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Letters to the Editor: Bay Farm residents seek voice at City Hall

Letters to the Editor
 Thursday, August 14, 2014 - 00:01

Now that there is a full slate of candidates for City Hall elections, which of them is going to stand up for Bay Farm Island and be our voice in Alameda politics?

Candidates should be falling over each other to court our votes. Bay Farm is one of the biggest, most consistent voting blocks in Alameda. Nearly every candidate to win the popular vote on Bay Farm has also won the citywide general election.

Plus, Bay Farm has a unifying issue.

For the third time since 2007, Ron Cowan and his

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company, Harbor Bay Isle Associates, want to develop something. First, they wanted to put homes across the street from the business park. Then, it was homes on the golf course. Now, it is homes over the very recreation center they built for the community.

The company has even proposed building a hotel down the street from Amelia Earhart Elementary School (the largest elementary school in Alameda). There is also talk at City Hall about opening Island Drive to the business park, but no discussion about improving the flow of existing traffic.

This absurd cycle of repetition could go away if City Hall just told Harbor Bay Isle Associates to knock it off. The company has sued the city four times since the 1970s (and never won).

Unfortunately, no elected member of the City Council lives on Bay Farm Island. Not one of them knows what it is like to deal with Harbor Bay Isle Associates on a near-constant basis. I have dealt with this company twice since buying my house in 2010.

The really frustrating thing is that every current and future elected member of the City Council needs votes from Bay Farm Island to win an election. And I mean they literally need our votes.

No City Council winner since 2002 has lost the popular vote on Bay Farm Island and then won the general election, according to the Alameda County Registrar of Voters. Win the popular vote on Bay Farm and odds are very, very good that the candidate will win the general election.

Just ask Mayor Marie Gilmore. Bay Farm voters accounted for 24 percent of all her votes in both elections for City Council (2004 and 2008). We were 22 percent of her total votes when she ran for mayor in 2010.

Or ask Councilman Tony Daysog. Bay Farm accounted for

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29 percent of his votes in 2002 and 20 percent in 2012.

Former councilman and current candidate Frank Matarrese is another good example. Bay Farm voters made up 24 percent of his votes in 2002 and 25 percent in 2006.

The reason for Bay Farm's influence is simple: We vote.

Bay Farm voter turnout has averaged 73 percent in every City Council election since 2002, compared just 70 percent for the rest of Alameda, according to the Registrar of Voters.

In the last City Council election, Bay Farm residents made up 21 percent of Alameda's votes despite being just 18 percent of the total population here, according the registrar and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Bay Farm Island gets City Council members elected. Yet we have no voice.

Part of the reason for that is the city charter. It allows for general representation instead of district-specific representation. That makes it possible for a City Council member to publicly identify with a specific area of Alameda, but be responsible for representing the interests of all residents.

This style of general representation inherently limits equal representation at City Hall for all Alameda residents. The reality is, the City Council has the authority to speak for us, but is not directly responsible to any of us.

The real question is, how much longer Bay Farm will lack representation? There are nearly 30 homeowners' associations in the community with built-in communication networks and regular elections for board seats.

Bay Farm is a great place to live because we share common interests. We care about our families, schools and neighborhoods regardless of our backgrounds or

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Thu, Nov 6, 2014

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Sat, Nov 8, 2014

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ethnicities.

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We also care about decisions at City Hall and how they impact us.

One candidate for City Council has already flaunted his disdain for Bay Farm at his election kick-off. The other candidates should not be so naïve.

Tim Coffey

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Submitted by **David (not verified)** on Fri, Aug 15, 2014

With the socioeconomic disparities across the city, from Alameda Point, to the 'west-end,' excluding Alameda Point, to the Gold Coast, to the East-end, to Bay Farm Island, there is a case to be made for :

o Replacing our at-large council system with a ward system. Bay Farm, East-end, Central Alameda, West End, Alameda Point.

o Paying councilmembers a salary. As it stands, only the independently wealthy can really afford to run for council. Regular working folks are basically locked-out of running, as it's not practical for most people to effectively be a councilmember and hold a job to earn a living.

Submitted by **marian** on Fri, Aug 15, 2014

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