

The Future of Rosemont

This article is drafted to invite thinking about the future of our Rosemont community. It complements a related article on a “Big Vision for Rosemont” that describes a number of future scenarios of what we could be if we decided to take certain actions.

This piece is a series of editorials and commentaries that are intended to provoke discussions. As you read these, we invite you to offer your own thoughts to keep the conversation going. The more discussion we have the better the end product and action plan we should create.

There is no particular order to these, and some may overlap a bit. Hopefully they will get you thinking. Again, read them along with the “Vision” piece to get a bigger picture of what Rosemont could become.

Reflecting on Rosemont:

Some Thoughts on Rosemont’s Future – And Action Steps to Get There?

In 2010 at the annual RCA meeting, members shared their ideas and concerns about the future of Rosemont. Those comments have served to guide the Board in planning its activities for the benefit of our community. And of course, more ideas and concerns have been voiced since then and also help guide RCA’s work.

The three main concerns then were safety, appearance, and public services. While we have taken many actions to address these concerns and reduce these problems, they still are with us. And in many ways the public resources available to address them have not increased; much of our success has been the result of dedicated and effective community volunteers. That is good news, and we will need more of that kind of engagement. That strengthens our community and makes it better and more desirable.

But we will also need to find ways to bring more “official” resources to bear on these problems. Volunteers cannot make arrests, issue code violation citations, and press property owners to care or for their property. While volunteers can help as the eyes and ears, we are not prepared to conduct investigations, stakeouts, and interventions. We have neither the preparation nor the authority to take such actions. Yet it is often that level of action that is needed if we are to “clean up” some of the problems that face Rosemont and neighborhoods like ours.

We all have heard the cries of budget limitations that answer our frequent pleas for help, and those fiscal limits are real. But we still need to find creative ways to work with law enforcement and leverage their ability to help us. More Neighborhood Watch groups, park watch groups and just vigilant residents who are prepared and willing to report problems and take appropriate actions are definitely part of the solution.

But perhaps it is time to begin a conversation exploring if other options make sense and are feasible. These could include such actions as investigating creating a property and business improvement district, or PBID; or forming a Community Revitalizations and

Investment Authority (CRIA) to provide resources to improve conditions here; or forming a Rosemont community service district; or organizing to contract for higher levels of certain services we desire. And there may be other options that deserve at least initial consideration.

Any such options will likely draw both support and opposition, and that is good and welcome if we are to come to the best decision – including no action at present – for our community.

There is a limit to the scope of what we can do with volunteers alone. But that scope expands greatly if more people are aware, engaged, concerned and willing to take action. If more people were of a mind to not tolerate misbehavior and problems, would keep their property cleaner and more attractive, and would set a higher standard so that there are clear expectations of what is tolerated in a neighborhood, then we would see some lessening of the problems. But even then the problems would not all go away.

It seems our best first step is to continue to build a widespread sense of community responsibility throughout Rosemont so that we have done all we can to help ourselves. There is strength in numbers, especially if people share a strong and focused resolve. As the late Margaret Mead quote says, “Never doubt the ability of a small number of dedicated people to make a difference; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

So we have two good routes ahead: build our community strength, awareness and pride though engaging more people in making Rosemont ever better; and explore what organizational options exist and their pros and cons so that if we ever decide as a community that we need and want more public services we have a good idea of how to get them, manage them and pay for them.

If you are interested in joining in these conversations around community building and strengthening services, send us your thoughts to info@rosemontca.org and we'll see where we can go with it.

In the meantime, here is an article that frames some possible options we have.

Reflecting on Rosemont: What If We Organized Differently?

Here's a thought just to see what gets stirred up. What if the Rosemont community decided it wanted a higher level of some services to help enhance our area? How could we determine that level of interest, and how could we achieve such higher levels? Would we want to, and would we be willing to, do what was needed to accomplish that? How could we even explore what options may be out there?

Let's play with some scenarios just to make it more real.

What if the Rosemont community was not happy with the crime rate here (though generally it is no worse than other nearby areas) and wanted a higher level of police

service. Or what if we wanted a higher level of code enforcement so we did not have derelict or neglected properties? How could we get those services? Or what if we decided we needed recreation programs here, or more businesses, or a facility in which Rosemont residents could hold events or provide youth programs, etc.?

Since Rosemont is an unincorporated area (i.e. not in an incorporated city) our services are provided by the County of Sacramento. We've all heard how the County's budget has been cut and how the primary requirements of the County (health, welfare and criminal justice) are calling for more resources, so it seems unlikely that there will be funding for significant service level increases any time soon here. So what options do we have?

Well, we could step up our volunteer efforts and do more to resolve these problems ourselves. We could work to have more Neighborhood Watch groups that were more vigilant in preventing crimes and reporting them when they do occur. We could organize code enforcement watch groups to spot and report code violations, hoping authorities would respond in a timely and effective way. Both of these actions are important and good. And it will take a fair amount of organizing and training and dedication to make these successful. And this means lots of dedicated volunteer hours. Rosemont can at least get partway there with this option, and we should continue to pursue it.

But that still requires professional authorities to respond and take the needed law enforcement actions, either regarding crimes or code violations. Will those resources be there to help us?

Or we could explore creating some kind of voluntary organization funded by participants who would benefit directly. For example, a group of businesses could join together and contribute to funding a security officer, even an off-duty deputy sheriff, to do a dedicated patrol of their businesses at certain hours. Depending on the number of participating businesses and the hours patrolled it might cost each as little as a hundred dollars a month (which might be partially offset by increased customer traffic and lower insurance premiums). If more participated the cost could be lower or the hours increased. With such a patrol there could be benefits to the general area as well.

Or we could explore a more formal option like forming a property and business improvement district (PBID). There are already several successful ones nearby. A PBID is a legal structure which property owners agree to form and voluntarily pay for specific services for a set period of time. Near Rosemont is the Power Inn Alliance, a PBID formed by the businesses in the general area of Power Inn Rd. south of Folsom and north of Florin to keep the area clean and secure, and to promote and support the general business climate there. Others include the Fulton Ave. PBID, the Mack Road Partnership, and the Florin Road Partnership.

Or we could explore the formation of a community services district (CSD) to provide specific services. While similar to a PBID, a CSD is usually more general in nature and might provide a wider array of services. Normally a wider area would be included. A nearby example of a CSD is the Elk Grove CSD which provides park, recreation and

fire/medical services, and which preceded the incorporation of the City of Elk Grove which does not provide those services.

Or we could explore the annexation of Rosemont to either the City of Rancho Cordova or the City of Sacramento. This would only happen with a majority vote of the residents of the area annexed, and with satisfactory terms of agreement with the receiving city and also of the County of Sacramento. This process would require extensive studies to determine its financial viability, and significant efforts to inform the public of the benefits and costs and the relative merits of such a move. It would require considerable discussion and deliberation to assure that people fully and fairly understood the pros and cons of such an option, which would take time. This would likely take several years at least.

Or we could explore actual incorporation as a city of our own. This too would require considerable study and a vote of the people in the incorporating area and agreements with the County of Sacramento. Arguably this option would provide the people of Rosemont (or whatever area was incorporated) the most say in what services were provided and how they were funded. However, under present state law, the annexation and incorporation options are not now financially realistic.

Or, of course, we could do nothing more than we have been doing and continue to work with the County to try to make things better under whatever circumstances the County faces. Fortunately, we have had a supportive and helpful representative in Don Nottoli, but he won't be there forever.

In most of these options we would be facing a fairly lengthy process of analyses, reviews and deliberations before any final recommendations or decisions are made. And these steps would not be cheap or without controversy.

So, we in the Rosemont community at least have some options facing us. If we are to take up any consideration of any of these options we will need to do so as objectively as we can, fully understanding the implications of each, and not arriving with pre-formed positions to which we are locked. It will be a process that demands from each of us a willingness to hear all sides, all pros and cons, and think long term for the good of our next generation be they our kids or the future buyers of our homes or businesses.

This review is obviously quite superficial. There is much more to any of these actions than described here – even the no-action option.

So far this matter has not begun to rise to the level of serious consideration in the community. Nor has it arrived on the RCA agenda and the RCA board has therefore no position on any of this, save for pressing the County to provide all the services that we need and are entitled to in Rosemont. Therefore, it is a good time to begin to frame the issues and process of deliberation so people can begin to reflect on them. If there is sufficient interest in exploring any of these options further, RCA stands ready to provide the forum in which the discussion can take place.

What are your thoughts?

Reflecting on Rosemont

What kind of community would you like to live in? What's important to you?

When you were growing up, did you ever dream of the kind of community you wanted to live in? What did it look like? Where was it? What did you dream of doing there? What made you want to be there? What was important about it for you?

Does Rosemont resemble that dream in any way? How? What's here that was also in your dream? What's missing? Does that matter to you anymore, or has that feature become less important to you? Why?

What makes a community important to you? What do you want in a community? Do you look forward to living here or do you want to move elsewhere? Why? When?

What are the features of your ideal community? Could Rosemont provide you with the features of your idea community? Why are they missing here? What could be done to bring those desired features here?

These are the kind of questions we seldom stop to consciously and deliberately ask ourselves, and more importantly, carefully and thoughtfully try to answer. Why not? They are important questions, aren't they?

Could it be that in honestly answering these questions we have to consider why we don't take some kind of action to make our community all that we'd like it to be. That question can be discomfoting for most of us.

Why don't we decide to take some action to make our community what we'd dream it should be? Why don't we talk to friends and neighbors and share our concerns, especially anyone who may be from a different background or culture, and who may not have memories and dreams anything like ours? There's a good chance you are not alone in those feelings, and that others think like you do. And they just might provide the extra motivation and support that helps you get going and take action to make your community all that you want it to be – all that it can be.

What thoughts do you have about the kind of community you'd like to have? What can the rest of us learn from you?

Reflecting on Rosemont

What Makes a Healthy Community?

In many ways our society is undergoing serious changes. While we have always tended to think of ourselves as a nation of individuals, in fact we have been much more interdependent than we think we are. And the more we live in urban or suburban communities, the truer that becomes. In such settings we really do need to be more

mindful of the effects and needs of others, just as we would want them to be mindful and sensitive to our needs and interests.

But that can be a real balancing act and a source of tension. So how do we work out satisfactory and healthy relationships in a community?

Certainly an important way is to create opportunities to learn about and from each other, and to share our own ideas and values and concerns with our neighbors. When we can have such conversations, without having them turn into arguments, we can all benefit. That doesn't mean we have to agree with the other person, just work hard to understand what he or she believes and why.

And how can we do that? Probably by something as simple as saying "hello" when we see someone, especially if they in some way are "different" from us – in age, ethnicity, gender, education, apparent financial status, etc. Even a simple nod and smile acknowledging their existence can open a good conversation. Then be open to sharing something with them, maybe a little compliment, or a question, or even an observation about something you are mutually experiencing such as a nice day or a new feature in the area. Very importantly, pause as you share indicating that you are not idly rushing by with empty pleasantries. Usually we are all "too busy" to be present to others and that shuts down good community relations before they can even begin. (Striking up conversations with strangers at our Food Truck events may be a great place to start.) If this little piece does nothing other than get you to think about how you relate to others, especially strangers, it will have served a purpose. The more we are open to meeting others the less reason we have to fear others. We have too much fear already.

Reflecting on Rosemont

If I Could Make My Neighborhood Better, I'd So What's Stopping You?

It seems that so often in our society today our initial default reaction is to complain or be cynical. Sometimes that reaction is wrapped in an attempt at humor. While humor is vital and can keep us from taking things (including ourselves) too seriously, it can also erode our confidence in institutions and society in general.

Here in Rosemont we occasionally hear complaints – some quite deserved – about how things are or something that has happened. Unfortunately, that too often is where the conversation ends. Seldom is the next logical question asked, much less answered: What can I do about it?

Is it because we somehow expect someone else to make the correction or solve the problem? Some public agency or some business? Or some neighbor?

First, is it really someone else's responsibility? Or is it something you can easily deal with yourself or with friends? If it is someone else's responsibility are they even aware of the problem? If not, why don't you act or report it? We all have phones and email and can look up numbers and web sites. (Have you ever picked up trash on the street or in a parking lot and tossed it in a garbage can?)

If we see something that does not make us proud of our community, what's stopping us from speaking up and taking action? Surely if you are reading this you know that there is a community organization that can help you. In fact, there are lots of resources available to solve most problems or at least mitigate them a bit. But these resources, like yourself, are just volunteers wanting and working to make our community better. They have no more time in the day than you, and probably less talent or energy than you.

If our Rosemont community is to continue to grow and get better, it will take all of us pulling together. So, what's really stopping you from helping? Let us know what you think about all this. And thanks for caring about Rosemont!