

To: Rancho Murieta Association  
From: John Merchant Lot 723  
Subject: Comments to the Strategic Plan  
December 7, 2021

While I find merit in many of the tenets proposed by the committee, I have concerns with the committee structure and the process used to develop its findings. This applies particularly to the community and aquatic center that is the primary goal of tenet #4

**1.**The interview process and information gathering (specifically, tenet #4) is heavily influenced by the community developers. Additionally, the committee does not reflect the complete demographic makeup of the community. Tenet #4 states it will commence the costing, design and financing of a community and aquatic center. This process will commence in 2022. What is missing is the input from several important community groups. These include athletic organizations, mom's groups, the Murieta Trail Stewards and SOLOS; just to name a few. An even larger demographic group, "young families (age 25-39) with children living at home" is completely overlooked. This would not be a concern if we were writing a strategic plan for Sun City. As you study the community demographic, take note Rancho Murieta has over 1000 children as reported in the 2020 census. By my estimate, taken from "per capita" census data, they are spread across at least 600 households.

**2.**The committee utilized two "town hall" meetings to gather community input. It used no formal data gathering resource in arriving at its findings. Unfortunately, the demographic representation at the town hall meetings does not reflect the 5,903 people who live in Rancho Murieta. While this is not the fault of the committee, it significantly impacts the report. "Save The Country Club" emerged as a prominent theme, mostly echoed by older, RMCC members who have lived in the community for an extended period of time. If the committee began these town-halls with a formal presentation, and if it had they presented more data (from other resources), a more inclusive community conversation may have emerged.

Below is a quote from tenet #4 of the approved plan:

**2021 - 2023**

**Actively pursue the funding, building and operation of a community center**

3. Tenant #4 suggests the community should approve a potential investment of millions of dollars before it answers several key questions. The process suggests that, after a comment period, the RMA Board of Directors approve the strategic plan. I question the judgement of a board approval until the questions below have been tested by an unbiased, professional polling entity:

**a. What infrastructure, services and amenities do the community see in its vision for the community's future?**

**b. How do these future desires/needs rank in terms of importance?**

**c. Will the community agree to pay for and/or finance these desires/needs with a bond issue or with an assessment over time?**

Polling research, expertly managed and without bias, might help us answer these important questions before we consider a substantial infrastructure investment. This professional guidance and expertise will not be inexpensive. The cost, however is justified when compared to the cost of the infrastructure or the cost of a very expensive mistake.

4. The governance, management and financing of any plan will originate with RMA, RMCC, CSD or the development community. It may also result

in a collaborative effort. What organizational structure does the community prefer? Who should manage and operate the finished product? Do a majority of RMA's members object to joining the "country club? The 2019 RMA survey suggests the community does NOT prefer club membership. Respondents suggest they "might join" the country club if amenities create an incentive to do so. However, there are no "price tags" included that accurately test this response. This remains an unanswered question.

**5.** When meeting with developers, did the committee consider the long range, demographic makeup of the community? I have inserted a chart that shows the age breakdown of the community I extracted from the 2020 census:

Our 2020 census population is 5,903.

		2020	2010	2000	2000
Persons 0-4		218	262	213	49
Persons 5-17		880	873	577	296
Persons 18-64		3005	3026	2484	542
Persons 65&older		1,800	1327	919	408
		5903	5488	4193	1295

Murieta Gardens was incomplete at the time of the 2020 census and is not completely counted.

A careful look at our 2020 demographics reveal the committee has work to do. Over 30% of the community is 65 years old. There are 685 persons living in Rancho Murieta that are OVER 75 years old. The proposed infrastructure and the approval of any financing will be significantly influenced by an older demographic. How will new development change this 2020 demographic breakdown? Did the committee consider or measure the long term demographic impacts of development? Will a change balance the current demographics or will the community continue to grow its "older" demographic? Current data are extremely revealing. See the chart above and interpret it as you will.

6. My vision for the community may differ with other residents or with the committee membership. I have not played golf for several years. Socially, my life does not include the amenities and activities provided by the country club. Like many others use a fitness club that in Folsom. To use it, I travel on an inferior, dangerous and sometimes flooded road.

I will vote for a pool. I will vote for a community center. I would be glad to see it provide child care, even though my “child” is 35 years old and lives 100 miles away. I believe these would be a tremendous community asset and would improve the value of my home.

I do however have significant concerns. I foresee open space, blue oak trees, wildlife, walking and biking trails may shrink or disappear. The landscape, in some areas of Rancho Murieta, is already changing before our eyes. The lifestyle and quality of life we presently enjoy may be replaced by a Rancho Murieta which is “just another development that is way out in nowhere” or “another Elk Grove”.

Rancho Murieta is a UNIQUE place. A common thread we share with each other is that we moved here for what the community is TODAY, and not for what the community promises to be tomorrow. While Rancho Murieta needs development, it also needs balance between today and tomorrow. A strategic plan driven primarily with input from developers and the country club landlord is both unbalanced and inexcusable. It does not fairly represent the vision our current residents. I value development and its future contribution to our community. However, I stress the importance of BALANCE in this process. The committee has a responsibility to gather data and measure the collective, long term vision of the community. It is not a committee “tenet” that the committee make these decisions for us. It is time to actively measure (without bias) the collective vision of the community.

7. SOLOS has 1300 members, all of which are eligible to vote in any referendum conducted to approve (or reject) the financing of new community infrastructure. SOLOS, with 1,300 members is now the community’s largest organization. SMUD was interviewed by the committee. SOLOS was not.

At the very last minute, the RMA Board inserted the words “open space” into the committee report. Here is why that was such an important addition.

In a 2019 survey conducted by RMA, over 1000 house-holds responded to this question:

**WHY DID YOU MOVE HERE?**

RURAL SETTING		718
NATURE & WILDLIFE		609
LAKES AND PATHS		549
GOLF		509
BIKE/WALKING TRAILS		447

The data gathered in the 2019 survey suggests a need to reopen this discussion. Golf and “country club living” is no longer the primary source of community recreation.

8. I would appreciate consideration for this suggestion as the committee proceeds with its work:

**REVISIT TENET #4. CONDUCT A PROFESSIONAL DATA GATHERING EXERCISE.**

1. Do everything possible to add members from all demographic segments of the community. Particularly address young families raising children in the community who are not presently represented on the committee
2. Select a polling consultant to lead RMA through this process
3. Be sure the RMA Board of Directors approves the polling questions to be asked of our residents in an open, public session.
4. Interpret the collected data. Does the data show a path toward a community consensus? Does the data suggest a predominating

community vision? Will a sufficient part of the membership vote to fund this vision?

5. The polling and data collection must be exclusive of the development community. Remove bias and the suggestion that the process is country club or developer driven.
6. Use the polling data and subsequent community input to restate the committee tenets and goals.
7. Conduct this analysis in an open environment that can be viewed by the residents.
8. Publish results.
9. Re-institute a new plan supported by the collected data.

Thank you for your time and for the consideration of the issues I have raised.