

Save the Noyo Headlands

By [SUBMITTED](#)

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Community Column

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The State of California is taking steps to protect the integrity of our elections from what is termed “disinformation”. For these purposes, disinformation is different than misinformation, depending on the intent of the person spreading the information. Misinformation is considered to be speech that is false information that may be passed on due to mistake, ignorance, or confusion.

Disinformation, on the other hand, is considered to be false information that is designed to deliberately or covertly influence public opinion or obscure the truth.

By this definition, the article by Mr. Pinoli in the recent Fort Bragg Advocate falls into the latter category of false information.

Mr. Pinoli’s claims regarding the Fort Bragg City Council’s actions are politically motivated. His hostile, accusatory tone is intended to influence the voters of Fort Bragg to elect council members sympathetic to Mendocino Railway’s projects. He distorts the intent of the Council to control the future of Fort Bragg, and his article misrepresents the truth.

Mr. Pinoli claims that the City council is “rudderless”, that they have “squatted “on the former mill site for “20 years doing nothing”, that they have “wasted” the opportunity to develop the mill site, that the council “did nothing but bicker for 20 years accomplishing nothing”.

This is absolutely untrue; the Fort Bragg city council, along with citizen groups, have been working for 20 years on a plan, since long before the purchase by Sierra Railroad, to develop the Noyo Headlands. Koch Enterprises and Georgia Pacific were nearing an agreement with the City. The City was attempting to purchase the land, until Sierra Railroad used a claim of eminent domain, to which they may not be entitled, to acquire the property and pull the rug out from under the city. This move may have been intended to limit the liability of Koch Industries and Georgia Pacific for the deadly contamination on the site.

He also says that in a “sleazy series of backstabbing maneuvers, unworthy of elected officials”, the city rejected the railway’s offer to “clean it up and work with the city on its development and permitting”. This is ludicrous, considering the method by which Sierra Railroad acquired this property. In prior proceedings, the railroad disavowed its claim to be a public utility, which would entitle them to use eminent domain, when it served them financially. They can’t have it both ways.

Mr. Pinoli claims that the city has lied about efforts to clean up the mill site, that they have embarked on a “senseless war to make it impossible for the railroad to clean up and develop the site along the lines of what our community has for 20 years said it wanted.” In fact, the railway’s representatives believe that they are not bound by local or state regulations, but claim to be exempt by their status as a “public utility”, which they are not. They are also using legal loopholes to attempt to avoid a comprehensive cleanup of the mill pond, which could lead to disastrous ocean contamination in case of earthquake or storm surge. It is as though the railroad is at war with the city.

Mr. Pinoli claims that the Council has “attacked” a local business that brings in millions of tourist dollars. True, the Skunk is a local business, but its owner, Sierra Railroad, is not. Further, he says they have “spread lies to prevent visitors from coming to Fort Bragg and riding Mendocino Railway’s trains.”

This is hyperbole; negative publicity will not prevent visitors to Fort Bragg from riding the Skunk Train. Mr. Pinoli has been publicly attacking the City Council in the media for months. Fort Bragg is now suing the railroad to assert its legal authority over the planning process, and it is being joined in the suit by the California Coastal Commission and the Attorney General’s office. These heavy hitters wouldn’t be involved without cause.

The City Council recognizes that the Skunk Train is a vital part of the local economy and history.

The Skunk Train per se is not the issue, but the mega development the railway wants to put on the headlands, with little regard for local and state planning regulations, a development which will once again make Fort Bragg a Company Town.

Mr. Pinoli claims that the city is blocking the efforts of the railway to “put money in the pockets of a couple of council members”, calling it “shameful”. Mr. Pinoli, do you have proof of this? What is your evidence? Your hostility makes me question what kind of a partner the company you represent would be for the City of Fort Bragg.

Perhaps the City is checking this development because the railroad claims to be immune from local and state regulations, seizes land belonging to private individuals, and misrepresents the facts to government agencies and the public. Or because the City’s own efforts and vision regarding the headlands have been sabotaged for a corporate model that does not reflect the will of the people.

We need a City Council that represents the people, not Sierra Railroad. Please vote responsibly.

— *Daney Dawson, Fort Bragg*

The “Community Column” section features opinion articles, op-eds, and editorials submitted by community members to the Advocate-News. Please submit Community Column items to the Editor by Noon on Fridays by emailing editor@advocate-news.com.