

Chasing Rainbows...And other Dreams--4/30/09

By Marc Garman--with VIB staff--(because we care about Vallejo)

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We all want a solution to drop out of the sky. Especially in Vallejo. While some may have faith that it will...a hard boiled pragmatism usually yields more predictable results. Sometimes the ability to apply such pragmatism effectively depends on experience and the ability to determine what makes sense, and what does not. Quickly. Time is money. Considering Vallejo's current seemingly intractable double sink hole of bankruptcy and a rising deficit, a city government steeped in common sense and resourcefulness is essential. Without it we have no chance for survival. The situation is that bleak. We have no wiggle room left in Vallejo.

On May 6, 2008 the Vallejo City Council voted unanimously to declare bankruptcy. That was the last cohesive and unified act of any note performed by a legislative body that has become so fragmented and contentious it has lost the ability to function in the ways that matter. The opportunity to bring about real change has been squandered in exchange for loyalties to special interests and a quest for mayoral omnipotence.

By September 2008, the internecine turf war between Mayor Davis and City Manager Joe Tanner had moved beyond niceties and evolved into a game of evasion and deceit. City staff had become divided into two camps: Osby's people and Tanner's people. Despite this rift in loyalties, city staff continued to work diligently with attorneys representing the city in bankruptcy. Bankruptcy has required lots of extra time.

Enter: The H. Martin Foundation

On September 17 and 18, 2008, Mayor Osby Davis arranged meetings with the H. Martin Foundation. Reverend Ray Bernardes of the Christian Help Center had made the mayor aware of the foundation. The H. Martin Foundation is based in the Philippines, Indonesia and Los Angeles, has no board of directors, and is headed by Mr. Martin Hornido Tirwatadinata--the self described founder/World Chair of the organization and Ms. Flor Lat Villapando described as the Co-owner, Vice World Chairman and Treasurer. The organization, which claims to be a global humanitarian foundation, expressed interest in engaging in a broad range of projects (such as schools, new industry etc) on Mare Island. Endeavors, that if realized, would certainly catapult Vallejo out of bankruptcy and into a spectacular fiscal apex. But was it too good to be true?

Records indicate that printouts from the H. Martin Foundation website became a document of record in the city archive September 15, 2008. Two days before the scheduled meeting. Did anyone look at them? The website claims that the

foundation has "Funds of legendary magnitude which have reached the highest monetary authorities of the U.S. Federal Reserve." and continues to add "international assets are well documented in the United States Treasury" Other statements refer to Mr. Torwatadinata as the son of the Sultan of Bogor (The Sultan is purported to be the source of the foundation's funds.) and makes references to a desire "to implement the different humanitarian projects worldwide with maximum effectiveness, without disrupting the global financial market." H. Martin website: www.hmartinfoundation.com

The language on the website seems to bear a certain resemblance to emails most of us have gotten from Nigeria promising great and easy riches. A pretty obvious red flag ? Nonetheless, the meeting with the foundation was held. Mayor Davis and city staffers Michelle Hightower, Gil Hollingsworth, Guy Ricca and Susan McCue were present as was Ray Bernardes. An overworked city staff was directed to spend time on something with olfactory issues. The H. Martin Foundation might have a hard time passing the smell test. Was any effort at all made to vet the H. Martin foundation prior to the meeting? Notes from meeting: [HERE](#)

City Manager Joe Tanner was never apprised of the meeting and had never heard of the H. Martin Foundation when recently questioned by VIB. (It seems Asistant City Manager Craig Whittom was aware of the meeting but never informed his boss) Was Osby trying to make his big play to save Vallejo behind Tanner's back? Did the mayor direct staff (the purview of the city manager) to be present? If so, this would constitute a violation of the Vallejo City Charter sec. 503.

Correspondence between the city and the H. Martin Foundation continues through November of 2008. Meetings were conducted between representatives of the H. Martin Foundation and Touro University and Lennar Mare Island. The foundation subsequently brought forth a twelve page proposal outlining "Mare Island Projects—In Collaboration with H. Martin Foundation" The scope of the proposals include items such as:

- Collaborating with Touro University to:"Provide all children of American an opportunity to complete their education with full concentration. The expenses will be paid by The Foundation..."
- "Provide studies and research in the field of Molecular Biology..."
- "Provide studies and research in the fields of infectious diseases and antibiotic resistant super-bacteria."
- "Coordinate the H. Martin Global Community Center for Success, H. Martin Retirement Center, Senior Care Center, H. Martin Childcare Centers, and other facilities involved in Mare Island Projects in providing the necessary healthcare services."
- Collaborating with UC San Francisco UC Davis and the California Maritime Academy
- Assuming responsibility for salaries and staff at Solano Community College
- Collaborating with the Vallejo Unified School District in order to "structure the proper tools for teachers, staff, administration, community, students and families to achieve success."
- Provide Medical, Pharmaceutical, Dental and Social Services
- Funding Public Safety Cadet and Trainee Programs

- Funding Police and Fire Academy
- Funding Mare Island Shoreline Heritage Preserve
- Funding Museums and Libraries
- Conducting feasibility studies on building an airport landing strip and/or dock and shipping port on Mare Island in order to bring in humanitarian supplies for the H. Martin Global Disaster Relief & Community Development Network

AND MORE !!! SEE THE FULL PROPOSAL HERE

A promise to solve all of our problems at once seems a little too good to be true. So VIB decided to investigate.

VIB FINDINGS

- The earliest reference we find to the H. Martin Foundation is in a Japan Times Article [HERE](#) dated January 1, 2001. According to the article a Japanese official, serving as an intermediary for a businessman, attempted "to deposit what he described as the huge assets of former Indonesian President Sukarno's half brother." The article continues to indicate that "Martin"--ostensibly Martin Hornido Tirwatadinata-- of the H. Martin Foundation is the half brother of Sukarno. Japanese authorities intervened and no transaction took place. They continued to surmise "it is unlikely that the offer was backed by real assets," and that the proposal may have been linked to money laundering.
- The H. Martin Foundation lists an address of 4510 Ellenwood Drive Los Angeles CA 90041. It appears this is a residential neighborhood. It also seems that the house number 4510 does not exist on Ellenwood Drive.
- Several attempts were made to call the Los Angeles phone number for the foundation. A woman answers "Hello" and when we request to speak with Martin H. Toriwatadinata or a representative of the foundation, she hangs up. The number is: (323) 441-1238
- The H. Martin Foundation was registered as a "limited" company in Ireland on May 4, 2000. It was dissolved in July of 2002. It is listed as a "market research and public opinion polling" company. (A Las Vegas address also seems to have existed at one time)
- Several online references claim that the funding for the foundation is derived from the Sultan of Bogor. Although the city of Bogor does exist in Indonesia, VIB has been unable to locate any reference to the Sultan except in conjunction with the H. Martin Foundation.
- VIB has been unable to locate any actual business activity or actual projects completed by the H. Martin Foundation between 2001 and today.

Questions Raised

In light of a dearth of evidence supporting the legitimacy of the H. Martin Foundation, and a surplus supporting the likelihood of the opposite being true, you can draw your own conclusions. The real questions are:

- Why was valuable staff time spent with these people over at least a two month time span when VIB was able to uncover items that raised questions within an hour?
- The H. Martin Foundation claims that it is large enough to disrupt "the global financial market"; Why have we never heard of them before this and why are there no other references to the H. Martin Foundation than bloggers who have questioned the foundation's legitimacy ? ?
- Why were meetings set up with Touro and Lennar? Did such meetings contribute to giving Touro cold feet with regards to the now defunct Cancer Center Project on Mare Island? Anonymous staffers from City Hall have described the representatives from the foundation as "obviously nutty."
- Why was the City Manager kept out of the loop on talks regarding proposals that essentially represented the takeover of Mare Island?
- Did the potential to have another organization on Mare Island cause the Mayor to be less receptive to Touro's concerns about having the City Manager involved with development on Mare Island?

Final Thoughts

When VIB started this investigation, acting on a tip, we had no idea what we would find. It has turned out to be an unfortunate glimpse inside Vallejo City Government. Perhaps its not like that all the time, but probably more than any of us would like.

When IAFF(International Association of Firefighters) 1186 President Kurt Henke said, "As far as we're concerned, Mickey Mouse would run this city just fine." in a recent SF Chronicle article...He may have been more prophetic than even he imagined.

The flirtation with the H. Martin Foundation is reminiscent of Mayor Davis's prior attempt to save Vallejo by doing business with Calvin Grigsby—an investor with a questionable background and multiple indictments. [HERE](#)

When will Vallejo get leadership with the vision and skill needed to put Vallejo on the right path instead of chasing rainbows?