

## LOCAL NEWS

# Novato school district to vet properties for workforce housing



By **KERI BRENNER** | [kbrenner@marinij.com](mailto:kbrenner@marinij.com) | Marin Independent Journal

PUBLISHED: February 6, 2024 at 4:07 p.m. | UPDATED: February 7, 2024 at 9:31 a.m.

---

Officials have put in motion a plan to assess Novato Unified School District properties for use as affordable housing for employees.

“We have to build housing that benefits a high percentage of employees who need help,” Derek Knell, the district’s staff housing development director, told members of a new committee at their first meeting on Monday. “The education workforce has been priced out of the housing market in Marin.”

The district will recruit a consultant to conduct a feasibility study of several of the 33 district properties in Novato. Knell said he and Tracy Smith, the district superintendent, aim to have a consultant in place by the end of this month.

The district intends for the feasibility study to be ready for review by the workforce housing committee at its next meeting on April 15, Knell said.



“Our biggest task is to listen, understand and to be accountable,” Smith told the committee members. “This is a big project, and there are a lot of things to consider.”

Of the 33 district properties, 14 have schools on them and thus lack enough available developable land. Properties that might be used include at least three in the Hamilton area and the San Andreas site in the San Marin neighborhood, Knell said.

The San Andreas site has been under consideration for educator housing for at least seven years, according to Susan Wernick, a member of the Novato City Council who was attending the committee meeting because she represents the area where the San Andreas site is located.

“It is approximately 21 acres,” Wernick added. “It was originally set aside for a middle school.”

The housing would be funded through the sale of surplus district properties, state grants and income from the eventual residents, Knell said.

The development process, which could take five to eight years to complete, coincides with a new state law, Assembly Bill 2295. The law, which took effect Jan. 1, changes the requirements for the sale of surplus property by school districts.

The law also requires that educator workforce housing contain a minimum of 10 residences that are deed-restricted for 55 years, and that most of the homes be affordable, Knell said.

“The housing would be offered to school employees first, then all public employees second,” Knell said. “If there are any units left over, they would be offered to the general public.”

Committee member Greg Mack, a member of the district’s board, said Novato already has numerous housing developments in the works. It will be hard to tell how big a project the district might need in five, six or eight years.

“A lot can happen in six years,” Mack said.

The new housing underway could bring in many families with school-age children, Mack said. Or a boom in artificial intelligence jobs in San Francisco could result in an even higher demand for housing in Marin, he said.

“We could have a glut,” Mack said, referring to a growing school-age population and the need for more teachers.

Part of the process will include a survey of district employees about their housing and affordability needs. A similar survey in 2018 indicated that 63% were considering leaving their jobs within five years because of the cost of housing, while 87% said they would consider staying longer if housing were provided.

“These are our full-time employees who cannot afford to live here,” Knell said.

The district has 258 employees, or about 25% of the workforce, who are within five years of the average retirement age of 68, Knell said. The average length of employment in the district is five years, he said.

“We’re looking to solve the problem of staffing shortages and a high turnover,” he added.

Committee members also will be invited to join field trips to other successful educator workforce housing sites in the state. Those include the Casa Del Maestro development in Santa Clara and 705 Serramonte in Daly City.

In addition to Mack, the committee includes district board members Julie Jacobson and Diane Gasson and district administrators Joshua Braff, Juliette Jones and Francesca Whitcomb. Teachers, retired employee union members, classified staff and other community members also sit on the committee.

## Shop Bright Hues For Spring

Shop the most versatile ballet flat in bright hues for spring. Choose from over 60 colors and prints. Free shipping and returns.

Tieks by Gavrieli | Sponsored

[Shop Now](#)

## 25 Funniest "You Had One Job" Photos

25 Funniest "You Had One Job" Photos

PlayJunkie | Sponsored

[Read More](#)

## Do You Remember Her? Take A Deep Breath Before Looking At Her

Finance Wealth Post | Sponsored

## Epic Signs That Are Spot On

Epic Signs That Are Spot On