

## OP ED PIECE FROM MERA

In the most recent Grand Jury report on Emergency Preparedness and Security, one of the conclusions stated "...the MERA system is too important to the safety of all citizens of Marin County to have it bogged down in a legal dispute in just one city." To those who are not aware, there has been opposition by some Tiburon residents to the Mt. Tiburon site for the construction of the Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA), a tactic that has stalled the completion of this vital project. MERA would like to provide background information on these issues to insure that the system be completed as soon as possible to protect ALL the residents of Marin County.

MERA has been designed as a state of the art radio system to protect the residents of Marin County in the case of a disaster, fire, earthquake or other emergency. The current public safety radio system is failing badly, with obsolete equipment and replacement parts that are no long manufactured. We are relying on surplus, scavenged spare parts to keep the system operational. What's worse is the current system does not allow agencies throughout the County to communicate with agencies from outside the County, and sometimes city to city within Marin. In short, it must be replaced and it must be replaced in the shortest amount of time.

In response to this inadequate system, Marin County cities, the County and all the independent fire districts have formed a new local government partnership to design, finance and build a new emergency radio system – a unique regional system that has not been achieved anywhere else in California. The system is constructed to send out an emergency signal simultaneously across the entire County, providing communications between all agencies in all Marin cities and unincorporated areas. The new system will not only provide countywide communications between all agencies, but also substantially improve coverage and improve public and officer safety. We all live in a series of small communities that rely on help from neighbors in a major public emergency. Those in out of town locales must be able to communicate to effectively coordinate their efforts.

In order for the system to be completely effective and send out an emergency signal simultaneously across the entire County, a site on the Tiburon peninsula is absolutely necessary. MERA has secured very scarce frequencies for the use of the agencies, obtained the necessary licenses from the Federal Communications Commission,

designed and financed the new system and completed construction on many of the 15 sites.

The site on Mt. Tiburon, currently in dispute by some residents, was selected from 17 alternate sites based on several criteria – effective radio coverage, the smallest visual impact possible and the lowest possible cost for the system. The Mt. Tiburon site was included in the final design of the system and in the project Environmental Impact Report, both of which were approved by MERA with representatives of the Town of Tiburon.

When faced with the opposition from the Mt. Tiburon neighborhood, MERA was quick to respond with alternative sites. Two applications were made for space on Angel Island and both were denied by the State Parks Department as incompatible with the recreational uses of the island. At the request of the Tiburon Town Council, MERA also made a detailed review of a site on Wolfback Ridge above Sausalito; however, the study concluded that this site could not provide coverage to downtown Sausalito, making it inadequate for this project. MERA also explored at least three open space sites in Tiburon, all of which were rejected because of current land use and acquisition policies of those areas.

At this point, MERA has exhausted alternative plans to complete this vitally important project and is ready to build the site at Mt. Tiburon without the approval of the Town of Tiburon as authorized under state law. However, at the request of the Town of Tiburon, MERA has agreed to put a temporary hold on the construction while the town “fast tracks” a land use permit for yet another alternative site at Sugarloaf, higher up on Mt. Tiburon.

Further, MERA has suggested a compromise to the Town of Tiburon that would allow them to build a temporary site at Mt. Tiburon while the Town completes land use review and secures financing for construction of Sugarloaf. Once the Sugarloaf site is complete and operational, the Mt. Tiburon site would be decommissioned.

The Mt. Tiburon neighbors have indicated “they support the need for the system” but do not want it on their adjoining property, when indeed the site currently houses a 35 foot water tank and has or has had radio and cable television towers for most of the last

10 years. Their opposition seems to focus specifically on radio frequency emissions from the MERA tower.

While MERA acknowledges that there is some concern about the safety of radio emissions, we are relying on established Federal standards for radio emission safety in our system, which are well below the Federal standards. Radio emissions are a part of everyday life, from television and radio stations, cellular phones, microwave ovens – even the sun! The exposure for even the closest neighbor, who undoubtedly uses a cellular phone daily, is substantially below the federal safety standard for radio emissions – not to mention below the emission levels of their cell phones.

We urge Tiburon to join with MERA and the Marin Grand Jury in weighing the public safety needs of ALL Marin County residents and find that the greatest good for the greatest number of people is found in completing the emergency radio system in the shortest amount of time.