

November 2007

Dear Citizens

The Board of Supervisors completed hearings on Countywide Plan Update, and adopted it on November 6.

General Outcomes

The 2007 Countywide Plan will be a solid and modern attempt to make our entire County more sustainable, better focused on avoiding the most dangerous aspects of Climate Change, and more responsive to it when it comes. It also provides a vision for a fairer, more inclusive community, a more vital economy, and a better quality of life for us over time.

I began working on this Plan in 1999 as a volunteer, and while absolutely relieved that it's done, I am generally pleased with its outcome. As with all public policy it is a hair-raising experience of give-and-take among people with conflicting values, but it reached fair and appropriate conclusions on most issues. I would strongly recommend that people take a look at the actual programs in the Plan sometime at:

www.future-marin.org

We made many compromises; some included specific protections for quality of life in our neighborhoods and attempts to limit the cycle of development and growth in our County, and some had to acknowledge more regional concerns, such as our impacts on the environment inside and outside the County (i.e. air emissions, consumption of resources, long commutes), and lack of housing for our lower income workers.

Issues in Southern Marin

I'm happy to report that we came out fairly well in Southern Marin and in the gateway to our region's many natural assets. Good transportation programs and efforts to contain development were adopted. Most recommendations from my deeply involved citizens

were approved by the Board of Supervisors, and that was impressive, given the contrasting legal, policy, and planning objectives from other parts of the County. We achieved all the substance we sought in our edits and negotiations. From housing to risk management for climate change, and from marsh restoration goals to a serious focus on better transportation, we made solid progress across the board.

The entire Tam Planning area has a cap of 100 potential housing units over the next 25 years, with no FAR exemptions, and all projects will require careful environmental and community review. Multi hazard zones, such as Tam Valley, will receive extra scrutiny during design review. We adopted the requested clarity that this area includes "any and all" density bonuses and that our existing commercial sites can be refurbished and replaced fully. If future expansion is desired, we agreed to a 25% inclusion for affordable housing and if any projects like this are proposed in Tam Junction (especially), a hard look at traffic and other environmental issues will be required. I believe that this final policy may work well for us, since it may mix in some night time vitality for the Junction and other areas that could need some innovative investment

over time.

Parcels on the east side of Tam Junction will be evaluated for inclusion in the Baylands Corridor, especially important in the coming days of sea level rise, and which could provide a more sophisticated connection to Bothin Marsh. We will evaluate these areas for potential assistance in buffering against sea level rise and other criteria in the coming year, and will develop the proper rationale and rules for inclusion into the Corridor during the study. This was satisfactory to me, and necessary, legally, as a proper “due process” for inclusion of expanded areas in this strict land use designation. I remain hopeful for eventual success, and remain committed to the Gateway Planning Committee’s recommendation for the eventual expansion and restoration of these potential upland areas for Bothin Marsh. My colleagues on the BOS now support this as well.

Mixed Use & Affordable Housing

Addressing the County’s lack of affordable housing remains a firm commitment for me and my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors. It is an urgent problem in this County and we realize now more than ever how this must be coupled with an absolute commitment to getting cars off our roads, so that addressing the housing concern does not condemn all of us to a declining quality of life. We will have to do better and more elegant work so these hard-won values can be implemented together.

As long commutes rise businesses move farther out from our homes and service centers, increasing costs for everything from healthcare to remodels. Not only is this pattern bad for the economy, it has a deleterious environmental impact from urban sprawl elsewhere and air emissions coming from cars headed back into the County each day.

We thus included a multi-pronged approach to housing, from overlay areas in good locations, two of which are in Southern Marin that can be considered for future proposals, and other programs to provide fewer monster and market rate homes and more affordable ones. For the right places in Marin this policy may in fact provide a mix of uses of housing with retail and job sites. If we can implement more vigorous strategies to remove congestion, these land use designations could help us achieve a more varied, stimulating and walkable community environment. I’m happy to say that appropriate parts of my District, better able to develop good infill housing sites without gridlock, offer strong support for affordable housing strategies that the County needs so badly.

We added a special new emphasis, thanks to thoughtful input from citizens in Mill Valley and the Gateway Planning Committee, on employing conversion and voucher programs, so we don’t always focus on a hopeless effort to “build our way out of this problem” by always turning to an endless cycle of building more apartments. By changing the ratio of affordable units in existing complexes we can find room for more people who work in the economy.

Other Issues

My very strong view about the need for better bicycle and pedestrian ways and a fully competitive transportation system was strongly endorsed throughout the Plan, and is now reflected in programs to expand jitneys, trolleys, buses, the train, etc., and an

increase in priority for our bike and pedestrian infrastructure projects.

I was able to insert in the last few weeks numerous programs to strengthen our planning, readiness, and efforts to avoid the worst aspects of climate change. All projects will be analyzed with these issues strongly in mind.

We even reached a unanimous vote on the proposed approach for senior housing at the contentious St. Vincent's & Silveira properties between San Rafael and Novato. It provides protection for the green fields out there in the Baylands and contains a strict limit on automobile use in any future development.

Now on to Implementation

We have our hard work cut out for us. The County faces a vexing lack of affordable housing that threatens to hurt the environment from long commutes, and to hurt our economy and even our own ability to afford living here as distant services raise prices. We are frustrated by an ever increasing number of drivers and cars. We have a burgeoning senior population that will also need housing and special care in the next 25 years.

We will have to reduce car trips, build an entirely new transportation system, protect existing green fields and habitat, and house lower income people; all without degrading our quality of life in more pedestrian and bicycle friendly communities. We have the chance to move quickly toward renewable energy sources in our County and this concept is also clearly supported now in our vision for the next quarter century. We know what to do; these values are well reflected in the Plan. Now we need to raise the funds and gain citizen support for these projects.

Thanks!

Thanks to all of you who monitored this work over the past several years and who have worked so hard providing excellent analysis and edits for consideration in the Plan. Your hard work made this Plan much stronger. Special thanks to Sharon Rushton who worked so diligently from the beginning through all these final days, item by item.

Sincerely,

Charles McGlashan

Vice President

County of Marin

Supervisor, Southern Marin (3rd District)