

Topical Topics

Caspar Committee

Compiled ideas shared with Ariana Bayer over email February 2022

Headings and emphasis are hers.

First thoughts:

As I like to say when taking on big projects: “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.”

Topics I heard that will need exploration and consensus include:

Housing: senior and affordable.

Transportation

Water

Energy

Communication

Education

Farmers' Market

- I think any planning/thinking around community resilience, agriculture, disaster preparedness, etc will always appeal to a large segment of the community.

- The high-level thinking regarding the “township” and shaping the town center is spot on. Like most things, without some structure or plan, we cannot expect real progress, no matter how many good intentions there are among the community members. Which makes these initial conversations a critical component of the process.

Impacts on existing residents:

Any discussion of expanding development and increased public activity, particularly in central Caspar, will have to anticipate and consider impacts on our neighbors. Parking alone will be a huge consideration as we consider expanded development and activity around the Community Center. I'm thinking particularly of impacts on the Potts' residence and Jan Boyd's immediately across the street. Neither did I hear any mention of impacts on the shul. We also need to consider how to address more “tragedy of the commons” impacts such as litter.

Safety

One thing I cherish about Caspar is that it is a safe place for a woman to live alone. Four of us in a row there in central Caspar.

Impact from/on neighboring communities:

Lastly, we need to stay aware of our neighboring communities, and how any Caspar initiatives may impact them. Fort Bragg currently has a lot of boarded up storefronts. Would replicating some services here like a farmers' market, grocer, or coffee house help or hurt those economies? Would these be wise investments now for Caspar entrepreneurs? I do think that expanded Caspar housing and visitation will ultimately help the regional economy, but short term I think local enterprises should proceed with caution so as not to invest without solid market research and forecasts.

Dark Sky

I've long advocated for a town lighting ordinance so we don't make like Fort Bragg & keep getting brighter & brighter. I have to say that I will go full on NIMBY about any dark sky unfriendly lighting within sight of my house! That does not mean no lighting, it just means smart lighting.

<https://www.darksky.org/our-work/lighting/public-policy/lighting-ordinances/>

I thought I had written a newsletter article about dark sky friendly lighting but now I can't find it. It was Caspar that taught me that one could value & protect the dark sky. **Back in the planning process before I came back here, the community was asked to identify its sacred places. They chose the Headlands, the duck pond, the dark sky.** That awareness still makes me tear up with gratitude. I did have fun looking through our newsletters & highly recommend that for all who are interested in community planning: <https://casparcommons.org/Press/index.php>

Highway Crossing

Looking for that newsletter I also came across these highway crossing update (with my dark sky pitches included):

<https://casparcommons.org/news/News1805.pdf>

<https://casparcommons.org/news/News1709.pdf>

Bette Goldfarb worked for years -- decades! -- to improve the crossing & what you see now is her success. I absolutely am in favor of working on a crossing away from the cars (for wildlife too -- I wonder if there is money out there for that?

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2021/11/15/new-funding-for-wildlife-highway-crossings-should-help-animals-and-drivers-alike>), but want to make sure that Bette's hard work is acknowledged. & CalTrans had some heroes, including the man who took on my complaint about seeing the light on the other side of the highway from home & custom-built the little protective screen on that one to appease me. I still see it, but it's not as bright as the moon any more.

- The Fern Creek/Hwy 1 crossing has been a perennial topic with the community, and any movement in that regard would be welcome. I know efforts have been made to add a light, and there has even been talk of a walk-over or -under. As with many Caspar ambitions, the trick is parsing actionable steps from good ideas. But I think there is a case to be made based on public safety. I think Judy Tarbell put in quite a bit of effort on this front.

- Roads, Transportation: The Fern Creek Road intersection with Highway 1 is dangerous for walkers. We might lobby Caltrans for improvements that would make the intersection more user-friendly (blinking lights and crosswalk, for example). We might also push for bicycle paths or bicycle lanes where appropriate. It is conceivable that there could be a pedestrian tunnel or bridge under or over the highway, thus linking West and East Caspar.

Duck Pond

- Same for the duck pond - it is such a landmark and is really well-suited for a more public use. I would be interested to discuss models for maintenance/upkeep as well as sources of improvement funding.

- The creation of a town park surrounding the Duck Pond. One vision for the Duck Pond includes a path around the pond with a boardwalk and bridge in the marshy areas, historical and ecological signage, and an easement creating a permanent wildlife preserve.

Downtown

We should seek models of small community success and try to identify crucial components. I keep seeing a small European village that thrives with, say, a grocer/hardware, a pub, a school, church, an apothecary, a coffee shop, and an inn. With dependable bus or ferry service to the doctor or transportation hub. Maybe a real post office.

I am not sure how a Community Land Trust might work under the new ownership, but perhaps this could be looked at.

- The Community Center and surrounding land seems like a great place to start, and makes a natural extension of the community hub that already exists. I am a fan of the ideas I've heard around possible uses for the "RV parking" area adjacent to the community center - volleyball or other outdoor activities that cater to all ages (rather than another dedicated playground). A place for outdoor concerts or movie nights? So many possibilities, but something that builds on the presence of the community center and the pub (assuming it will reopen one day) makes sense to me.

- The expansion of the Community Center parcel to include the RV lot south of the Community Center, raising the possibility that there could be a "Town Square" surrounding the parking lot. One vision has the buildings facing inwards, with a boardwalk connecting them: possibly a fire station, a coffee shop, a country store, and possibly a permanent, covered, farmers' market structure that would enhance the ability to buy and consume truly local food produced right here in Caspar.

Agriculture

Gowan's advice on the economic limits of organic gardening in her experience suggests that smaller, dispersed agriculture makes sense, and might be a more sustainable stewardship model considering water supply, agricultural land carrying capacity, and wildland impacts.

- Local agriculture. It has been said that there are young people who would like to farm here on the Coast, but that there is insufficient land available for farming. A century ago, the North Coast both produced most of the food for a larger population and food and fiber for export. Today most of our food is imported. The solution might include an agricultural land trust that would preserve farmland from development and provide land that could be used for local food production.

Housing

- Housing is one issue that I definitely hold dear. I've been in several community meetings over the last decade designed to explore options in this area (back when the community was trying to figure out how to buy the land off of the Caspar Cattle Company), and again it seems like a popular topic. One point I would add is that I have frequently heard elder housing mentioned as a priority, and I believe that overlooks the far more practical need of affordable housing in general, specifically for individuals that would provide the support services that an aging community would need. We are fortunate to have programs that cater to the economically disadvantaged and the elderly or infirm (admittedly never truly sufficient), but we really fall down here on the coast in terms of access for capable, motivated people that lack the financial resources to afford life out here. I've watched far too many great members of this community leave because they simply could not afford the high home prices and non-existent rentals. I would be in favor of looking at models that offer paths to affordable housing that also inherently preserve the affordability - meaning they are structured such that when you sell the asset the price is capped at some metric that modestly tracks with inflation, rather than market pricing (Sarah McCormick with Fort Bragg City Planning is doing some interesting work in this area,

fyi). That way the entire system can perpetuate rather than dying after the first owners. But again, there is a serious shortage of opportunity for the people that would ultimately be the teachers, and nurses, and service people, and work in the Caspar shops, etc etc, and I don't know that this gets enough attention in these discussions. In short - who will work at the elder care facility, were that to be the outcome? That is not a trivial question.

- **Housing.** It is evident that there is a serious shortage of housing on the North Coast – a shortage exacerbated recently by people and investors from elsewhere buying land in anticipation of further increases in land value. It is possible that some of the land in downtown Caspar could be developed as housing, easing the area-wide shortage, and adding homes to Caspar itself. A community land trust has been mentioned as a possible way to make homes and farms affordable to people on modest incomes while maintaining a measure of community control over what is built there. That a large portion of the land surrounding the Community Center is zoned RR-20 is severely limiting. It is possible that we should apply for more appropriate zoning in the downtown area.

Water

This alone will need much research if we are not to develop beyond carrying capacity. A CSD (Community Services District) may be a good approach, but ultimately, water availability is more and more an unknown. **Consensus:** There may come a need for a community vote on who wants in or out of any proposed water treatment and distribution system, and some idea of the costs involved. Anyone with familiarity with the Caspar South and Mendo water system issues should be consulted.

- The quite extensive aquifer under the lands that have now transferred raises the possibility that the water resource can be expanded to serve more homes in Caspar, possibly including homes to the east as well as more of the homes in the downtown area, and conceivably making water available to residents of Mendocino, revenues from which might make the water system financially workable so that the water can be treated appropriately.

Education

Some of us imagine that portions of the land could house a school or institute ... possibly a permaculture / biointensive training program, possibly a demonstration farm, possibly in collaboration with Jug Handle Creek Farm & Nature Center, Fortunate Farm, Ecology Action, and Victory Gardens.

Municipality

I do not get the sense that anyone is proposing to establish a municipality here, and for good reason; we have neither the population nor tax base to support such —see Mendocino. Whatever plan results would therefore be best guided by County zoning rules, and state law.

Caspar Community Services District

The possible creation of a Caspar Community Service District (CCSD) that would conceivably manage the undergrounding of the electric lines in the downtown area, the creation of a local micro-grid, steps toward universal broadband coverage, the development of the water resource to serve more homes in Caspar, the organization of a fire station, the possible creation of a community leach field, and so forth.

Funding

What I did not hear, and which will be crucial, is funding. I see this need as identifying and taking advantage of governmental funding sources, combined with an otherwise organic approach that encourages individual enterprises such as the inn.

In thinking more about Caspar development, I wonder how much front-end effort we really want to expend on developing and getting a consensus on a wish list to present to two private landowners absent any identified funding, or a development proposal from either one. We also lack regulatory authority to say, "Here are our community development guidelines."

It's not really a chicken-egg situation, especially not in the case of Michael St. John, who has been active in the area for years. Ms. Bayer and Mr. MacDonald can certainly research water system development and what's involved in creating a CSD or private water company—existing single parcel well owners may need some convincing to participate, even if invited.

What the community might best provide is responding to surveys by both property owners, including how many are interested in participating in say, a water district, or a CLT, or strictly as affected neighbors. The only thing the community would lack is a comprehensive awareness about what those desires are, but the community at large could be cc'd on participants' responses via a Caspar email slot. Residents are still free to present their concerns through the state and county permitting processes.