

DAMON CONNOLLY

SUPERVISOR, DISTRICT 1

April 2017

Dear Friends,

As we push forward with our local priorities in a new political environment, it is more important than ever for our communities to engage with their local government and elected representatives.

I value all opportunities to communicate with you, and to work together as partners as I serve as your representative on the County level.

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:

- February's NACo Conference in DC
- Laura's Law and Progress in Mental Health
- Future of the Bettini Transit Center
- #Hack4Health: Marin County Hackathon
- #RideWithDamon Part II
- Update on McInnis Marsh

Advocating for Local Priorities in Washington DC

In February I traveled to Washington DC to represent Marin at the National Association of Counties (NACo) annual Legislative Conference. Suffice to say it was an interesting time to be in DC, and an important time to be advocating for our local issues and priorities.

There has been an incredible activation among the public in Marin around national political concerns over the last few months – around issues like immigration, climate change and healthcare. Thousands of people attended a series of town halls around these topics hosted by Congressman Huffman, highlighting new levels of concern in an already highly-engaged community.

With this political backdrop, my goal was to use my time in DC to advocate on behalf of Marin towards broad national issues, but more pointedly around specific projects and priorities where we are making progress on the local level.

Two national issues of high interest that the County characterizes as “Federal Policy Risks” are protecting the Affordable Care Act and Immigration Reform. More than 50,000 residents have benefitted from new or expanded health care coverage thanks to the Affordable Care Act in Marin alone, nearly 20% of our total population. And the Board of Supervisors has recently reaffirmed its strong support for immigrants in our communities, passing a resolution that affirms the principles of community security, family unity, dignity and due process.



My daughter Brette and I in front of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool

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Advocating for Local Priorities in Washington DC

These are important issues that touch our core values, and stand to deeply affect Marin residents. It is important to advocate for them. However while these fights unfold on the national level, local projects and priorities that are simultaneously ongoing stand to affect us as well. These projects require diligent stewardship, particularly in the face of marked uncertainty.

I found it heartening to go to bat for so many concrete, worthwhile projects that deserve support in meetings with representatives from federal agencies and potential funding partners.

It is not breaking news that we have several local transportation and infrastructure needs in Marin. One of my top priorities on this front is funding the permanent relocation of the **Bettini Transit Center in Downtown San Rafael**, (more on the Transit Center later in this newsletter). To this end, I met with U.S. Department of Transportation officials around potential federal funding sources. The Transit Center will likely require various sources of funding, from federal to regional to local. I will continue to pursue this goal as Marin's representative on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, MTC.



Another issue linked with the SMART train's arrival in Downtown San Rafael is the **Multiuse Path**, or the **North-South Greenway**. I met with the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy around this project –particularly in regard to the challenging portion of the pathway between 2nd and Andersen –but also more broadly around **non-motorized transportation infrastructure** in Marin.

It is notable that as things stand today, there are no safe, reliable bike routes across Downtown San Rafael that are suited for large scale public use or for students crossing town to Davidson or San Rafael High School. I raised these issues in meetings with staff from the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, of which our Congressman Jared Huffman is a member, and in meetings with the Senate Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

While transportation issues are a high priority for Marin, we remain active in pushing local environmental projects that also require dynamic funding partnerships. Marin County recently secured a \$550,000 state grant to fund the planning stages of the **McInnis Marsh Restoration Project**. While this funding sets us off to a great start, we will need larger commitments from other partners to make this project a reality.

This trip was not the first time that I've met with the Army Corps of Engineers and other federal stakeholders around this amazing opportunity for habitat restoration, endangered species protection, flood control, climate change mitigation and sea level rise adaptation. We will continue to build on the progress we've made to date advocating for this project, (more on this project later in this newsletter).

Climate change and sea level rise were constant themes that ran across all of my meetings with agencies and on the Hill. These are obviously issues that do not enjoy consensus under the new administration, but they are strong local priorities that we are dedicated to in Marin. We are steadfastly advancing these issues on the local level with our "BayWAVE Vulnerability Assessment" and by implementing our "Climate Action Plan." These two efforts are both moving forward, and we will be seeking community buy-in around them in the coming months.

Overall, the predominant feeling around the NACo conference and in meetings around DC was a high level of uncertainty -- not dissimilar from what we've seen locally among the people of Marin. Nevertheless, we must remain focused on our capacity to advance our priorities on the local level to the degree we have the control to do so. I believe this represents a significant opportunity. I'm proud to be pursuing these worthy priority projects, and to be representing constituents that care so deeply about our community.

A Year of Real Progress in Mental Health Services

Throughout my service on the Marin County Board of Supervisors, I have supported the County's efforts to increase capacity and build new programs in Behavioral Health and Recovery Services. Some recent developments serve as indicators of the real progress that we are making.

I was excited to be part of the County team that traveled to Sacramento in February for a two day summit around the "**Stepping Up Initiative**," an innovative nationwide effort to address the mental health crisis in our county jails.

There are currently more people suffering from mental illness in our county jails across the nation than there are people in the mental institutions nationwide. The Stepping Up Initiative brings together stakeholders, advocates, and public agencies to approach this issue together. In terms of local public agencies, this includes law enforcement, the criminal justice system and county social and mental health services.

We are now engaged in focused planning around how our County Health and Human Services divisions can work in concert with Jail Detention Services to address the unique challenges around people suffering from mental illness in the criminal justice system. I expect to see specific actions and proposals presented in our budget workshops as part of our fiscal priority-setting in the coming months.

I am also pleased to report that at our March 14, 2017 meeting, the Board of Supervisors received an update from Behavioral Health and Recovery Services seeking guidance on how to move forward with several programs, including a two year pilot program implementing **AB 1421, or "Laura's Law."**

The Board voted unanimously, directing staff to proceed with preparing this pilot program. I have advocated for Laura's Law throughout my time on the Board of Supervisors, and I'm very pleased that we are now in position to implement the program.

It is important to keep in mind that AB1421 is very specific, and many people that will be evaluated for eligibility will not meet the criteria. This is not going to be a cure-all answer for everyone who is seeking help for their loved ones, but our hope is that it will strengthen our safety net, and further the County's mandate is to serve MediCal eligible people with severe mental illness.

For those who may not meet the strict set of criteria for Laura's Law, we have built up a more robust mental health infrastructure over recent years. I believe we can continue this progress and continue to improve the services we provide to those in need, even if they don't meet the standards of AB 1421.

The March update from Behavioral Health and Recovery Services included direction regarding the shortage of beds for people with mental illness in our community. We currently have a quantifiable shortage of these beds, with a total of 75 in Marin County. Working with Progress Foundation as our lead contractor, we will be able to provide new opportunities for 12-15 people currently living on the street with severe mental illness. This is a good start.

We are also considering a partnership with Sonoma County to establish a Psychiatric Health Facility to address this shortage in the long-term. Our goal is to provide the appropriate level of support in the least restrictive therapeutic setting.

As we look ahead to the April budget workshops, I'm proud of the progress made to date by our Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, and pleased with their direction moving forward.



Our team in Sacramento: myself; County Sheriff Cpt. Rick Navarro; HHS Behavioral Health's Dr. Suzanne Tavano; County Probation's Mike Daly; HHS Recovery Services' DJ Pierce; and HHS Behavioral Health's Janice Wells



Working Together Around the Bettini Transit Center

As we prepare for the arrival of the SMART train in Downtown San Rafael and for the construction extending the tracks to Larkspur, there are many questions around impacts on the Bettini Transit Center and its future.

The Bettini Transit Center serves 9,000 transit users daily, making it the second busiest transit center in the Bay Area. There are two ongoing work efforts around the station that are in different stages: the “interim plan,” which addresses accommodating for the arrival of the SMART train and the construction of new tracks in the short term; and the relocation process, which looks ahead towards a permanent relocation of a new transit center as soon as possible.



It is important to bear in mind that the status quo of operations around the Transit Center prior to the SMART train was already problematic, and the area doesn’t function well as is. The area suffers from issues around congestion, as well as access and safety for bikes and pedestrians. This area was in need of solutions regardless.

We now have an opportunity to plan for a vision that holistically accounts for all user groups around the Transit Center, and that stands to result in a world-class gateway into Downtown San Rafael.

Many agencies are involved in these planning processes. Thankfully, they are already all working together in good faith. This includes Golden Gate Transit, owners of the Transit Center and operators of the Golden Gate Bus Service; SMART, who are planning for both the rollout of train service to Downtown San Rafael and the construction of tracks through the Transit Center; Marin Transit, operators of local bus service overseen the County and local cities, including myself as a Board Member; and the City of San Rafael, the planning agency who will need to approve the plans and permit the entire project.

Also involved are the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, or MTC, where I serve as Marin’s representative, and Congressman Jared Huffman, who has worked as a convener and facilitator as well as a champion for securing funds on the federal level.

These agencies demonstrated this cooperation recently by making accommodations that will keep Marin Transit buses from using San Rafael’s surface streets to make stops around the Transit Center during construction of the Larkspur extension, as was initially planned. All parties are also committed to minimizing the timeframe for operations of an “interim solution” prior to a permanent relocation, and will continue to work together to address issues as needed.

Looking ahead towards the long-term, we have a real opportunity to create an excellent gateway to San Rafael. As of today, there is a distinct lack of connectivity for bike and pedestrian infrastructure connecting through this area to Downtown San Rafael. These are the sorts of opportunities we can now look to maximize, with the goal of a revitalized transit center that serves the needs of all user groups well. I’m confident that the interests of all parties are aligned towards this end.



A graphic representation of the SMART tracks passing through the current Bettini Transit Center, for interim planning process

#Hack4Health: First Annual County Hackathon Is a Stellar Success!



After months of work preparing and promoting, last weekend's first ever Marin County Hackathon, #Hack4Health, was a HUGE success!

Saturday was truly an inspiring day to be a part of. It was a day of civic-minded young people working together on ideas and solutions around how we can move public health forward in Marin.

The event was sold out. 80 students came out to spend a Saturday hacking for public health in Marin!

I was impressed to see the diversity of the attendees, and the range of participants and skill sets. 19% of the participants were middle school students, 66% were high school students, and 15% were college students—but 100% made valuable contributions to the day's work. Some teams showed up ready to go, including local groups like

"Girls Who Code" and **"Coder Dojo."** Other groups formed organically, working together for the first time.

Students used the County's new "Open Data Portal," and thanks to the front end work of the Dept. of Health and Human Services and County IST, they were able to access a wealth of data around public health in Marin. With a fresh and innovative approach to this data, students were able to visualize brand new uses and solutions around this information.

The ideas and products that came out of this day are nothing short of creative, brilliant and forward-thinking. Some will be featured in short order on the County website, and collectively these ideas can be further developed to further our goals around public health in Marin.

Our prizewinners put forth a truly impressive range of products and ideas, including using machine learning to find correlations between public health and hazards such as illegal dumping, stagnant water, and unsanitary food facilities; an app for teens promoting healthy lifestyle choices; visualizing ambulance response times based on zip code and dispatch location; providing compelling information around vaccinations and herd immunity for kindergarten students; and a "gamified" fitness app that award points for exercise, and allows for competition and social collaboration. For a full rundown of prize winners with pictures, check out the Hack4Health website: <https://www.hackathon.marincounty.org/hackathon/event-recap>

Other topics addressed by students included opioid addiction, eating disorders, bringing together community gardens, bike paths and other resources to underserved communities, mental health around high-pressure scholastic environments, and more.

All this in just one afternoon. None of this was by accident, and beyond our stellar student participants, much credit is due to the County's IST Team, who took an "all hands on deck" approach to envisioning and executing a top-notch event, to the Dept. of Health and Human Services for their partnership and guidance towards connecting the event with the reality of public health in Marin, and MCOE for being a partner in promotion of for hosting the event itself.



#RideWithDamon Rides Again!

Last year's #RideWithDamon campaign was a great experience. I achieved my goal of taking **ZERO** single-occupancy-vehicle trips in the month April, instead relying on public transit, biking, and the occasional carpool. On top of that, I used Facebook and social media to report out on the different means of getting around Marin; I gained a better understanding of the systems and infrastructure around public transit and non-motorized transit; and I encouraged lots of my neighbors and fellow Marinites to take similar steps. It was a rewarding experience across the board.

I'm happy to report that for a second year in a row, there will be one less car on the road for the month of April! (Well, to be precise, there will be one less car on the road from April 11 through May 11, which allows my car-free month to culminate with "International Bike to Work Day.")

Many of my goals remain the same. After successfully completing the "Resilient Neighborhoods" program, I better understand how transportation habits impact our carbon footprints, and am doubly committed to "walking the walk" by taking personal accountability for my own carbon emissions. As we continue to work on our public transit systems, from envisioning the future of the Bettini Transit Center to considering Marin Transit service to East San Rafael, I value my perspective as a user of these systems. Lastly and most importantly, the #RideWithDamon challenge is about getting people to evaluate their daily habits:

- Can you find one bus route that serves one of your regular routines?
- Can you be proactive in setting up out carpool opportunities?
- Can you spend one week committed to taking zero single-rider car trips?
- Can you use your powers of influence to show others the steps you are taking to avoid getting behind the wheel?
- **Can you challenge yourself to take ownership of your transportation habits as part of your personal carbon footprint?**

My greatest takeaway from last year's challenge was that it **really isn't all too difficult to reevaluate your habits!**

If you are willing to be part of the challenge by taking a step to remove a single-passenger car from the road, please post a photo from your experience to Facebook, twitter, or email me directly with **#RideWithDamon**, and enter to win a special prize.

An Update on McInnis Marsh

We are pleased to report that Marin County Parks is continuing to advance the **McInnis Marsh Restoration Project** after securing a \$550,000 state grant from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. McInnis Marsh is 180 acres of wetlands in northern San Rafael that was separated by a non-engineered levee system in the early 1900s. Our goal is to reestablish this area as tidelands, thus improving valuable natural habitat for native and endangered species, allowing for new recreational opportunities, and providing resiliency against sea level rise. The recent grant funding will help take the project through design and environmental review. Looking ahead, funding this project to completion will take collaboration from a variety of sources, including local Measure A dollars, funds from regional Measure AA, and likely federal sources. I'm happy to be working closely with Marin County Parks in pursuing all of these potential sources to complete a valuable project for District 1 and for all of Marin County.



District 1 Newsletter

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District 1's own international skateboarding champion Zoe Safanda, who took 1st place in the Vans Combi Classic in January



*Redwood High School's Isabella Liu, co-founder of the **Elix Incubator**, and my job shadow for the School to Career Partnership Program's job shadow program.*



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