

Editorial

Getting to Net Zero with Clean, Renewable Energy

by Doug Wilson

If our society is to get to net zero greenhouse gas emissions in the couple of decades remaining to us, we must use all the options available: clean energy that powers clean transportation and clean buildings, and no more pollution elsewhere from using fossil fuels. The odds of achieving this goal seem daunting, but at least we know generally what we must do and how we might do it, if we have the will to make it happen. This editorial offers MCL's overview of some of the most promising paths toward that goal and outlines some key issues and concepts.

Begin with clean energy

Clean, renewable energy is the starting point. Clean energy can charge batteries that can power our entire transportation system without further damaging the environment. Likewise, clean energy can power the heating and cooling needs in our homes and buildings, without adding to the Earth's burden of greenhouse gasses.

We need to be working on everything right now, but here let's focus on getting to a clean energy supply. This is an enormously complex but vital challenge that we need to better understand so

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General Plans: What to Know, Why to Care



City of San Rafael

A city's growth and development, like San Rafael's, is directed by its general plan.

by Kate Powers

Many are familiar with Eisenhower's reference to the adage, "Plans are worthless, but planning is everything." That may be true while planning for changing circumstances of battle, but it is not true of general plans.

California state law requires that every city and county have a general plan that is comprehensive, internally consistent, and that covers a specific time period (usually between 10 and 20 years). Having a general plan ensures a jurisdiction's decisions are made with a long-range perspective and take into account relationship to a surrounding region. A general plan creates a policy framework that communicates and supports a community's values and vision for

managing and directing future growth. All local zoning and land use regulations must be consistent with a general plan and while a plan can have competing goals, it must still present clear policy direction. The courts have described a general plan as the "constitution for land use and development planning."

Some general plan processes in Marin County have been in recent news. After several years, Novato finally approved its new 2035 general plan. At the other end of the county, Sausalito began updating its general plan in 2017 and expects to approve it sometime around year's end. The San Rafael 2040 plan is on a similar trajectory aiming

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A Message from the President - Climate Change: Time to Act Now

Dear Members and Friends,

Orange skies. Dense smoke. Ash falling. Extreme heat.

Climate change impacts are not five or fifteen or fifty years in the future and are not someplace else. They are now. In Marin.

At Marin Conservation League, we're responding to climate change in two broad ways: we work to quickly reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming and climate change, and we work to reduce and adapt to climate change impacts on the natural environment and built environment (e.g., houses, roads).

This issue's editorial provides our "take" on policies that we advocate for that can quickly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I used the words "quickly reduce" because the situation is urgent, requiring policymakers to act immediately. Policies now can drive adoption of today's most economically feasible solutions limiting global warming and damage, and can incent innovations that produce even better, future solutions.



Global climate change impacts affect water supply, wildfires, the health and biodiversity of flora and fauna on land and in the ocean, the productivity of agricultural lands, and flooding of rivers, streams, and shoreline. Because we already are deeply involved in advocacy work in most of these areas, we try to integrate climate change understanding into that work, whether climate change is a crucial factor (like flooding of shorelines), a major contributing factor (like wildfires), or a minor factor contributing to negative environmental change. But regardless, the "Conservation" in our name requires that we respond to all threats to nature in Marin, and climate change is an ever-greater threat to what we love and value.

MCL's founders 86 years ago saw the Golden Gate Bridge's likely impacts on Marin

and reacted boldly, with great success. MCL is seeing climate change's immediate and likely impacts on Marin....and we aim to react to this issue just as boldly.

Even without climate change, we would have a lot of important environmental work to do. Climate change adds to some of that work, but how we work doesn't really change: obtain the best possible understanding of the issue, develop policies and advocate for them with decision-makers, and communicate issues to our members and the public.

We invite you to join us in our work—as a member and as an issue committee member. Check out our issue committee meetings on MCL's website at marinconservationleague.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob". The signature is stylized and appears to be written on a light-colored background.

Robert Miller, President

New and rehabilitated trails advance in Marin's parks and open space

One clear message has emerged over almost eight months of quarantine: people want and need to be in open space! As restrictions gradually softened, more and more people flocked to roads and trails in Marin's national and state parks, public watersheds, and county open space preserves – to escape confinement and to enjoy the health and psychological benefits that come with being in nature. In response, land managers have been challenged to accommodate the crowds that have strained both personnel resources and overtaxed facilities. Trailheads continue to be congested by traffic and parking, and trails are crowded by people on foot, bike, and horseback, making social distancing a challenge.

More trails? Not so fast

Some ask: why don't we add more trails? The easy answer is that we already

have 600-some miles of roads and trails in Marin. The more complicated answer is that to construct new or even rehabilitate existing trails without impacting the surrounding environment is complex and costly. Constructing or reconstructing a trail seems easy enough: bring in a 4-foot-wide SWECO trail dozer, a variety of hand tools, and some hardy volunteers to follow the dozer for clean-up, and miles of trail can be built in a day. In reality, that dozer cut is preceded by many months, even years, of considering the need for the trail, studying terrain, surveying for sensitive plant and animal species and cultural sites, weighing alternative alignments, doing preliminary design, conducting environmental review, locating funds, gaining permits, negotiating contracts for construction, and making the most of a construction season that is squeezed between the end of bird nesting and winter rains. Even the post-construction requirement to "harden" new trail surface

can take months before the trail can be opened! Three current examples in Marin's public lands, however, prove that patience is bringing its own rewards in 2020 and 2021.

Bill's Trail

The almost 4-mile Bill's Trail in Devil's Gulch, Samuel P. Taylor State Park was 20 years old when it was proposed to be redesigned to accommodate mountain bikes along with equestrians and hikers. In the mid-2000s, under pressure from mountain bike advocates, State Parks began to explore opportunities throughout the state to transform selected trails and roads to accommodate mountain bikes – called "change-in-use." Bill's Trail was the first to move forward. Officially opened in April of this year, the trail had taken 14 years to plan, redesign, prepare an EIR (prompted

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Marin's parks and open space *from page 2*

by MCL, who threatened to sue State Parks for failure to identify significant impacts to critical habitat of the endangered coho salmon), construct over multiple seasons, harden, and open. Among other mitigation measures, the "new" trail added design features to eliminate erosion and sediment production and to slow the speed of bikes. With its long easy switchbacks, Bill's Trail offers a gradual, forested ascent to (almost) the top of Mt. Barnabee, popular to all visitors. It remains to be seen whether walkers, families, equestrians, and off-road bikers will continue to enjoy the multi-use trail equally and comfortably.

Redwood Creek Trail

One of the most popular hiker-equestrian trails in Mt. Tamalpais State Park, the Redwood Creek Trail winds along the Creek through alders, willows, elderberry and woodland for almost two miles between Muir Beach and Muir Woods. In its existing configuration, much of the trail lies in the Creek's floodplain, impeding natural hydrology and contributing fine sediment. Sections of the trail become impassable in the wet season. Several bridges that cross tributaries and the Creek itself are old and/or not designed to carry equestrians who frequent the trail and are forced to descend from the trail to ford the Creek or, to avoid disturbance during spawning season, stay away from the trail entirely.

For almost two decades a partnership of National Park Service, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Marin Municipal Water District, and Mt. Tamalpais State Parks (precursor to One Tam, which added Marin County Parks to the partnership) have gone to epic lengths to improve the chances that populations of the endangered coho salmon and threatened steelhead will survive in a healthier Redwood Creek.

From repairing myriad sediment sources high on Mt. Tamalpais, to restoring Big Lagoon at the mouth of Redwood Creek at Muir Beach, to jumpstarting coho by transporting juveniles to a hatchery and returning them to the creek as adults to spawn, the land managers have undertaken a series of projects both within and outside Muir Woods to restore the health of the 9 square-mile watershed.

Plans to remedy the problems along Redwood Creek Trail were first introduced to the public in 2015. After lengthy planning and design, the project, which requires cutting a 1.1-mile segment of new trail outside the floodplain and installing new bridges among other improvements, was analyzed in an Environmental Assessment. The State finally received sufficient funding to begin work on the realignment and bridges this year. That work has been underway in 2020, and, although slowed by competition for resources to fight wildfires, will continue into the 2021 construction season. Current funding will enable completing the project between Muir Beach and Deer Park Fire Road. In the meantime, walkers and equestrians can use the existing trail alignment until restricted during the wet season.

Ponti Ridge Road-to-Multiuse Trail conversion

Compared to Bills' Trail and Redwood Creek Trail projects, Marin County Open

Space District's Ponti Ridge project, which has converted a 14-foot-wide unsustainable and steep redundant fire road into a five-foot-wide multiuse trail, has proceeded with remarkable speed. The project was first proposed during the Region 3 trail designation process in 2016. Fire departments and districts agreed that the road was no longer necessary for emergency response and furthermore was non-sustainable in its current condition. Located in Pacheco Valle and Ignacio Valley Open Space Preserves, as well as partly within Marinwood open space property, the Ponti Fire Road runs east-west along the crest of Ponti Ridge toward Big Rock Ridge, rising from 240 feet near Hwy 101 to 1,310 feet at the junction of Chicken Shack Fire Road. To bypass the steep gradient and erosion of the upper road segment, the plan proposed constructing 2.8 miles of new trail with switchbacks to replace 1.4 miles of road; keeping the lower half-mile segment as an emergency road. At the lower entry, 0.4 miles of new trail would connect with the Pacheco Hill Pathway that parallels Hwy 101.

By the opening of the 2020 construction season, the project was ready to build. Several days of volunteers helped the regular crew to complete trail construction this year. Still in process, some three miles of social trails within the region are being decommissioned, along with the abandoned Ponti Fire Road. Improved connections to other roads and trails in the vicinity of Big Rock Ridge, make the "new" Ponti Ridge Trail especially attractive to mountain bikers.



Marin County Parks

A portion of the Ponti Ridge Road-to-Trail conversion shows the steep former fireroad before (left) and the wider, multi-use trail after (right). Next step: erosion control and spreading native seed.

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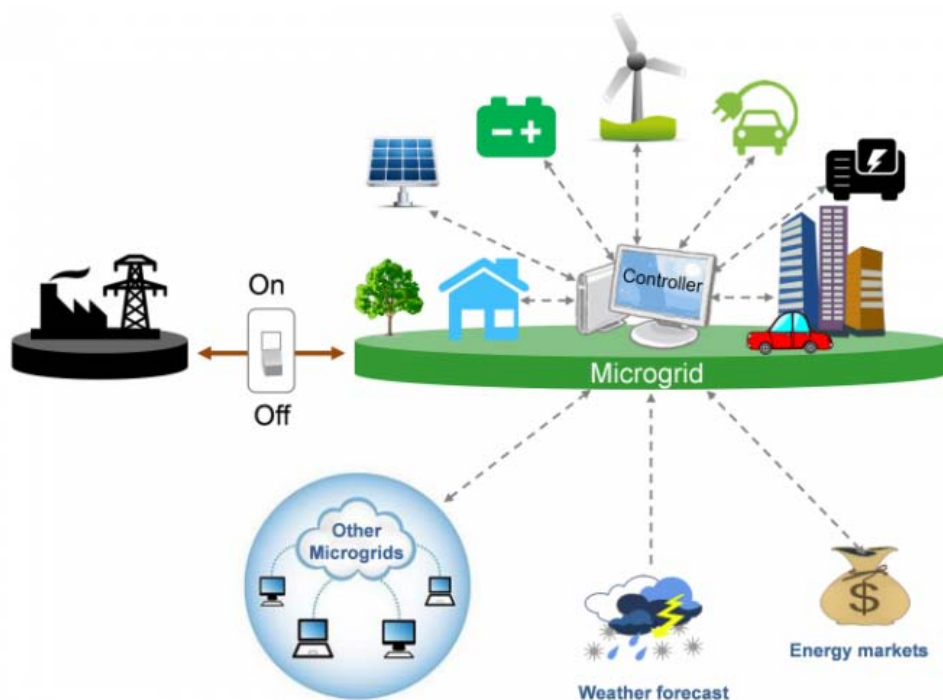
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that we can make better choices, both for ourselves and to help society move in the right directions.

Solar and wind will, of course, make up a major part of the energy solution, but they are intermittent. Their availability varies depending on weather, on time of day, and on season. Society, however, demands a completely reliable energy supply at any and every moment throughout the day and year. So, a key challenge is to bridge that gap, connecting a supply of clean, renewable energy to meet society's precise energy demands. We're making good progress, but until we have mastered it we will remain dependent on burning coal, gas and oil for at least part of our energy needs.

Our energy system is beginning to change

The energy grid we grew up with, built largely in the twentieth century, was designed to transmit energy in one direction, from huge distant power plants (via high-capacity transmission wires) to electricity distribution centers and from there into our homes and businesses. We are now seeing the brittleness and vulnerability of that system with wildfires and blackouts. We will depend on the grid to supply part of our energy for a long time to come, but a new and more flexible energy system based on locally produced renewable energy is emerging. The state of California is conducting preparatory studies and funding pilot programs to enable development of flexible micro-grids and to allow locally generated energy to be aggregated and sold back onto the grid. The Congressional Climate Crisis Action Plan calls for a complete process, from research to deployment, to further new technologies for a cleaner, more responsive and resilient energy system (See side bar, pg. 5). Private industry is beginning to see the tremendous potential here for growth. Change will take time and massive investment, but it offers payoff in good jobs and meeting the imperatives of dealing with climate change.



Graphic: Berkeley Lab

Micro-grids are a more flexible energy system than the traditional energy grid. Visit [MCL's YouTube channel](#) to view a presentation on the subject by Peter M. Schwartz, Lawrence Berkeley Labs.

Achieving net zero energy

There are, broadly, three concurrent approaches to achieving a net zero energy system: providing new clean energy sources, developing efficient and affordable energy storage, and shaping energy demand to better meet supply.

Solar, both rooftop and grid scale, and wind are by far the most advanced new sources of renewable energy, yet their reliability limitations require exploration of other sources such as biomass combustion, geothermal, hydrogen fuel cells (and more speculatively) tidal or wave generation.

Storage is a burgeoning field, since intermittent energy from solar and wind needs to be made reliably available in order to match the fluctuation of energy load demand. At the "behind the meter" homeowner level, lithium-ion batteries are now being combined with rooftop solar that charges them in order to better balance midday solar electricity production with greater evening demand for

electricity. Electric vehicles, with their large lithium-ion batteries, are being explored as sources of backup energy both for homes and possibly, through aggregation, for peak needs of the grid. These batteries also can provide resiliency during power outages.

The current system tends to use gas-powered plants to meet evening energy demand that surges just as solar production tapers off, but new technologies are being used or explored to reduce their role or replace them. At grid scale, lithium-ion storage charged by solar can produce a reliable and dispatchable energy supply, but still at a relatively high cost. "Large hydro" is one of the oldest forms of energy storage. As the water from reservoirs falls at dams through turbines, it releases stored energy and produces power as needed, except during drought. "Pumped hydro" can store energy when water is pumped back up to reservoirs using intermittent solar or wind—but again

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at great cost, and in this case, with limited expansion opportunities.

A broader range of storage systems are promising when we look at least several years ahead. "Green hydrogen," produced from water using renewable energy, has the potential to be stored and used as fuel for heavy-duty transportation or for use in buildings or as a source of electricity for the grid. Vanadium membrane battery systems, centrifuge-like momentum batteries, gravity batteries and too many other types to mention are being explored.

It makes sense to complement innovation in energy supply with a more creative approach to managing energy demand. Peak demand in the evening or during heat waves produces peak energy prices and increases the need for energy production infrastructure. Lowering periods of peak demand, by shifting energy usage to times of energy abundance, creates efficiencies that save resources and money. For example, electric home water heaters can be programmed to heat water and store it during the day when solar is cheap, rather than heating it when used during peak evenings hours. Smart thermostats in smart buildings that pre-cool buildings and

moderate air conditioning use during heat waves can help even out demands on the grid.

This is a very broad view of the changing energy world we live in today. Not everyone can afford a new electric vehicle or put solar on their roof, but we can all support public policies that move our society and economy toward clean energy and away from fossil fuels. If we are to eliminate fossil fuel emissions, we must have policies that create incentives to develop new alternatives and that motivate people and companies to use them.

What is Marin Conservation League doing?

MCL supports the people and institutions leading the way in renewable energy by advocating for better policies that help them. MCL's Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) hosts experts every month, many addressing

Not everyone can afford a new electric vehicle or put solar on their roof, but we can all support public policies that move our society and economy toward clean energy and away from fossil fuels.

clean energy issues, to spread knowledge as the basis for supporting needed policy changes. We generally support and defend Marin Clean Energy's (MCE) efforts to reduce greenhouse gases by bringing more renewable energy to its customers and piloting microgrid and solar + storage projects. We advocate with MCE and other decision makers for policies that accelerate the production and use of renewable energy. We also support programs to sequester carbon in Marin's agricultural lands.

For many decades MCL has focused on preserving and protecting the exceptional natural lands, waters, and ecosystems of Marin County. A changing climate, however, brings a whole new array of challenges and threats. Greenhouse gases are the primary culprit, and thus the imperative to find ways to cease dumping them into the atmosphere. Awareness, collaboration and action are needed now more than ever. Together, we have work to do. [Please join CAWG monthly meetings](#) (3rd Fridays, 9 – 11 AM) and consider working with us.

The House Select Committee's Climate Crisis Action Plan

Inspired by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) reports, in 2019 the House majority convened the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. The committee released its 538-page report, the [Climate Crisis Action Plan](#), in June 2020. The plan includes hundreds of policy recommendations grouped under twelve pillars for action. For example, the first pillar is investing in infrastructure to build an equitable and resilient clean energy economy; the second is driving innovation and deployment of clean energy and deep decarbonization technologies. All 12 pillars have twin objectives: address climate change and grow the economy in healthy ways. The Plan roughly tracks the Green New Deal but with concrete policy recommendations and also, to lesser degrees, underlies Biden's two trillion-dollar economic recovery and climate change plan and the Democratic Party's platform. Our Congressman, Jared Huffman, co-authored the Plan and discussed it recently with MCL's Climate Action Working Group and with Time to Lead on Climate's event, "How the Earth Wins this Election".

General Plans *from page 1*

for approval in 2021, Larkspur's update is underway too. The County is undergoing a limited update of the 2007 Countywide Plan. Although each of these jurisdictions has different vision and values, similar processes and a state-mandated framework unite them.

General Plan basics

Every general plan in California is required to have seven planning "elements", or topic areas, that are implemented through a hierarchy of goals, policies and programs. They include land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, public safety and noise. An environmental justice (EJ) element was added in 2016. Cities and counties that have disadvantaged communities must include an EJ element or integrate EJ goals and policies throughout other elements of their plan.

Cities may also adopt "optional" elements which reflect local priorities, such as community design, economic vitality, arts

and culture, or climate action. Once added, these elements assume the same legal standing as mandated elements. Planners can organize these elements in ways that best suit the unique character of their community and reflect the needs and priorities identified during public engagement. General plans also are an important tool for programming capital improvements and prioritizing funding allocations.

Jurisdictions can amend and must also periodically update their plans in response to changing conditions, so a clear process for amending the plan should be included. Updates offer the opportunity to adapt to new state regulations, respond to changing perspectives on land use and environmental issues, incorporate recommendations from other documents such as climate change action plans, and update baseline conditions.

City and county staff and elected officials are responsible for implementing a general plan and are required to provide California's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) and its Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) general plan and housing element annual progress reports, respectively.



Van Meter Williams Pollack LLP

All jurisdictions are required to implement a Housing Element to identify existing and projected housing needs for all income levels. Victory Village is a senior affordable housing community which added 54 units to Fairfax's housing stock.

State priorities impact local general plan updates

Although most decisions involving California's future growth are made at the local level, these decisions according to the State "should proceed within the framework of officially approved statewide goals and policies." Statutory state planning priorities include promoting infill-development and equity, protecting environmental and agricultural resources, and encouraging efficient development patterns.

Since 1969, California has required that all local governments plan to meet the housing needs of everyone in the community. In recent years, legislators have introduced dozens of housing bills to address both homelessness and the broader crisis of housing shortages in the state. Enacted legislation promises to remove prior obstacles to housing development by: holding jurisdictions accountable for housing production at all income levels, requiring fines if a housing element is out of compliance with State law, banning "downzoning," reducing parking requirements, streamlining project review processes, allowing unlimited density and up to three additional stories for 100% affordable housing within one-half mile of a major transit stop, and de-emphasizing local input and control.

Housing Elements and Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA)

All jurisdictions are required to adopt and implement a Housing Element as part of their general plan, to identify existing and projected housing needs for all income levels, and to form a plan for meeting those needs by analyzing available housing sites and remaining residential land capacity. RHNA is the state-mandated process to identify the

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number of housing units, by affordability level, that each jurisdiction must accommodate in their Housing Element. Several cities in the Bay Area have historically failed to meet the RHNA standards for affordable housing.

Unlike other elements in a general plan, the state mandates that the Housing Element be updated on an eight-year cycle and that every jurisdiction's Housing Element be reviewed and certified by the State. The next cycle for all counties in the Bay Area is 2022 – 2030. The housing goals for the upcoming cycle are much higher than previous periods (more than twice the 2015 – 2023 quotas) and contain more enforcement. RHNA's methodology and allocations are currently under review.

According to Marin County's recent "Housing Element Update Work Program" report, Marin continues to have one of the highest median incomes in the State and is identified as one of the healthiest counties, yet many working families and seniors struggle to meet their basic housing needs. The high cost of living and continued rising costs in Marin contribute to the inability of low-to-moderate wage earners and families to live in the communities where they work. This has both ecological and economic consequences.

California's housing-element law acknowledges that, in order for the private market to adequately address the housing needs of Californians, local governments must adopt plans and regulatory systems that provide opportunities for, and do not unduly constrain, housing development. Housing policy in California rests largely upon the effective implementation of local general plans and, in particular, local housing elements.

Engage and participate

Though it's not easy to track a community's general plan process, it is important that all residents and businesses do so, for it will guide every future land use decision regarding both conservation and future development

and address issues that impact not only housing, but traffic, jobs, environmental resource protection, resilience, disaster preparedness, and public services. The plan will guide how and where future growth may occur and how that growth might be managed to protect the character of existing communities and ensure quality of life for future generations.

Public outreach is a critical component of planning. It seeks to involve all members of a community and provides opportunity for residents to contribute ideas and to speak out. The current pandemic requires new ways of informing and engaging the public to ensure all voices are heard.

How can one participate? Seek ways to get involved in your city's/town's planning efforts. Fill out surveys, write comments, attend public meetings and hearings. Share your experience and your concerns in constructive ways. Your participation will contribute to a desirable and resilient future for all.

Belvedere General Plan 2030. Adopted June 2010.

Corte Madera General Plan 2028. Adopted April 2009. Updates to Elements will happen as needed.

Fairfax General Plan 2030. Adopted April 2012.

Larkspur General Plan. Update started in 2010, 2040 Draft plan update is underway.

Marin Countywide Plan. Adopted in 2007. The County plans to update expanded stream conservation area ordinance and Safety Element with climate adaptation and resiliency strategies.

Mill Valley General Plan 2040. Adopted Oct 2013. Land Use and Mobility Elements amended March 2016.



City of Sausalito

Sausalito residents participate in the City's General Plan Update Visioning Workshop, 2018.

Novato General Plan 2035. City Council plan was to certify final EIR and adopt General Plan in late October, 2020.

Ross General Plan 2025. General Plan update likely to begin 2021-22.

San Anselmo General Plan. Most elements adopted 1975 and 1988, several Elements amended thereafter. Update to General Plan by section will be starting soon!

San Rafael Draft General Plan 2040. Planning Commission (PC) will continue public hearings in December. Draft EIR will be released soon for 60-day public review. Adoption planned for March 2021.

Sausalito Draft General Plan 2040. Final draft has been published. Public comment on recirculated EIR accepted until December 11.

Tiburon General Plan 2020. General Plan update about to begin!

Thank you to planning and community development directors Paul Jensen (San Rafael), Ben Berto (Fairfax), Elise Semonian (San Anselmo), Patrick Streeter (Ross), Adam Wolff (Corte Madera), and Dina Tasini (Tiburon) for providing information on upcoming planning efforts in their respective towns and for information on planning in general. Information was also gathered from local jurisdiction websites.

MCL Member Profile

Paul Jensen, San Rafael's Director of Community Development and 30 - year member of MCL

by Kate Powers

Paul Jensen, San Rafael's Director of Community Development, grew up wanting to be an architect, but instead he built a 40-year career as a well-respected environmental and city planner, in both the private and public sectors. This spring, after San Rafael adopts its 2040 General Plan update and after a combined 20 years working for the City of San Rafael, Paul is planning to retire.

Paul graduated from high school in the early 70s, when the momentum of the environmental movement was well underway. Paul describes himself as having been idealistic then. He was inspired to study planning by three impactful events: the passing in 1970 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the statute which makes environmental protection a mandatory part of every state and local agency's decision making process; the publication of Design With Nature by landscape architect and planner Ian McHarg; and the adoption of the first Marin Countywide Plan.

McHarg's book created an analytic framework that overlaid landscape features like topography, hydrology, and vegetation, with layers of existing land use, and then went on to identify constraints, resources, and opportunities to guide planning for new uses or redevelopment. When Marin's 1973 Countywide Plan was adopted, it evaluated the County similarly at a landscape-scale and created a unique approach that established three separate planning corridors -- the Coastal Corridor, the Inland Rural Corridor, and the City-Centered Corridor - located along Highway 101. The plan helped establish the county's growth patterns for the next four decades and counting. Although the plan succeeded in preserving coastal wetlands, forests, hills, and ranches, it also promoted job growth, with the unintended consequence of increasing traffic gridlock and a shortage of housing at all levels.

Paul emphasized that, moving forward,



attention in Marin will need to be on providing housing. San Rafael's Downtown Precise Plan, planned for adoption this spring along with San Rafael's General Plan update, has policies that strengthen opportunities to create more housing but to lessen pressure for more housing in areas outside of downtown.

The following are highlights and summary from a conversation Paul and I had in September.

Q: Paul, you have said you were inspired by CEQA. San Rafael seems to be increasingly using CEQA exemptions for streamlining project approval. What do you see as CEQA's pros and cons?

Paul is still a fan of CEQA. He realizes that recent City approvals of two large housing projects that took advantage of exemptions were not popular with environmentalists. While he does think CEQA is a very valuable tool for disclosure and public participation, he also has become somewhat jaded by it. He's seen CEQA used to abuse the approval process by groups that just want to kill a project.

He says there are many instances where CEQA exemptions would not be appropriate, but they could be suitable in urban areas like in downtown and, to some extent, in Northgate and other places in San Rafael. Of greater concern to Paul is the increasing number of state housing bills that are crafted as "one-size-fits-all" which potentially could override local planning goals.

Q: Why have you been a member of Marin Conservation League for almost 30 years?

Paul was originally inspired to join MCL by environmentalist and former MCL president, Jean Starkweather. "Jean knew the

community. She was a friendly yet persistent environmental watchdog." He went on to say, MCL has always been politically strong. Some of the biggest battles in Marin County in which MCL played an influential role include: major land development decisions, preservation and protection of open space, prevention of urban development in West Marin, and protection of agriculture - those are actions that have made Marin County a very special place.

In Paul's opinion, MCL's energy should now be placed on what is currently the bigger issue: climate change and how it is already affecting the environment, whether it's wildfire, flooding, drought, or the threat of sea level rise. Adapting to sea level rise concerns Paul most, as currently there are no easy solutions.

Paul says MCL is fortunate to have board members who have extensive expertise and wisdom like his friend Nona Dennis. He says it is also important that MCL tap into a younger demographic that also embraces sustainability in order for MCL's impact in the County to continue into the future.

Q: What would you say was a favorite place that influenced you as a child?

Paul's response: Golden Gate Park. "It was unique to have such a huge green space in an urban setting." Though Paul has lived in Marin for nearly as long as he's been a planner, he's still rooted in San Francisco, where he was born, and where multi-generations of his family still live. If landscapes, as reported, accumulate memories too, Paul's family history and the history of the Park are intermingled. His grandmother lived there with her family in a tent after the 1906 earthquake and fires. His father planted trees at a time when portions of the park were still largely dunes. Paul remembers riding his bike with friends to the polo fields in the 60s, finding themselves unexpectedly at what must have been one of the Park's first rock

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Paul Jensen, *from page 8*

concerts with bands including the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane. (Maybe it was the Human Be-In?). He's frequented the park many times over the past several decades, and yet he still finds undiscovered gems - his most recent, a small remnant of native oak woodland.

Q: How has your thinking of shared public space changed over the course of your career?

Paul says public space used to be divided into categories with separate zoning. "Infrastructure and roads, public parks, open space and preservation were separate and the dots between them were not connected." But he's seen an evolution. "We've run out of space in our urban areas, so we need to find ways to integrate other uses." He points to the Napa River flood control project as an example of successful multi-benefit land use. It combines the travel of water, flood control, people space, and recreation. He envisions similar opportunities for San Rafael, such as the Gallinas Creek channel along Freitas Parkway.

Paul also mentions that communication and coordination between Planning and Public Works have improved over the years, at least in San Rafael. Public Works has infused a public process into what they do. Planners have always vetted plans and project proposals with the public. Now Public Works is doing it too. "They're getting community input, and that's really important."

Q: What's next for you after you retire?

Paul says he isn't going anywhere. He loves Marin. He isn't planning to consult during retirement; rather he would like to volunteer and make a difference in that way.

Paul's past leadership will carry San Rafael well into the future, yet there will be a lot of work to implement the General Plan update after he retires, including a sea level rise adaptation plan and two priority development area (PDA) specific plans. "Yes," he said with half a smile, "there will be a lot of work to follow."

Governor Newsom's Executive Order on Biodiversity and Climate - California's "Thirty by Thirty"

On October 7, Governor Gavin Newsom issued executive order N-82-20 announcing new actions that connect two environmental crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. The order commits the State to conserving 30 percent of lands and coastal waters by 2030, the conservation goal that was the focus of recent Assembly Bill 3030. According to Governor Newsom, the actions are aimed at making California more resilient to the impacts of climate change and wildfires through land conservation and healthy soils initiatives, protecting biodiversity, and "jumpstarting our economy by greening it." For more information, see the [Governor's executive order](#).

In Memory of Connie Berto

Connie Berto, San Anselmo resident, nature lover, avid horsewoman with extensive trail riding experience, and dedicated Marin County advocate promoting safe equestrian access to public lands, passed away on August 8th. Connie attended meetings (including MCL's Parks and Open Space meetings), wrote letters and advocated with gumption to county, state and federal land management agencies. She served on Marin County Open Space District's (MCOSD) Parks, Open Space, and Cultural Commission for 29 years and was a mounted volunteer for MCOSD for 40. She was a founding member of Marin Horse Council as well as of other organizations. Connie leaves behind four of her children and four grandchildren, many friends, colleagues and admirers, and the special places where her favorite wildflowers bloom.



Connie on the cover of Endurance News, 2013

Nature Note Update

by Bo Kearns

Every December through February, newts head down from the West Marin hills and attempt to cross Chilen Valley Road to spawn in Laguna Lake. These small, slow moving creatures are vulnerable. Thousands get run over by cars and never make it. Last year they got help. Chilen Valley Newt Brigade (CVNB) volunteers working 2-hour shifts scoured a stretch of the road at night, and often in the rain, for these migrating amphibians. The team collected data to better understand migration patterns and the health of the population and assisted the crossing. Sally Gale, a former MCL director and West Marin rancher, in collaboration with other community leaders, founded CVNB.



alongside for scale. A volunteer then carefully lifts the newt at the midsection and carries it across the road.

Initially, signs and flaggers with wands were posted at each end of the eight tenths of a mile stretch of road being monitored. Volunteers were outfitted with headlamps and flashlights. When passing motorists expressed concerns about the lights and volunteer safety, CVNB adapted. "Our first year was a learning experience," Sally Gale said. "We realized we didn't need flaggers, headlamps, or wands. Now when cars approach, volunteers turn off their flashlights, move way off onto the shoulder of road, and wait until the vehicle has passed."

Twice as many newts crossed in December than in January, and four times as many than in February.

Crossing concentrations occurred at the eastern end of the observation area in December and shifted to the western end in February.

A high number of juveniles moved away from the lake and across the road into the hills in December. No juveniles were observed in January or February.

Though the number of juveniles recorded is encouraging, more data is needed to accurately determine population ratio.

The high newt mortality rate demonstrates the devastating effect of habitat fragmentation. "It's indicative of what could be a larger problem," said Gail Seymour, retired Sr. Environmental Scientist, CA Dept. Fish and Wildlife, and member of CVNB's steering committee. "Newts are an aquatic indicator species. The health of the population can indicate the health of other aquatic species and, more broadly, the health of a watershed."

Laguna Lake occupies 200 acres. It's a natural lake, rare for Marin County and the area in general. In addition to amphibians, migrating and breeding waterfowl, including the whistling swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) frequent the Laguna Lake watershed.

Volunteer training

Approximately fifty volunteers of all ages, skills and interests participated in two training sessions. They learned about the newt's life cycle, how to identify a California newt from other newt species, how to download the iNaturalist smartphone app and how to upload photos to the project site. When confronted with light, newts freeze. Prior to photographing them, a penny is placed

Data collection and curation

Data related to temperature, wind speed and precipitation was incorporated with other information collected on-site. Triana Anderson, a volunteer and UC Berkeley graduate with skills in data analysis and cartography, curated all the information. This was the first time monitoring the newt population in that area, so no baseline was available for comparison. Data collected and analyzed related solely to those occasions when volunteers happened to be on a particular stretch of the road.

Observations

1,434 newts were observed over the three-month period— 814 Alive, 595 Dead, 10 Injured.

Temperature and precipitation had a direct correlation on crossings. In the absence of precipitation and when temperatures dropped to the low 50s, fewer newts were observed.

The majority of newts crossed in December.

Amphibians observed

The *Taricha torosa* or California newt represented the vast majority of amphibians observed. Their distinctive bright orange belly, protruding eyes and winsome gaze characterize these creatures. They're a native species having inhabited the region for millions of years. Populations in San Diego County are now extinct. Newts south of the Salinas River in Monterey County are considered a "species of concern" by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Habitat destruction, road kills and drought



Photo: Chilen Valley Newt Brigade

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are persistent threats to the population.

Over the three month period, other amphibians were seen on the road: the rough skinned newt (*Taricha granulosa*), California slender salamander (*Batrachoseps attenuatus*), ensatina (*Ensatina eschscholtzii*), arboreal salamander (*Aneides lugubris*), Northern Pacific tree frog (*Pseudacris regilla*) and the California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*). The red-legged frog is listed as "threatened" under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

CVNB 2020-2021 season goals

For the upcoming season, CVNB goals are to save more newts, and collect more data. Based on experience, collection methodology and use of the iNaturalist app will be refined. More volunteers are needed! CVNB is also seeking the assistance of a university researcher to help determine population size, and the newt's role in the Laguna Lake's watershed biodiversity.

Though the first-year volunteer program was a success, a long term, more permanent solution is needed. CVNB, together with the Turtle Island Restoration Network, is seeking funding for a feasibility study related to road crossing alternatives, particularly those successfully implemented in other areas. Once the options have been determined, they will be presented to the relevant agencies and the community for input.

Want to help save newts?
Want to make a difference?
Visit www.chilenovalleynewtbrigade.org

MCL Director Profiles



Kim Baenisch is a problem solver with an affinity for creating order where none exists, and a lover of the outdoors which she feels everyone should be able to access and experience.

For the past 15 years, Kim led nationally recognized non-profits that work to reduce greenhouse gases through non-motorized transportation options (Marin County Bicycle Coalition, focused on biking and walking) and empower youth through nature-based experiences (Trips for Kids Marin). She spearheaded the modernization of the branding, fundraising and programs at both non-profits; her leadership brought greater public visibility and success to their programs, increased membership and community partnerships, and empowered their effective staff.

Previously, she honed her skills in project, personnel and business management for environmental and health-oriented businesses. Kim especially enjoys organizational development challenges to maximize stakeholder engagement and implementing functional and productive changes.

She holds a Bachelors degree in Landscape Architecture from Cornell University, and worked for a Marin County landscape design firm and a Sonoma County environmental restoration firm. Originally from suburban Long Island, NY, she found her true home when moving to Marin County in 1987. Kim is a long-time recreational hiker, mountain and commute cyclist, and gardener.



Terri Thomas is a natural resources manager, ecologist, and planner with 36 years of national park experience. From 1984 to 2016, she held the positions of Chief of Natural Resources Management and Science at Golden Gate National Recreation Area followed by the Director of Conservation, Science and Research at the Presidio Trust. In these roles she oversaw a diversity of disciplines such as vegetation and wildlife management, water resources, archeology, inventory and monitoring, research, geographic information systems, volunteer management and natural resources education. She helped establish the Golden Gate International Biosphere Reserve.

Her knack for attracting experts to work together across disciplines enabled ecological work with teams of experts. Restoration projects created and managed in this way included: day-lighted creeks from culverts, endangered plant communities, a tidal marsh, the only freshwater lake in GGNRA and currently nature-based adaptations to sea-level rise with four scientific institutions in Marin County. Bridging the gap between research and application is a passion of hers.

Terri has a BS in Forestry from U.C Berkeley and an MS in Forest Ecology from the University of Washington. She has served on the boards of Fire Safe Marin, the Sausalito Community Boating Center, the Floating Homes Association, and most recently served as the Director of Natural Resources and Climate Resiliency for Conservation Corps North Bay. Currently she serves as Director of Ecology for the Environmental Forum of Marin. She lives with her dog, Thoreau, on her floating home in Sausalito.

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Zoom and are open to the public.*

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Issue Committee Meeting Schedule (subject to change—check website)

Land Use and Transportation:

1st Wed. of the month, 10:00 AM—12:00 PM

Parks and Open Space:

2nd Thurs. of the month, 3:00 PM—5:00 PM

Fire and Environment Working Group:

2nd Mon. of the month, 3:00 PM—5:00 PM

Climate Action Working Group: 3rd Fri. of
the month, 9:00 AM—11:00 AM

Agricultural Land Use: meets quarterly;

North Marin Unit: Check website for times
Marin Conservation League was founded in
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