

Response to Grand Jury Report

Report Title: Roadblocks to Safer Evacuation in Marin

Respondent/Agency Name: City of Novato

Your Name: Pat Eklund

Title: Mayor

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: **F1**
- I (we) agree *partially* with the findings numbered: **F2, F3, F4 and F5**
- I (we) disagree *wholly* with the findings numbered: **N/A**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I (we) agree with the recommendations numbered: **N/A**
- I (we) agree *partially* with the recommendations numbered: **R1 and R3**
- I (we) disagree *wholly* with the recommendations numbered: **R2**



Date: 3/10/21_

Signed: _____

Mayor, City of Novato

Number of pages attached: 3

RESPONSE OF THE CITY OF NOVATO TO GRAND JURY REPORT

FINDINGS

F1. No single agency or jurisdiction is taking responsibility and authority for building infrastructure for safe evacuation routes across jurisdictions in Marin County.

Response: **Agree**

There appears to be no entity in place that assumes responsibility. Multiple agencies collaborate in developing of evacuation routes and are placing resources towards reducing impediments. The Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority provides essential support via funding for projects involving evacuation planning and development of evacuation routes. In the Spring of 2021, a new evacuation notification system will be implemented county-wide. The rollout of the system is being facilitated by the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority. "Zonehaven" is expected to significantly increase evacuation capabilities and better predict fire behavior to more quickly prioritize neighborhood evacuations.

F2. There is confusion in the county as to who has ultimate responsibility and authority for ensuring that Marin has safe evacuation routes.

Response: **Partially Agree**

There is no single established agency or authority to ensure safe evacuation routes exist in Marin County. It is left to each jurisdiction to develop, implement, and message respective evacuation plans. This can cause confusion as evacuation routes often cross jurisdictional boundaries and areas of responsibility. The City of Novato and Novato Fire Protection District collaborated in 2020 to develop intuitive and highly user-friendly evacuation route maps. The maps were prepared for approximately 36 separate zones/ neighborhoods, including the unincorporated areas of Novato. Special attention was taken to translate the maps in Spanish and facilitate ease of download by the use of a QR.

F3. Marin County Board of Supervisors and town and city councils have the responsibility for safe evacuation routing, and they have not sufficiently considered evacuation as a criterion when approving improvements to roads and traffic infrastructure in their jurisdictions.

Response: **Partially Agree**

The City of Novato is responsible for developing safe evacuation routes but works closely with the Novato Fire Protection District to accomplish this critical function. Fire suppression and prevention services within the City of Novato and surrounding unincorporated area are provided by the Novato Fire Protection District. The City's Community Development and Public Works Departments evaluate needs and determine necessary improvements to City streets and traffic infrastructure when considering new private development and public works projects. Since mid-2020, City and Novato Fire Protection District staff meet regularly to coordinate ongoing and upcoming projects with fire protection operations and needs. This includes prioritizing alternate evacuation routes, street design and ability to use the roadway for evacuation purposes.

F4. County and municipal administrators, public works, and traffic engineers have not adequately considered mass evacuation as a criterion for planning and funding traffic infrastructure improvements.

Response: **Partially Agree**

The City of Novato considers mass evacuation as criteria for planning City street and traffic infrastructure improvements when considering new private development and public works projects, but this is an area that is anticipated to be further enhanced following the completion of the countywide evacuation route study that is being undertaken by the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority. It is anticipated that the study will recommend primary evacuation routes and identify areas of concern that will help guide the future planning, programming, and shape of the City's infrastructure. Factors that can be considered to accommodate mass evacuations include, but are not limited to, traffic signal synchronization, contraflow to allow two-way roadways to be used as temporary one way multilane facilities, alternative evacuation routes, and Emergency Vehicle Access roads.

F5. Most Marin jurisdictions have not yet included urgently needed evacuation plans in their general plans as required by state law and as recommended by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research.

Response: **Partially Agree**

The General Plans of Marin County jurisdictions vary in their schedule of updates to address State law. The City of Novato General Plan does not currently address Safety Element requirements for evacuation planning, however, it will be updated to include these needs following the upcoming update of the Housing Element (scheduled for adoption no later than January 1, 2023).

RECOMENDATIONS

R1. Within 180 days of the date of this report, the governing boards of the County of Marin and its cities and towns should direct their respective planning and public works departments to include evacuation needs among their criteria for evaluating and recommending public works projects.

Response: **Partially Agree**

The City's Community Development Public Works Departments, with support from the Novato Fire Protection District will continue to evaluate projects against existing standards, including minimum road widths that ensure evacuation needs are among their criteria for evaluating and recommending private development and public works projects.

R2. Within 180 days of the date of this report, the governing boards of the County of Marin and its cities and towns should adopt resolutions calling on the Transportation Authority of Marin to include evacuation needs among the criteria it considers when planning and funding public works projects.

Response: **Disagree**

The City of Novato is solely responsible for determining the scope of public works projects within its jurisdiction. The City has and will continue to engage adjacent jurisdictions such as the County of Marin and other agencies such as the Transportation Authority of Marin in the planning and coordination of City projects. The City will also continue to participate in

the planning and coordination efforts of our partner agencies to ensure that their projects and initiatives meet the needs of each jurisdiction, including fire protection operations and consideration of mass evacuations.

R3. In calendar year 2021, the County of Marin and its cities and towns should update the safety elements of their general plans to include evacuation planning.

Response: **Partially Agree**

The City of Novato will update the Safety Element of our General Plan following the next update of our Housing Element (scheduled for adoption no later than January 1, 2023) in accordance with state law.

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CLARENCE
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