

DAMON CONNOLLY

SUPERVISOR, DISTRICT 1

May, 2016

Dear Friends,

We remain hard at work on the issues facing District 1, meeting with community groups and constituents every day, while holding a serious commitment to open lines of communication.

For regular updates on how we are working for you, please like my official County Facebook page by clicking here:

www.facebook.com/SupConnolly

Damon



Topics Addressed Below:

- #RideWithDamon Challenge
- Cleaning Up Marinwood Plaza
- Homelessness and The Chronic Inebriates Pilot Program

A Successful Month of ZERO Car Trips – #RideWithDamon Challenge

I'm happy to report that the **#RideWithDamon** challenge, swearing off driving for the month of April and relying solely on public transit, my bike and carpools, was a great success! Not only did I achieve my goal of taking zero single-occupancy-vehicle rides, I gained some great perspective along the way and had some excellent conversations with my fellow travelers around transit.

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Back in March, I decided to gain some valuable insight on our non-motorized transit infrastructure and systems. The County makes a serious investment in these systems in order to encourage people to take advantage of them, and in turn take cars off the road. However, too often the officials charged with overseeing systems like these lack important first-hand knowledge on their operations and functionalities from the user perspective. As someone who sits on a number of transit boards, I felt it was important to “walk the walk” and learn about real-life experiences of those using the systems.



I rode my bike up and down the County throughout the month of April, taking advantage of some of our first-class bicycle infrastructure, and also experiencing gaps in that infrastructure. I rode about a dozen different bus routes, learning what routes work well and where greater coordination is needed. I carpooled, and generally shared my experience with dozens of friends and neighbors about how to pursue options to take cars off the road. It was a tremendously valuable set of experiences on several fronts.

I calculated that the trip from my front door to my job at the Civic Center took 15 minutes by bike, and 18 minutes by Marin Transit shuttle (compared to 10 minutes driving). In terms of the North-South bicycle infrastructure, the Cal-Park Tunnel, the new Central Marin Ferry Connection Multi-use Pathway in Larkspur, and the Class I pathway from the top of Puerto Suello Hill to downtown San Rafael (which I used multiple times per week) are examples of fantastic and valuable facilities. I used transit to get to various destinations, both within Marin and regionally, and the estimates that I got from mapping out my trips through MarinTransit.org were generally very reliable.



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Of specific note - I took three trips to the East Bay. My staff questioned whether that was even possible, but it was not nearly as daunting as one might think. I'd simply take the Golden Gate Transit Route 40 bus from the Downtown San Rafael Bettini Transit Center to Del Norte BART in Richmond. From there, the entire BART system is at your disposal.

On one Saturday, I rode BART to the Bay Fair station in San Lorenzo with my bike to ride around the Hayward Regional Shoreline. This shoreline consists of hundreds and hundreds of acres of restored wetlands. I remember this shoreline from my childhood, when it was simply long mud and salt flats, frustratingly inaccessible for the public. It was amazing and inspiring to see this habitat restored for the public benefit of recreation and valuable ecosystems, and reminded me why we are concerned about habitat restoration and climate change mitigation. Great exercise too!



Of course, there is much work left to be done and many ways we can do better. Gaining insight into our challenges was a major goal of this project.

Critical gaps in our North-South bicycle Infrastructure remain, which is far from a secret – most notably from North San Pedro Road to the top of Puerto Suello Hill, and the area between the Bettini Transit Center and Andersen Drive in San Rafael. I'm currently sitting on a Joint Committee with the City of San Rafael that is at work trying to evaluate the complicated stretch between 2nd Street and Andersen Drive.



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As for needed improvements to the transit system – the local system has improved and has a number of bright spots, including the Marin Transit shuttle system which has turned into a real workhorse. There are a couple of routes where the schedules could stand to start earlier or end later, and I will be making those specific recommendations to Marin Transit. Moreover, many of my challenges with the system involved transferring between buses, especially if one bus was running behind schedule. I appreciated the many online comments received from others about how the system can be improved, and I'll be sure to pass those along as well.

I believe that a key challenge going forward will be how to address the “first and last mile” of transit. In other words, how do people get to the bus or to the new SMART train without having to drive? I found that a very effective means of doing this was by bike – and virtually all buses now have bike racks in front (in one case the rack was even full so I had to wait for the next bus!) Adequate bike parking at transit stops is a key. We will also need to bolster “first and last mile” options for people who are not in a position to hop on a bike. This could involve more shuttle service and/or app-based ride services.



Overall, I learned that it is entirely “doable” to change your transportation habits, even with a hectic calendar. I benefit from living near my office and along the 101 corridor, but in my experiences and conversations, I became convinced that everyone has the capacity to use our cars a little bit less without too much sacrifice to personal convenience or freedoms. It just takes some patience, planning and flexibility.

I plan on keeping up with non-motorized trips a couple of times per week and would also like to get a first-hand perspective on Para-Transit in the coming weeks.

Last but not least, my heartfelt thanks to the dozens of people who participated in the #RideWithDamon contest by riding their bikes, taking transit or submitting comments online. We'll be announcing a contest winner soon!

An Update on Cleaning Up Marinwood Plaza

Since first taking office last year, I've made it clear that Marinwood Plaza is one of my top priorities. Throughout this time period it has also become clear that no meaningful progress with the property is possible before first addressing the issue of toxins left behind by the former dry-cleaning business.

With the Regional Water Board's recent "Partial Approval" of the Plaza Owner's proposed cleanup plan, we are finally in a position to move forward towards meaningful resolution of this frustrating issue. In the coming months we will be finally going to get started on excavating contaminated soil and cleaning up the source of the contamination.

Marinwood Plaza LLC, the owners of the property, are responsible for cleaning up the toxins to the standards of a "cleanup order" issued by the Regional Water Board last year. They were required to submit a comprehensive plan to address multiple specific aspects of this issue. This proposed cleanup plan was submitted by Plaza Owners prior to January 1, 2016, per the cleanup order.

The Regional Water Board held a special hearing on the proposed cleanup plan on April 13, 2016. Leading up to this meeting, I had many discussions with staff and leadership from the Regional Water Board, concerned community members and advocates, and the Silveira Family and their representatives to review the proposed plan. This included a well-attended community meeting convened by my office to provide an opportunity for neighbors to hear information and ask questions on the proposed plan. By the day of the hearing, the Regional Water Board received 116 pages of comment on the plan. All of the parties listed above met together the Friday prior to the hearing for a final discussion on the Regional Water Board's potential courses of action with the proposed plan.

After attending and testifying at the hearing, I'm pleased to report that the critical questions and concerns that were put forth by community members and myself were taken into thorough consideration and largely addressed. Members of the board were thoughtful in their exploration of the plan, and displayed an understanding of the local perspectives on this troublesome issue, as well as the technical questions at hand.



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The course of action taken by the Regional Water Board was a “Partial Approval” of the proposed plan. This allows for the owners to move forward with the demolition of the building and the evacuation of the contaminated soil while reevaluating other insufficient elements of the plan. While there are multiple issues with the proposed plan, excavation of the contaminated soil is the most critical component of the plan, as it is essential to all elements of a successful cleanup.

The Partial Approval document makes it explicit that no critical cleanup tasks are tied to redevelopment. Instead, firm dates are provided for key actions –most importantly, the owners have until July 1, 2016 to plan for and begin demolition of the building and excavation of the soil underneath, and must report out that all work has been completed by February 1, 2017.

Plaza owners are also now obligated to construct six barriers along utility lines to prevent soil vapor from traveling west towards the Casa Marinwood neighborhood by July 1, 2016, along with monitoring wells to ensure that soil excavation is effective in reducing and ultimately eliminating toxins from the soil vapor.

Meanwhile, the owners of Marinwood Plaza have been sent back to the drawing board on their approach to treating groundwater at Silveira Ranch, and have been put on notice in regard to completing essential elements of the remedial investigation. The Water Board knows that we are expecting that the owners be held accountable to meeting deadlines, with firm enforcement to back it up, and we will continue to track this process as an invested stakeholder on behalf of community and neighborhood interests.

I’m satisfied with this outcome as it allows for the long-overdue and essential work of cleaning up the source of the contamination to begin, while further planning is done to ensure that the other elements of the job are addressed thoroughly and to a high standard. We will need to make sure that future amendments to the plan addressing issues like groundwater are held to the right standard, and that timelines are adhered to by the owners. The great news is that we are finally ready to address the root cause of all of these issues and start making things right while we begin to look towards the future of the Plaza.

Addressing Homelessness: The Pilot Program for Chronic Inebriates

A common question that we hear often is “what is the County doing about homelessness?” While it is evident that there is no single solution to this issue, the County is pursuing a number of different strategies towards providing effective services and mitigating the impacts on our downtown and neighborhoods, including working to relocate the Ritter Center and building up mental health services with new innovative programs.

For example, the “Transitions” program is a newly-funded three year pilot program that addresses chronic inebriates among the homeless. This program aims to break the cycle of costly and ineffective services that move people through our hospitals and justice system, only to land them back in the same scenarios. The goal is to reduce the public costs associated with chronic alcoholism and get people off the street.

The individuals we are reaching out to for participation are many of those most visible on San Rafael’s streets. These individuals often go from the back of a police car to the emergency room, onto the County Jail or the Helen Vine Detox Center, and then back to the streets with nowhere else to go. The Transitions program has been accepting referrals, and participation is ultimately voluntary. Potential participants have the opportunity to enter this program when already in jail or facing court, so participation also requires a sign-off from the District Attorney, Judge, Public Defender and law enforcement.

This program is part of our ongoing work to identify ways for law enforcement, the District Attorney, Public Defender and the Courts to work together to interrupt the revolving door process in the criminal justice system. These are all behavioral health and criminal justice systems that the County is responsible for, and they need to be highly coordinated.

Coordination between agencies and systems is an essential key to making progress on the issue of homelessness. It is an issue that affects the public interest on many levels, and any meaningful progress will depend on new creativity and coordination.

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The program described above is one of many tools used by the County in addressing this multifaceted issue. We are working to preserve the Helen Vine Detox Center, which provides beds committed for homeless chronic inebriates and high-risk probationers. In addition, Community Mental Health has created new teams to increase its outreach and engagement efforts to the homeless. All teams are fully staffed and engaged, reaching out daily to those who suffer from mental illness and have nowhere to go. We also have a triage team that works to prevent people from losing their housing due to their mental condition. We have a mobile crisis team as well that responds to calls from the public and law enforcement.

I'm particularly excited about our new Homeless Outreach Team in partnership with the City of San Rafael and community organizations, identifying the hardest to serve clients and working one on one to try clear away the obstacles that have prevented them from finding stable housing.

I will continue to make homelessness a top priority given its importance for the residents of District 1, and the entire County.

Check Out Our Key Priorities and Issues Page!

We are taking the time to make sure that people know where I stand on key issues and how we are working towards community priorities, and we are updating this page as we make progress. We've updated the page twice since first bringing it live at the beginning of this year –[check it out and let me know what you think!](#)

Future Updates on Marinwood Plaza, Grady Ranch and Other Projects:

I am committed to healthy and active community engagement for all land use and project proposals. To that end, I've set up dedicated email newsflash lists for specific projects. [Click here to sign up.](#)

Well-Deserved Recognition for Our Incredible Schools

We all love our fantastic schools in the San Rafael City School District and the Dixie School District. They are the reason that many of us moved to Marin or live here now, and they are foundational to our communities and neighborhoods. In April our schools received some well-deserved recognition. I'm proud of our excellent local schools and educators.

- Congrats to Venetia Valley, Mary E. Silveria, Vallecito, Glenwood, and Sun Valley on being 2016 Gold Ribbon Schools! Of the 6,000 schools that are eligible statewide, only 780 are recognized with this honor, and we have five of them right here in District 1 in Marin County!
- Congrats to Karrie Coulter, 2nd Grade Teacher at Short School Elementary on being named Teacher of the Year at this year's Golden Bell Awards, put on by the Marin County Office of Education!
- Congrats to Andy Hyman of the Dixie School District Board of Trustees on being named trustee of the year!
- Congrats to all the dedicated teachers in District 1 who were honored at this year's Golden Bell Awards: Alison Fell, Davidson Middle School; Gray Douglas, San Andreas High School; Jennifer Thomas, Dixie Elementary School; Patricia Else, Terra Linda High School; Ashley Davis, Sun Valley Elementary School; Brittany Rysman, Laurel Dell Elementary School; Robin Loeffler, Short Elementary School; Kathryn Cimarelli, Vallecito Elementary School; David Snaith, San Rafael High School; Tanya Osorio, Glenwood Elementary School; Mary Kate Kenney, Coleman Elementary School; Melissa Guerrero, Bahia Vista Elementary School; Vicki Van Deusen, Mary E. Silveira Elementary School; Michele Harland, Venetia Valley K-8 School

Information on Flood Insurance for District 1 Residents

We hosted a very well attended community meeting on April 12, 2016 to provide information on flood insurance for people who now find their homes within the FEMA updated maps for risk of flooding. If your house is in a flood zone, and you have a mortgage, your lender will require that you have flood insurance. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was developed as a way for homeowners to access affordable flood insurance for those living in moderate-to-low risk areas as well as high risk areas, and you can find information on the program in the first link below. You may have already been contacted by your lender and you should check with them to see if they require you to get your insurance through the NFIP. The "Floodsmart" website in the second link below will be able to answer most of your questions and provide resources on where to go and who to contact to explore the most appropriate coverage for your home. If your lender does not require you to obtain your coverage through the NFIP, contact a private insurance agent to see if they place flood insurance policies with Lloyd's of London or other excess coverage company. Those companies may provide options not offered through the NFIP that are more attractive to your particular situation. Finally, elevating your house may provide you a longer term strategy to address the risk of flooding as well as sea level rise. The third link below has further information on this approach.

- [FEMA information on the National Flood Insurance Program](#)
- ["Floodsmart" Website, to answer questions and provide resources on exploring the most appropriate coverage for your home](#)
- [Information from DPW on Grant Funding for Elevating Your Home](#)

District 1 Newsletter

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