



SEMINARY FAQs

1. Who bought the Seminary?

In early 2014, the Seminary was purchased by North Coast Land Holdings. North Coast is owned by the Fasken Trust, which got its start with Texas oil and is now one of the largest landowners in the United States. They are a trust, but don't confuse that with charity. The trust is a way to pass vast wealth from generation to generation.

2. What are they asking for?

They are proposing to replace the Seminary with a 1,000-student private high school (Branson) with sporting facilities, staff, and administration, as well as 300 units of rental townhomes.

3. Is this project a done deal?

No! This project is not a done deal. They will have to go through a very public process to get what they are asking for. It will include many public meetings where we need a unified showing of opposition to this proposal.

4. What can the community do to reduce the size of this project?

We have repeatedly expressed a willingness to find a compromise with the developer and Branson. They could have engaged the community long ago, but they chose not to. Instead they have come in with a mega proposal.

North Coast needs to start over, but this time with a community-based approach.

5. What are they entitled to?

When North Coast purchased the Seminary, it came with certain rights and restrictions all of which are codified in the Strawberry Community Plan and the Seminary Master Plan. These documents give them the right to run a college-level seminary and to have up to 300 units of housing to accommodate the seminary's students and faculty. These

documents also restrict them to using the purchased land to these same narrow uses.

In other words, neither a high school nor 300 units of free market rental townhomes are allowed under the current agreements with the community and County.

6. Isn't an educational use (e.g., a seminary) an educational use (e.g., a high school)?

No, because they have very different impacts.

When the Seminary was originally approved they promised that 100% of their students would be living on campus (hence the 300 units of student housing). The seminarians could walk and bike to class. Also, the Seminary, like most colleges, didn't have a morning bell and fixed class schedules. Instead, students went to a few classes a week at various times of day. Finally, the Seminary had no theater or sports programs.

By contrast, the Branson students arrive and depart at mostly the same time five days a week. The students will come from all over the Bay Area and by necessity will depend mostly on cars. Many don't yet have their driving licenses so a parent will have to drop them off and pick them up (thus doubling the trips) and those that do drive are young inexperienced drivers. Finally, the plan includes football and baseball stadiums as well as a theater, all of which are expected to be offered for wider general use, not just Branson events. Branson intends to host regional and statewide athletic events. The campus will be used day and night year round.

Hopefully, these simple contrasts make it clear why not all educational institutions are equal. It certainly must have been on the minds of the community leaders and County officials in 1982 when they specially granted a use of a graduate level seminary and not just any educational institution. To be clear, our opposition is not about Branson as a school, it's that a massive commuter school just doesn't fit here.

7. What about the traffic?

Traffic is the biggest issue regarding this project. During the commuting and school windows we are already near gridlock in Strawberry, Mill Valley and the rest of the Tiburon Peninsula.

If approved, this project will add all the traffic associated with 300 new townhomes plus a new 1,000 student commuter high school. A traffic study commissioned by the Seminary Neighborhood Association forecast that this mix will quadruple daily traffic in Strawberry. If that isn't bad enough, that study didn't even consider the impacts of baseball, football and theaters (practice, games with visiting teams and their fans, nighttime theatric programs, etc.)

8. Can they mitigate their traffic?

There aren't any significant opportunities to widen roads or put in better signals. The applicant will promise to mitigate traffic with carpooling, buses, etc. That might help a little, but the traffic study mentioned above took into account all of the mitigations that Branson already employs at their Ross campus.

The truth is that it's hard to tell a parent who is paying \$41,000/year in tuition that you can't drop your kid off at school, especially when it's dark or rainy. It's hard to keep students from parking in nearby neighborhoods and then carpooling the last few blocks.

These mitigations have proven ineffective in other scenarios throughout Marin.

9. Has Branson shown itself to be a good neighbor?

Ask yourself this *"If Branson was a desirable neighbor in Ross, why did the good citizens of Ross put their own initiative on the ballot to cap enrollment at 320? To cap enrollment in such a way that neither the Ross Town Council nor Town staff can ever raise the limit?"* It's not easy to do an initiative. Those citizens must have been mighty frustrated to impose such a firm cap. The files in Ross are replete with complaints from neighbors about the school. Remember Branson intends to more than triple in size as part of their relocation to Strawberry.

10. So how do they get their plan approved?

In addition to providing plans for their high school and market rental townhomes they are asking for a major amendment to the Seminary Master Plan. This amendment would change the uses from seminary to high school and student and faculty housing to free market housing.

Can they do this?

Yes, they can ask for this change, but they have no right to expect this change. Neither the community nor the County owe them this change. When they purchased the property they did their due diligence and knew exactly what was allowed. Our economy has a long tradition of speculation for financial gain and North Coast is speculating they can make a profit on their purchase. However, speculation implies risk and one of their primary risks is that the community and County decide to not grant them these discretionary amendments to the Master Plan.

11. Generally what will the process look like?

This review process is complicated and will take some time to play out. Here are some key milestones:

- The County will gather initial comments from various agencies (e.g., Marin Water, Cal Trans, etc.) including the Strawberry Design Review Board (SDRB) on the application and its consistency with the agencies practices and programs.
- The County staff will undertake a review for completeness. This will likely generate many questions, some of which may come from the public. North Coast will have time to respond to these questions and amend their proposal.
- Eventually, the application will be deemed complete at which point it will be reviewed on its merits. This review process will start with the SDRB, which will eventually make a recommendation to the County. After the SDRB review, the County Planning Commission will take up the matter. They will likely have more than one meeting to review the application. Eventually they will make a recommendation on the matter and then it will be taken up by the Board of Supervisors who will also likely have more than one meeting and eventually vote on it.

All of these meetings will be publicly noticed. Each meeting will include an opportunity for public comment. Both the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors may choose to condition the application as part of their consideration.

12. Should I be discouraged?

No! We are up against a very large, well-financed land developer and their team of hired guns. But the law and the facts are on our side. They are merely fighting for their return on investment. Whereas we're fighting for our way of life. If we stick together and stick around (this is the start of a long race) we can beat back this proposal.

13. Doesn't this show that we should have worked more collaboratively with the Seminary on the Hart Marin proposal?

No. Aside from the fact that the last proposal would have developed over the most scenic parts of the land, the Seminary was always going to move away. We have heard for many years that Branson was looking at this site – and now these rumors have proven true. In all likelihood, if the original proposal had moved forward we would still be contending with Branson's relocation efforts.

14. What if we are successful in getting them back to the drawing board? Then what?

We need to be realistic. The Seminary is gone. In fact they've been planning their departure for years and it was just a matter of time. Things will change in Strawberry.

However, we can guide that change so that it is consistent with values captured in the Visioning process initiated by Supervisor Sears in early 2015. There is no reason why change can't begin with community input and reflect Strawberry's goals and aspirations. This is a large and beautiful site. The community and landowner should be able to find common ground.

15. What can I do? How can I help?

Get involved! You can learn more by visiting SeminaryNeighbors.com and joining us. North Coast will be throwing a lot of money on lawyers, PR, and other paid consultants to influence this process. That's why we must be united as a community. Please consider donating to the Seminary Neighborhood Association and/or volunteering your time to write a letter, attend a hearing, or spreading the message to your network of friends.