

# Friends of Villa Grande: Planning for the Future

Meeting on April 13, 2024

## I. Introduction

The Friends of Villa Grande (FoVG) held a meeting for members interested in talking about the survey conducted during February-April and generating ideas for the Board of Directors about goals, priorities and future actions. The meeting was attended by seven members of the Board of Directors (Roberto Esteves, Kyla Brooke, Rich Holmer, Sukey Robb-Wilder, Tim Cahn, Patty Thayer, and Drew Farley). FOVG members included Nancy and Rick Lopes, Leah Roderman, Jessica Mihaly, Bonnie Peterson, and Leah Norwood. The moderator, Rhian Miller, is also a member of FoVG and provided some of her thoughts in that capacity.

## II. Survey Summary

### A. By The Numbers

Drew Farley presented the results of the member survey. The questions presented and the number of respondents providing numeric ratings (or “yes” and “no” responses) were identified in a flip chart, reproduced below. Approximately fifty people participated in the survey.

Question	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
1. Overall, how well do you think FoVG is achieving its objectives?		3	5	20	21
2. Regarding #1, caretaking the PPP?			1	7	41
3. Regarding #1, maintaining the common areas of VG	2	2	10	18	16
4. Regarding #1, helping with emergency communications and evacuations	2	3	3	12	28
5. Regarding #1, creating a sense of community within VG and the Terraces	3	3	12	13	17
6. Regarding #1, organizing community social activities	3	5	15	15	11
7. Regarding #1, enhancing communications with County officials		2	8	23	17
8. Regarding #1, advocating for improved infrastructure	2	2	8	10	28

9. Regarding #1, informing members of important community meetings			13	20	15
10. Regarding #1, providing propane discounts to members	1	6	14	11	16
11. How should FoVG attract members/encourage community participation?	comments	only			
12. Suggestions for other priorities and ways to improve?	comments	only			
13. Have you ever contacted Board members?	Yes 78%	No 22%			
14. How do you rate the Board's performance over the past two years?		2	8	15	19
15. Do you attend annual meetings in July?	Yes 49%	No 51%			
16. Do you prefer in-person or Zoom meetings?	Zoom 54%	In-Pers. 46%			
17. How well do the Board and its committees connect with you and others about volunteer opportunities?	1	2	10	19	13
18. Does FoVG have relevance for you?			7	10	31

Drew pointed out that there was an insufficient number of responses to perform a formal statistical analysis, and it would be useful to repeat the survey in a year or so, to measure how opinions have or have not changed. That said, he pointed out that the responses were very positive in a few areas, such as maintenance of the Patterson Point Preserve, communication to members about community events, and whether the FoVG has relevance to its members. Other questions elicited a more mixed response, such as #5, #6, #10 and #17. Understandably, those questions and the written comments were the focus of discussion later in the meeting.

## B. Commentary

Sukey Robb-Wilder presented an overview of the comments, both orally and in writing. She used ChatGPT to create a written collation and summary of the comments. A copy of that document is attached for everyone's review.

Sukey also listed what she believes are the key recommendations flowing from the comments. They were:

- We should implement strategies to involve the widest possible group of people in FoVG decision-making;
- We need to manage over-crowding on the PPP beach;
- We should create a plan for safety and accessibility during emergencies;

- The Board must demonstrate a balanced focus on its objectives and avoid disproportionate focus on any one project.

### III. Discussion Session

The discussion portion of the meeting, which lasted about 90 minutes, focused on six areas where the survey (and particularly the survey comments) suggested room for improvement or the need for changes. Rhian Miller moderated the discussion and took notes. Patty Thayer (FoVG Secretary) also took notes. For each section below, we have listed the many questions raised during the meeting, followed by a summary of ideas/suggestions made for improvement. Note: not every question raised was answered during the meeting.

#### A. PPP and Common Areas

##### 1. Questions

- Why do community members complain about FoVG acting like an exclusionary group, yet call on FoVG to figure out how to exclude people from going through the PPP to the beach?
- Why does FoVG feel it is entitled to make rules for use of the PPP or common areas without inviting full community participation, such as deciding who can go to the beach (during the Pandemic) and who can park in places that clearly are legal?
- How can non-members engage with FoVG about things like anchorage, parking and access to the beach?
- If no one shows up to the meetings of the Board of Directors (which are open to all meetings), how can the Board get input from the community?
- What is the “Villa Grande community” in terms of geography and how should it be defined, given the number of homeowners who live far away and are infrequent visitors?
- What can FoVG or anyone else legally do to give beach privileges to residents in preference to out-of-towners?

##### 2. Ideas/Suggestions/Comments

- We need to add more garbage cans and a second port-a-potty to deal with the crowds at the beach.
- The community needs to understand that FoVG is legally prohibited from giving special beach access or other privileges to anyone, given its charter with Open Spaces.
- FoVG is legally tasked with maintaining the firehouse and town square, consistent with County requirements. So, it has to regulate any events that take place there.

- People should show up to the once-a-month meetings of the Board of Directors to present ideas/complaints, etc. The Board encourages that.
- Past decisions can be reviewed and changed, if there is good reason to do so. All the more reason for more people to participate in meetings.

## B. Membership

### 1. Questions

- Should there be any geographic boundaries for membership in FoVG or for any of its perks (such as propane)?
- Has the organization adequately explained the benefits of being a member of FoVG? If not, how best to do so?
  - Stewardship of PPP
  - Boat anchorage
  - Access to some social events
  - Propane rates (this is a sore spot for many)
- What can FoVG or anyone else legally do to give beach privileges to residents in preference to non-residents? Or to reduce crowding on the beach?
- How many members are there (about 250 according to the database)?
- How can the organization improve and broaden participation in decision-making?

### 2. Ideas/Suggestions/Comments

- Open up the committees to non-members of FoVG and make clear that they can “vote” if that ever is required.
- Consider opening up all events to non-members.
- Add more garbage cans and a second port-a-potty to deal with the crowds at the beach.
- Appoint a volunteer coordinator whose role would be to galvanize everyone to help with the work, whether Preserve, recreation, community outreach, or finance.
- Revive and invigorate the Facebook page to alert people about volunteer events and community events. (Note: some are against this because it could increase overcrowding at the beach.)
- Organize tables at the great community events during the year to attract new members and volunteers.
- The current committees are PPP/Restoration; Recreation/Social events; Membership; Finance; Community Communication; Firehouse; and Emergency Preparations. Some are not active due to lack of membership and others need more help from the community to become more relevant.
- Hold the annual membership meeting on a Friday evening and serve wine/cocktails.

## C. Recreation/Social Events

### 1. Questions

- Should FOVG continue to organize and manage social events, or is that something better left to the wider community to do, with the support of FoVG?
- If FoVG should continue to organize events, which ones and why?
- Should social events organized by FoVG be focused on fund-raising, fun, community or all of the above?
- Should there be FoVG docents at the PPP during summer months? (I.e., do they give positive returns or are they viewed as “policing” the PPP?)

### 2. Ideas/Suggestions/Comments

- While social events are part of the core and history of FoVG, we should focus on smaller, less expensive events (e.g., coffee hours) and less on big fund raisers.
- We should focus on events at the PPP and beach, such as bonfires and picnics.
- FoVG should sponsor the events that the community already created, including Talent Show, Halloween, Turkey Trot, and Mardi Gras.
- We might hold a party to invite the community to talk about future events and who might volunteer at those events.
- We should help to create more family friendly events.

## D. Prioritization

### 1. Questions

- Why should FoVG support non-FoVG activities?
- What is the right balance between being inclusive and exclusive? If there is a sense that FoVG is trying to run everything, won't scaling back help change the perception of the organization?

### 2. Ideas/Suggestions/Comments

- We should identify other individual leaders to support and collaborate with us for community events.
- Consider changing the boat anchorage policy to allow non-members to use the chain while paying.
- We need to achieve a balance between giving members perks and including all of the community.
- Supporting local initiatives like the Talent Show will help improve community relations.

## E. Emergency Preparedness/Response

### 1. Questions

- Does FoVG have a responsibility to pursue more in this area, or is this an example of Mission Creep that should be avoided?
- What is the definition of an “emergency” that would be the responsibility of a FoVG committee?
- Isn't it better to let neighbors take care of neighbors, as we now do?
- Aren't other groups/agencies better situated to deal with emergencies?
- While we need an entity to be on top of emergency preparedness and response, is FoVG the best one to do this, or do we need to create a new organization?

### 2. Ideas/Suggestions/Comments

- Create a “listserv” or other online group that would be available to everyone.
- Advocate for a closer cell tower.
- We should ally with existing groups and agencies to increase emergency communications.
- Coordinate with Duncans Mills, Monte Rio and Guerneville about emergency planning.

## F. Communications With Members and Community

### 1. Questions

- Should we change the format of FoVG newsletter to deemphasize the role of the Board?
- Are there ways to change the newsletters and other communications to reduce the concern about “policing the PPP/community”?

### 2. Ideas/Suggestions/Comments

- Restart the Facebook page to communicate our successes and recruit volunteers.
- Rebrand the community newsletter to reduce the presence of FoVG.

## G. Board of Directors

### 1. Questions

- What is the current size of board and how large can it be?
- Should there be term limits or staggered terms?
- Could we ask members to sit on the Board as a condition of membership?

- Is the Board “overreaching” and, if so, how should that be addressed?
- Should the Board seek advice from other organizations in Sonoma about best practices?
- Should we ask Open Space to take over the PPP?
- Should we create positions for “outside” board members?
- If FoVG is beset by Mission Creep, should we encourage the formation of a new entity to take care of the lower river community?

## 2. Ideas/Suggestions/Comments

- We need to educate everyone about what it means to be a Board member and when turnover or vacancies exist.
- We need more non-VG residents on the Board.
- The Board should research other boards and see how they deal with overcrowding on beaches (Odd Fellows, Rio Nido, Finch Mountain).
- We need to revise and restate the Board’s major objections and focus.
- We must make an effort to educate people on what the FoVG has accomplished over the past decades and on what we continue to do. (Create a list of accomplishments and shore up the Facebook page.)
- Change the community newsletter to delete the FoVG logo.
- Address the issue of how Board members are acting in their official v. personal capacities.
- Figure out how to increase participation in Board meetings. Because there are no tangible outcomes from most meetings, people don’t want to show up.

## IV. Conclusions And Next Steps

The Board of Directors convened immediately after the Future Planning meeting to discuss all inputs and decide on next steps. One thing that was clear to all Directors is the need to recruit new leadership and participants to carry out the essential work of FoVG. A second clear priority was a re-examination of the scope of work that FoVG (and, thus, the Board) will undertake going forward. For example, we should consider becoming more of a supporter/facilitator of community events that others undertake rather than an instigator and supervisor of those events. In addition, the Board agreed that it was important to circulate the results of the survey (and this report) to all members; to solicit any additional reactions to the data and comments from FoVG members; and to reach out beyond membership to receive input about all issues raised by the survey and during the recent meeting.<sup>1</sup>

Drafted by Patty Thayer  
Vice President and Secretary,  
Friends of Villa Grande

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<sup>1</sup> Several people noted that the invitation to this meeting went only to members of FoVG and questioned whether it would have been better to include the broader community. The Board agreed to take up this question at its next meeting and specifically agree on a way to reach out beyond membership.