



*MEHC is a partnership that includes (1) affordable housing, (2) environmental, and (3) social justice advocates. MEHC works collaboratively to build public support for projects that advance affordable housing, environmental integrity, and social equity—which are equally essential to a livable community.*

In Marin building affordable housing has become highly complex and difficult -- in part due to growth and traffic concerns, environmental and infrastructure constraints, the set-aside of large areas for open space and agricultural protection, a post-Proposition 13 inclination of governments to favor commercial development over housing, the desire of existing residential owners to maximize their own property values, and the increase in residential land values.

During the past two years, the Marin Environmental Housing Collaborative (MEHC) has spanned a longstanding and yawning gap between environmental activists and affordable housing advocates. Decades of conflict had produced entrenched suspicion, communication breakdown, hardened positions, and narrowly partisan perspectives of each side's motives.

MEHC has brought leaders in the environmental and affordable housing communities together into an active, committed, task-oriented group. MEHC has demonstrated that environmental and affordable housing advocates can break out of the cycle of conflict.

Examples of MEHC activities include the following:

- In late 2005 MEHC advocated with the City of Novato and the developer of a proposed Whole Foods mixed-use retail/residential development in downtown Novato to support the inclusion of affordable units within the development.
- In late 2006 MEHC endorsed a Marinwood neighborhood planning effort for a proposed adaptive reuse development to include a grocery store and 100 housing units, including 50 affordable units, near Highway 101
- On an ongoing basis MEHC evaluates development proposals for their environmental strengths and shortcomings and their affordability criteria and then works with the developer and the local government to support increased affordability and reduced environmental impacts. MEHC publicly endorses and actively supports projects that meet MEHC standards. For example, MEHC worked with Mill Valley city officials in an attempt to maximize affordable units at 505 Miller Avenue and met with the developer of 33 San Pablo in San Rafael.
- From March through October 2007 MEHC participated in the public review process for the 2007 Countywide Plan and the Environmental Impact Statement for the Plan. MEHC submitted 5 comment letters to the County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, testified at numerous Commission and Supervisor meetings, and met individually with Supervisors to support policies to increase the supply of environmentally friendly affordable housing.

In addition, MEHC met with each of the Board of Supervisors to urge them to adopt a policy that would require that community plans designate additional lands for environmentally friendly medium to high density affordable housing.

- In early 2007 MEHC endorsed the proposed 4-unit Habitat for Humanity development in the Eagle Rock area of unincorporated Marin County and is working to build and strengthen neighborhood support for this development. MEHC sponsored a neighborhood coffee in July 2007 and will continue to support this Habitat project as it moves through the public approval process.
- MEHC educates the public about the need for environmentally friendly affordable housing. In September 2007 MEHC made a presentation to Planning Directors on affordable housing financing. MEHC members are frequent participants in educational panels and community forums, educating the community and its leaders on environmentally friendly affordable housing.
- MEHC has been awarded a grant from the County of Marin to identify potential sites in unincorporated areas for potential rezoning for multifamily housing and to lead community outreach in neighborhoods regarding potential sites for multiunit housing

MEHC makes connections between adversaries, aligns the goals of competing missions, and provides stronger support for elected officials who want to vote for environmentally friendly affordable housing but hesitate in fear of backlash. MEHC demonstrates that leaders in the environmental and affordable housing communities share vision and values and can collaborate to bring more environmentally friendly housing to Marin.