



YEEHAW! Continues

His original lawyer left the area abruptly in 2019 in the middle of his case due to health issues, leading to the next attorney who, Charles claims, “Dropped the ball and messed up my case by not filing the proper documents in time.” their letters. Charles said, “I wasn’t even notified about the Supervisors meeting in February. I wouldn’t have known if a friend didn’t happen to see it on the agenda...I was up against the county alone, and I still am.”

Charles noted he had a difficult time with maintaining legal representation during his appeal process. His original lawyer left the area abruptly in 2019 in the middle of his case due to health issues, leading to the next attorney who, Charles claims, “Dropped the ball and messed up my case by not filing the proper documents in time.”

The county offered Charles to leave two of the original structures, but were adamant that they cannot be occupied.

When asked where Charles planned to go, he said “There’s tragedies of justice and tragedies in life, I know of plenty of places on the bluff I can sleep I guess.”

Ford said one of his primary concerns is the huge number of homeless people in our county. Ford stated, “I fully grasp the humanitarian side of this.”

Ford elaborates,

“The struggle is how to help people. Not everybody can be helped in the same way, not everybody can be housed in the same way. There really is a need for a strategy that addresses the many ways people seek shelter...for those who do [have cars], having a safe parking place that is preferably managed, maybe with some degree of resources. That is something our department is working on right now... Another thing that was discussed when we did the housing element is tiny home villages... or using tough sheds, with a centralized kitchen, dining, restroom, shower facility. Some way to get people out of the elements but also give them good utilities with water and plumbing and give them a safe place to have hygiene and food. Those are things we have to change our thinking a little bit. It can’t be a traditional housing style that will never meet the needs represented...So we are trying to do that, to create opportunities to do that from a regulatory perspective.”

For residents at Yeehaw the proposals sound a lot like what they have already, or pale in comparison. Some feel living in Charles’s old buses in the redwoods is better than car camping in a managed parking lot with other cars. Others feel a compost toilet is more sustainable and safe than a porta potty. Yeehaw, they say, has a communal kitchen, dining, restrooms, shower facilities and homes to keep people out of the elements.

This reporter spoke with Claire’s partner, Andy Terra during the Save Yeehaw BBQ, blockade and Carnival on August 22.

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Andy spoke about how he just replaced the roof on their one bedroom garden home. He pointed at his approximately 10 x 12 tough shed sitting next to their much larger house. Andy asks, “Does the county really want my family to live in the tough shed instead of our home?”

Ford commented on the inherent tension between affordable housing and the cost of abiding by building codes and other land use ordinances, commenting, “There probably are ways to get there, but it does take time and there is a cost to rezoning, to change the general plan to land use and environmental studies needed to do that. Here we are talking about affordable housing and I’m talking about the cost of doing things, that’s the inherent tension in all of this.”

This is a much more expansive story than Yeehaw of course; we have all endured a year and a half of a global pandemic with no end in sight, lockdowns, an economic collapse, all amidst an existing housing crisis that’s only grown more troubling. We are coming up on the expiration of the rent moratorium on September 30 that once provided some relief to tenants during the pandemic and subsequent economic crisis and people are concerned that this will send millions of families to the streets for inability to pay back rent. Many community members are asking if there isn’t something more that can be done to address issues related to lack of affordable housing and poverty in Humboldt County that is more congruent for the times we are living in.

Local Attorney Eugene Denson is an expert on land use matters and abatements. Denson offers advice to the county on this news site in August, saying,

There are two intertwined problems that local governments can solve, and both are related to land use ordinances. They are homelessness, and an acute housing shortage. Present County ordinances are responsible for most of the homeless people in our county being homeless. We need more housing, but the county is preventing it from being created by insistence on an outdated dream of universal suburbia, and making the housing shortage worse by code enforcement preventing rural people from living in RVs and similar vehicles on rural parcels. Starting Jan 1, 2022 look for a direct assault on “substandard” housing which could destroy hundreds, perhaps thousands of homes. Tiny homes, trailers, RVs, MIL apartments – all potential ways to expand housing, lower rents and housing prices, and house the homeless. We need a major reconsideration of our land use and housing ordinances and we need it now.

Ford told this reporter that the County is working to extend the deadline for the Safe Homes Program now.

The question on many local residents’ minds is if their unpermitted homes could face demolition if Yeehaw’s residences are destroyed by the County. But, Ford clarified to the public that the County is not actively looking for unpermitted homes, Yeehaw’s demolition is code related but it was complaint driven.

Ford says,

“We do not look for unpermitted homes... There’s three things that we are directed by the Board of Supervisors to do, 1. Illegal cannabis cultivation, 2. When we see abandoned vehicles to deal with those and 3. Parcels that are just filling up with junk, if we see that it’s a significant nuisance [our goal is] to be proactive about helping the property owner get it cleaned up... But everything else is complaint driven.”

When asked about the specifics of the complaints and who made them, Ford explained, “The complaints are not public record.”

Ford could share that the original complaint was made in 2001, then subsequent complaints were made, with the most recent in 2017. Ford could say the complaints pertained to, “Illegal structures, septic, waste, junk and junk vehicles, building code violations which are safety issues in addition to electrical issues.”

Denson commented on the matter of anonymous complaints on his Rights Organization KMUD radio show, saying, “We had cannabis enforcement for some years and it turns out the complaints were made by the cops.”

Charles explains, “I don’t know who would complain, my only neighbor is Mercer Fraser, I’m surrounded on three sides. My other neighbors love me.”

Dianne and Stan Rowland agreed with Charles and even offered to stand at his gate to prevent the demolition. The Rowland’s contacted Kym Kemp this week detailing their experience as a neighbor, writing,

“We live near Yeehaw and haven’t had any problems from these folks. We’re friendly with one of the regular walkers from there. He told us how they counsel newcomers, have community meals, don’t allow drugs and generally help each other out. I know at least two other neighbors who also support Yeehaw’s existence.”

I find it extremely troubling that the code enforcement people just want to wipe them out of existence rather than assist them. It sounds like they just want to grab their land and frankly we need a lawyer who can help stop this land grab. And for those who think the Yeehaw residents are lucky to live in expensive Trinidad well, check out their location, next to the quarry with two cell phone towers. I have WAY more problems with the quarry traffic, loud giant generators every few months from PG&E and the cell towers. It is NO picnic for the Yeehaw people living next to this crap!”

The former postmaster of Trinidad and neighbor of Yeehaw for 29 years, Larella Moore wrote in an email to District Five Supervisor Steve Madrone, saying,

“[I] have never had a problem with anyone at the “commune” up the road. Over the years I’ve personally known 4 young families who stayed at Yeehaw long enough to gather their resources until they could graduate to better jobs and more conventional living arrangements. Without the low rent safety of

Yeehaw, these families would most likely have been living in their cars or on the streets. Yeehaw is not a drug den, nor is it a cult and I have never known anyone to get sick from their composting toilets. It is a safe refuge for single parents with young children, elderly low income people and some folks whose philosophies don’t quite align with the mainstream... Go after Mercer Fraser for polluting the creek running from the Quarry if you want to pursue violations. Charles is a bit of an anarchist. His interest is in protecting people over gaining personal profit. One might call that anti-American. The residents of Yeehaw need a roof over their heads and Charles provides it. Remove Yeehaw and you’re putting at-risk peaceful people on the street. I’d rather my tax money be spent on eliminating corporate evil, not on screwing over poor folks. Leave Yeehaw be.”

Negotiations Are Ongoing

The County originally said they would begin demolition late August/ early September. Though since then, Charles hired David Nicoletti, owner of DTN Engineering, who put a pause to the demolition at least temporarily as he negotiates with the County to come to a mutually acceptable agreement for all involved.

Nicoletti wrote to Director Ford to request a two month extension in order to “Address issues onsite and to bring Yeehaw into compliance.”

Nicoletti stated to Ford, “I would like to have enough time to develop a plan to present to the County for the demo of specific buildings, removal of old vehicles, improve others for permitting, present ideas for new construction, and address the wastewater issues on site... Yeehaw does provide a service for Humboldt County and with the housing crisis during COVID, I feel we can come to a win-win situation after speaking with Charles...[who] is very open to working with the County.”

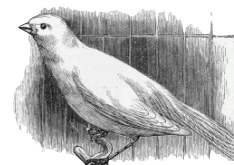
When Ford was considering solutions, he spoke about Ag exclusive zoning of the land, which he said was not ideal for communal living. Ford said, “He needs to rezone the property [which] takes six months to a year.”

As of publishing time all parties are at the table in negotiations. One option being considered is a rezoning of the parcel which requires a full CEQA analysis, possibly even an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) which requires approval from the neighbors.

Charles invites everyone fleeing from fire and abatements to Yeehaw, adding,

“We’re standing up for our basic rights here, we don’t have a choice about it. But it’s not just me, everyone is in trouble right now. If you haven’t received an abatement yet, your next. So this is an offer I’m making to the community...you can stand up too... we are going to be public here, we are going to be loud and proud and we are going to stand them down. We will show them our power, that’s what we did last time and we beat them before. It’s what we’ve got to do if we want to maintain our freedom. It’s time to do it. If the community backs us up then we’re all going to do a lot better. I know it’s cliché but I ask if not now, when? If not you, who?”

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