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## Marin Voice: Housing deserves civil dialogue

By Lynne Wasley

Guest op-ed column

Posted: 12/27/2010 02:58:00 AM PST

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HOME. That's where we all want to be, especially when it's raining outside and warm inside as we celebrate the holiday season. Yet for some people -- those working, those retired and the young -- that very roof overhead may be a blessing.

The recession has hit some of us hard, and Marin remains an expensive place to live. Many of us know neighbors and friends who are out of work and whose homes are "under water." Some people working here simply just make too little money to afford a place to buy or rent.

In Novato, almost 200 children who attend our public schools are listed as homeless. For their parents, finding a place to live remains out of reach even if they have jobs. As a Novato resident, I am concerned about the welfare of these homeless students.

Marin's primary response to our homeless problem has been the rotating emergency shelter project. Churches throughout the county, including in Novato, have opened their doors and lent their floors to these individuals who have nowhere else to go. I'm proud that we can be charitable in this way. But the long-term solution to Marin's homeless problem is to create a range of homes affordable to different incomes.

How can we keep homeless children safe and provide a dry and warm place to study? Where will our aging population live if they can no longer afford their ranch-style home? Where do those challenged with a disability live when accessible

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housing is in short supply? It's only neighborly to work together to provide housing solutions.

In fact, building apartments, townhomes and condos near Golden Gate Transit bus stops and the future SMART train stations will be a boon for all of Novato.

In a 2009 CEOs for Cities study, higher home values were linked to how walkable a neighborhood is. And once the people who already work and go to school here have an affordable place to live, they may have more disposable income to spend downtown.

You can imagine that having a roof over your head probably deters hopelessness and crime, too. When properties are well-managed by a nonprofit such as Eden

Housing and good quality homes are built that fit into the character of Novato, then we have a solution that will make attractive neighborhoods that benefit us all.

Let's engage in a respectful civil dialogue and work with the city of Novato to plan a better future. I know our community and I believe that we can work together to come up with a solution for the shortage of homes people can afford -- and to do so not only for the overall betterment of Novato, but because it it's the right thing to do, especially for our children.

Lynne Wasley is a San Marin resident, who among other recognitions was honored with the Marin's Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award.

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