings between G-P and the City of Fort Bragg. Known as the *Mill Site Specific Plan*, it is intended to be more specific than the City's Coastal General Plan.

This plan grew out a series of informal and formal planning processes. The first community workshops were put on by the citizens' organization North Coast Action in early 2003. Later that year, the City received a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy to produce a formal plan guideline for the reuse of the Mill Site. This resulted in the five-volume [Mill Site Reuse Study](#) that includes results of a public survey, focus group recommendations, thoughts from elected officials, land use principles, economic analysis and economic tools and strategy.

The Noyo Headlands Unified Design Group (NHUDG) grew out of the North Coast Action workshops and has been a vigilant partner with the city and community to

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EIR Scoping Session Continued from Page 1

water quality; noise; recreation; air quality; geology/soils; land use/planning; population/housing; and transportation/traffic. It can also look at other environmental factors such as “blight” or urban decay and the impact of the project on local small businesses. If members of the public want other areas such as “climate change” or “rising sea level” to be addressed, the Scoping Session is where they must be included. CEQA does not specify a particular level of study in these respective areas. In fact, the City of Fort Bragg advises their hired consultants about the “Scope” of the study and could describe the various environmental factors as “Potentially Significant” or “Less Than Significant.” This is such a big undertaking that NHUDG expects and hopes that this will only be the first of several scoping sessions on this project.

The environmental investigation and subsequent EIR is the process through which the City of Fort Bragg, as the lead agency complies with The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA—“seek-wah”). CEQA is designed to prevent further damage to the environment in the State of California. It is also California’s premiere law requiring disclosure and public involvement in decisions that have the potential to harm the environment.

This act allows Californians to actively participate in planning and development issues in their communities by reviewing environmental documents; submitting written comments; and attending hearings. It also provides opportunities for people to raise issues of concern and to secure changes in plans and projects to reduce their impact on the environment. It is important to understand that the role of CEQA is to lay out a specific process for making decisions. It ensures that the public gets to participate; that potential impacts are fully disclosed;

Specific Plan Continued from Page 1

insure that the reuse of the Mill Site follows leading edge sustainability principles and reflects the desires of the community. Since 2004 NHUDG has produced publications on the reuse of the Mill Site. In 2005 it produced its 100+ page [Noyo Headlands: Design Strategies for a Sustainable Future](#), which looks at the remediation, restoration, rebuilding and reinhabitation of the Mill Site looking at models and best practices from around the world. NHUDG’s 2006 publication, [Noyo Headlands: From the Extraction Economy to the Restoration Economy](#) looked at the history, demographics and community involvement and desires in the reuse of the Mill Site. Then in 2009 G-P first came up with its first vision plan for the Mill Site reuse. NHUDG compared that plan to NHUDG’s sustainability strategies and the desires of the public expressed in the 2004 preferential survey in [The Midterm Report Card on Georgia-Pacific’s Plan for the Fort Bragg Mill Site](#). NHUDG hoped that the constructive criticism expressed in that document would lead G-P to work with the City in building a plan more closely aligned with the desires of the community expressed when this process first began.

All of these efforts promoted a similar philosophy of extending the existing residential and commercial land uses in Fort Bragg west onto the northern end of the Mill Site. In each approach, the central mill pond area and the coastal bluffs have been designated for open space and the southern area has always been conceived of what is now called

and that mitigation measures are identified. That’s it. It does not mandate a particular outcome. It does not require rejection of a development proposal because impacts to community or environment are severe.

There are; of course; other government agencies participating in the process with more legal leverage to protect the environment than individual citizens. These include the State Departments of: Dam Safety; Toxic Substance Control; Fish and Game; along with the Water Quality Control Board and The California Coastal Commission. But, each of these agencies has a backlog of projects clamoring for attention, making it even more important that local citizens get engaged in the project.

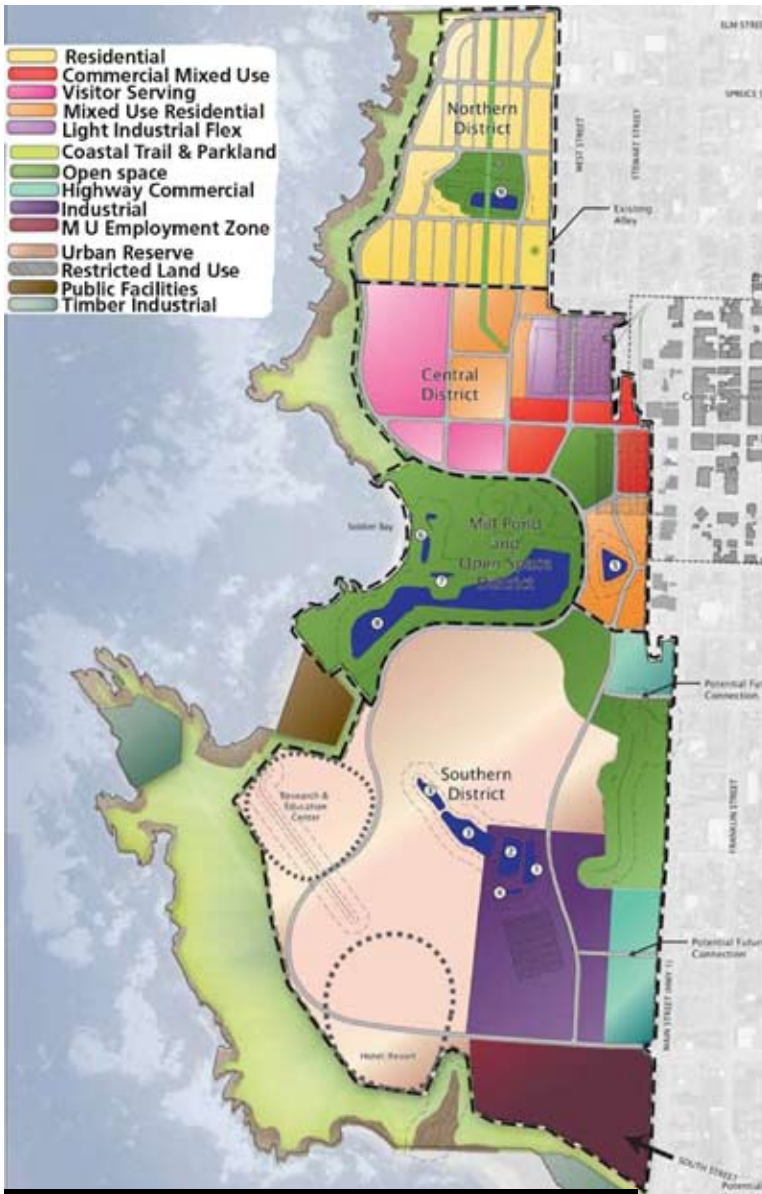
NHUDG has doggedly followed the excruciatingly slow ten-year process leading up to the *Specific Plan*. NHUDG advocates that the scope of the environmental study of the G-P Mill Site reuse be framed by the vision the community wants for its future. Almost anything would be preferable to the barbed wire fencing the Fort Bragg community off from its Coast. The closed G-P Mill Site is evidence of the extent to which the extraction economy of the past can bring the environment to its knees. One could make the argument that nothing more could be done that would have a significant environmental impact on the Mill Site—at least in a number of the 16 categories specified by the State for study. But the EIR process is an opportunity for people in our community to make sure that the land use planning for the Mill Site and its subsequent development are an overall benefit to Fort Bragg and the Northern Mendocino Coast. We encourage concerned citizens to find ways to use the CEQA process to reverse the historical damage and promote the restoration economy of the future.

urban reserve. In the words of Fort Bragg City Manager Linda Ruffing, it is a place reserved for “the next big idea.” This will be the heart of job creation in Fort Bragg. There is already a strong movement to put the [Noyo Center for Science and Education](#) there. Other projects including a NHUDG-promoted eco-industrial park could build off of that base.

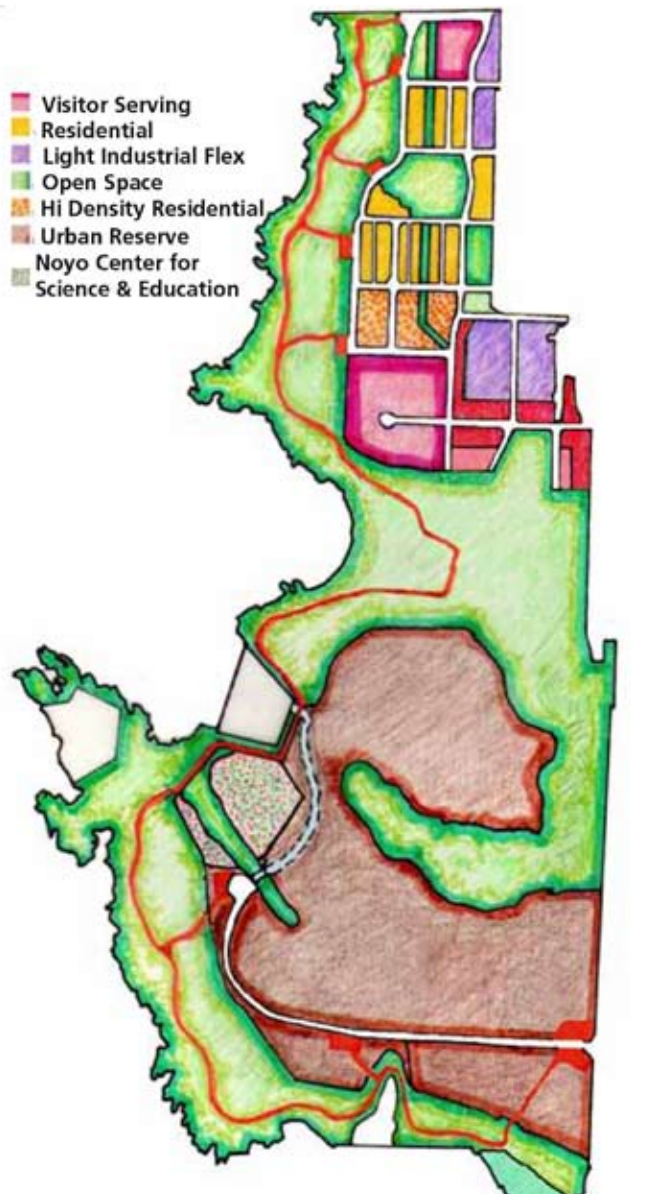
The differences between the G-P *Specific Plan* and the NHUDG vision revolve around scale and phasing. How many acres will be dedicated to open space? Will development begin, even though the existing downtown is plagued with empty storefronts and the housing crisis has created excess residential units in Fort Bragg?

How much land should be devoted to commercial development? How dedicated should the reuse be to needs of tourists? Finally how will the development strategy deal with future realities such as climate change and resource depletion? How will the reuse be a model for moving from the extraction economy to the restoration economy?

Georgia Pacific’s plan calls for: 520 housing units; 295,500 square feet of industrial space; 290,000 square feet of retail and commercial development, 210,000 square feet of research, office and education facilities; and 450 hotel rooms, covering 80 percent of the Specific Plan area in development. The city and people of the North Coast will have to decide if this is the scale and formula for development that best fits Fort Bragg. The public meeting on January 18 will be the beginning of that process. We hope you will be there.



G-P Draft Specific Plan
Georgia-Pacific Corporation



Evolving Alternative Plan
Noyo Headlands Unified Design Group

NHUDG Offers an Evolving Alternative Plan

by George Reinhardt

Georgia-Pacific's *Specific Plan* (SP) for development of the Fort Bragg Mill Site has finally been released. As a part of the required Environmental Impact Report (EIR) the community is encouraged and empowered to offer an alternative vision and help define the questions that frame the environmental investigation. The Noyo Headlands Unified Design Group is creating an alternative Land Use Map. We agree with the goals and Vision of the Draft SP (1.2.3 A&B) in the introduction to the Mill Site SP. To that end we are proposing an alternative that does a better job of achieving the community's goals while guaranteeing far more open space, the restoration of Alder Creek, a far more positive environmental impact, less sprawl and a less negative climate impact.

This quick, side-by-side comparison between G-P's plan and the NHUDG alternative will give you an idea of

what we have been thinking. This is an evolving alternative plan and a few dramatic differences will be visible in this initial map. The Northern Residential District has more mixed use. It is set much further back from the ocean. Fewer units are permitted. No large detached houses, unaffordable to the people of our community, will be built. Residential build-out is required to start close to the existing town. There is a far greater commitment to restoration of the natural landscape, including the expanded riparian ways of the day-lighted creeks, which make north/south vehicle traffic inappropriate. The coastal trail comes inland at Fort Bragg Landing to a point where it can cross the day-lighted creeks. It designates most of the south end as urban reserve to be dedicated to the "next big idea." There is a single road in this southern district, which facilitates access to the coast, the Noyo Center for Science and Education the city's wastewater treatment facility. Coastal access is prioritized throughout the plan area.



NHUDG Vision For the Reuse of the Fort Bragg Mill Site

by George Reinhardt

The NHUDG vision is a community-based proposal that calls for more open space, emphasizing restoration of creeks and coastal bluffs, with a strictly phased, careful build-out from the existing city. The objective is a walkable and bikeable Fort Bragg in which automobile use is minimized. The Noyo Headlands must not stand apart. It must be carefully integrated into our town.

The reality of climate change and the rapidly transforming natural environment present huge challenges to all coastal communities. There are also great opportunities for Fort Bragg. The work of restoration can engage our community in a healthy positive vision of the future. The clean-up of the Noyo Headlands will take years, and offers many opportunities for work and learning. Jobs will be created and new businesses launched if we take this path. Our connection to our past and the economies of food, fishing and forestry all benefit from the restoration choice.

New business creation must compliment and not cannibalize existing business. An area devoted to nurturing innovation and business incubation will find a future.

Housing must be scaled to be affordable to our community and the people who work here. All housing should be for full-time residents. Careful phasing is essential. The first places built should be small, affordable and include rental stock. There should be zoning to accommodate elder housing and co-housing.

Building guidelines should be mandatory, not suggested with zero net energy buildings and water catchment required throughout the design guidelines for all building types. Areas on the headlands should be set aside for renewable energy production. An electric vehicle infrastructure should be planned for and powered by renewable energy.

Visitor services will continue to be a crucial part of Fort Bragg's future. The beautiful and careful restoration of these headlands compliments this priority. Again, the issue of phasing is crucial. The restoration work should begin immediately. This is not planting some trees and flowers to beautify a development. This is "Restoration Job One." A decade has been lost in which our community could have been doing this important work. Remember, this work trains

a new generation in valuable work, sequesters carbon, and restores the health and beauty of our natural environment.

Our local food system is a fast growing and important part of our coastal economy. It compliments visitor services and keeps an ever growing per cent of everyone's dollar here in our community. The North Coast used to grow most of it's own food. We can do this again with proper planning. Local food provides local jobs and business opportunities. Space should be allocated for both commercial food production and neighborhood community gardens. In some cases greenhouses can substitute for growing directly in the ground of the Headlands.

A great deal of interest in an educational and visitor serving [Noyo Center for Science and Education](#) has been expressed by our community. The City has been very proactive in preparing the ground for this excellent idea. They have acquired land, developed designs and pursued partnerships with educational institutions eager to participate in this exciting project. This could be the keystone for an education and science park.

Climate change, restoration of the natural environment, and the nurturing of healthy life styles must guide all our planning choices. The environmental investigation for the EIR should examine the impact of peak oil, resource depletion, and the changing demographics of our community.

The question of water availability for future plans out on the Headlands presents our community with a good object lesson. Rainwater catchment, conservation and reuse through grey water systems allow for greater flexibility in planning. "Water equals energy" is a phrase used by planners. By cleaning water sources on the Headlands, restoring the natural waterways and planning for conservation we are doing something about climate change, thinking about the next generation, and choosing the path of healthy economic restoration.

Noyo Headlands Unified Design Group (NHUDG)

NHUDG is a project of the 501(c)3 Coastal Land Trust. It is dedicated to creating a diverse, multi-use public/private reuse of the Fort Bragg Mill Site that will serve as a model development for communities around the world. More information is available at its [website](http://www.noyo-headlands.org), www.noyo-headlands.org