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## Dick Spotswood: Novato decision on mobile park sounds like double-talk to residents



Marin Valley Mobile Country Club in Novato, Calif. on Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2025. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)



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The saga over the Marin Valley Mobile County Club is a reminder of a legal maxim, “put it in writing.” The mobile-home park,

located in southeastern Novato, has about 400 residents. All of them are 55 years of age and older. Of its 313 households, 91% are defined in the range between acutely low and low income.

Late last year, past Novato Mayor Bernard Meyers spoke to the City Council.

“I’m here tonight to speak about the Marin Valley Mobile Home Park,” Meyers said. “I am not a park resident. I have no financial interest in it whatsoever.

“As I understand the facts, in 1997, the city agreed to help park residents buy their park from the then owners. The residents took on a \$17 million loan and have spent nearly 30 years paying it down. That loan will be fully paid in 2027. Now, just as they’re about to cross the finish line, the city says they must buy the property again — this time from Novato — for another \$26 million.

“Here’s what that feels like. A man stops to save someone from drowning. He hands his valuable, heavy coat to a friend for safekeeping. The rescue succeeds. But when he comes back, the friend says, ‘I found \$30 million of gold in the pockets. I’ll return the coat — if you pay me \$26 million.’ That is what’s happening here. The city held the deed while residents paid the debt. Now the city is holding the deed hostage. You don’t change the deal at the finish line — especially when families’ homes are at stake.”

Meyers’ one error was that the city took out the Bank of Marin loan and guaranteed its payment. To secure that loan, title to the property is held by the city, not the tenant’s homeowners association, the Park Acquisition Corp. All loan payment and

maintenance costs have been paid by fees charged to Marin Valley's residents.

For the past six months the city and the PAC have been negotiating over the sale of Marin Valley to its residents. Last month, the PAC countered the city's \$26 million sale demand and offered the city \$23.5 million with outside financing. The city didn't even make a counteroffer, instead it summarily ended negotiation.

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Now the city is saying that the value of its never-called-upon loan guarantee and past staff times is worth \$27 million in cash. I asked city manager Amy Cunningham if the PAC offered to accept the city's \$27 million demand, would the city have accepted it? She replied, "That's a theoretical question," and didn't give a firm reply

That was then. Current councils aren't bound by statements of past councils any more than future councils are committed to promises of today's council. Bottom line: If Marin Valley residents want certainty, get it in writing and in the form of deed recordable commitments that run with the land. Anything less is worthless.

In a public statement, today's council wrote, "After a careful analysis the City Council believes continued (city) ownership is the best way to protect residents and assure rents to remain affordable for years to come." I asked Cunningham for a copy of

the “careful analysis.” The upshot is that it appears she created the “careful analysis” term to describe all past discussions and evaluations that the city has conducted since 1997.

Realistically, except for veteran Councilmember Pat Eklund, the current City Council will not sell Marin Valley to its residents at any price.

To reforge the now-lost bond of trust between the city and Marin Valley residents, negotiation should reopen. The PAC is asking for the basics: “The city would provide MVMCC residents with long-term security, stability and protection for the baseline offered by laws.” It’s time for the city to make a binding, written guarantee that for the next 75 years Marin Valley’s status quo will continue unmodified.