



Summer 2014

Goodbye summer, hello “school’s back in session” season and with it a caution to all to take care driving, biking, and walking, especially in school zones. We are so fortunate to live here in Marin, and particularly the Ross Valley, but a thriving local and regional economy, booming school age population, and general high level of activity of residents, has our transportation infrastructure at capacity and often in gridlock.

As we seek ways to reduce congestion - through creating more capacity, maximizing the efficiency of the infrastructure in place, and continually working to improve public transit and support all modes of travel - we all need to take a deep breath. Patience and good planning are the tools to put in play right now, while we work together to address our traffic and transportation challenges.

Traffic congestion, land use planning, flood and drought continue as topics of greatest interest for residents of the Ross Valley. I provide updates on all these issues in this newsletter, and you can find more information on these topics by going to my website and clicking on “[Current Issues](#).” As always, please never hesitate to contact me with your comments, questions, concerns on these or any other issues. Email: krice@marincounty.org; ph. 415-473-7825.

In This Issue:

- Housing Element Update
- Urban vs. Suburban: Update on AB 1537
- Larkspur Station Area Plan Wrap Up
- Traffic/Transportation Updates
 - Richmond-San Rafael Bridge
 - Sir Francis Drake Rehabilitation Project
 - White Hill Roadway Improvements
- Ross Valley Watershed Program Update
- Drought Update

Housing Element Update

I have had a number of folks reach out to me with questions, concerns and/or comments regarding the County Housing Element (applies to unincorporated Marin only) and the current update process. Assuming others are also interested, I provide below information on the Housing Element - what it is, what it isn’t, the County’s timeline

and process towards adopting an updated housing element, and links to resources so you can learn more and participate in the discussion should you desire.

This will be Marin County's 6th Housing Element going back several decades. The Housing Element is not a prescription for growth, it is a legally required documentation of site availability towards meeting community housing needs. The how, where, and when we develop has been, and will continue to be decided and guided by our own local plans and policies, through community process and public discussion, not by the Housing Element. That said, while the Housing Element cannot and does not impose development, it does have us thinking about and discussing our communities' housing needs, a critically important issue and a conversation well worth having.

About the Housing Element

- Every city, town and county in California has been required by state law since 1969 to include a Housing Element as part of their General Plan. Housing Elements are required to be updated on an eight year cycle.
- The Housing Element is not a dictate to build, but an outline of a jurisdiction's ability through existing zoning, development code and housing programs to accommodate and support community housing needs - from market rate single-family homes, to senior, workforce and special needs housing.
- The number of housing units (RHNA) a jurisdiction must plan for in their housing element for each 8 year cycle is determined by the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).
- For the upcoming 8-year period (2015-23), the County must show through its "site inventory list" that there are appropriately zoned sites in unincorporated Marin which could accommodate at least 185 new residential units across income levels; this compares to the 773 residential units the County had to identify for the 2007-14 Housing Element.
- Identification of vacant or underdeveloped parcels with zoning in place that could accommodate additional new housing does not trigger development. It is up to the property owner to decide whether or not to develop their property. This is true, regardless of whether a property is included in the Housing Element's Site Inventory list.
- Further, proposals for development of any parcel (whether or not included in the Housing Element), are required to conform to local code, community plans, general plan policy, design guidelines, etc. and must go through the planning, design, environmental review, and permitting and public review processes required by the County.

- There are two District 2 sites included on the 2007-14 site list, and being reconsidered for the 2015-23 list: a commercial property located in unincorporated Fairfax at Sir Francis Drake and Oak Manor Road (an existing strip mall zoned mixed use/residential for up to 10 residential units); and, a two-acre strip of vacant land in California Park (San Rafael along Woodland Avenue adjacent to SMART rail line), which has zoning to allow for up to 50 units of multi-family housing.

Process for the Current Housing Element Review and Adoption:

- The Marin County Community Development Agency (CDA) initiated the current Housing Element update for the planning period 2015-2023 in March 2014. This follows a two year discussion and public process around consideration and adoption of our current 2007-14 Housing Element. The 2007-14 Housing Element constitutes the basis for the update of the 2015-23 Element.
- To date, five public workshops on the Housing Element update have been held at various locations throughout the county.
- In addition, the Marin County Planning Commission held hearings on July 28 and August 25, and a third is scheduled for November 17.
- At its August 25 hearing, the Planning Commission reviewed and recommended a site inventory list identifying 10 different sites which at current zoning could accommodate up to 502 residential units across income levels. Their recommendation will be reviewed by the state agency, Housing and Community Development, and then returned with comment for further consideration by the Planning Commission, and then by the Board of Supervisors at public hearings later this year. The Board of Supervisors has the discretion to concur or make changes to the draft housing element as recommended by the Planning Commission prior to final adoption.
- January 31, 2015, is the first deadline for adoption of the 2015-2023 Housing Element. Meeting this deadline would allow the County to stay on an eight year cycle for Housing Element update, representing a considerable saving per the County's resource allocation, and ensuring access to regional transportation funding.

To close: Marin is a county that respects community values, community character and thoughtful planning that supports our many unique and varied communities. We value our open space and agricultural lands, and have worked hard to preserve them through zoning, conservation easement and permanent protection. These values have guided growth patterns throughout most of the county for decades and will continue to do so.

For more information on the Housing Element, I direct you to the [Draft Housing Element](#) and [staff report](#) prepared for the August 25 Planning Commission hearing. To sign up

for ongoing email notifications on the Housing Element, go to the [Housing Element website](#).

Urban vs. Suburban: Update on AB 1537

Assembly Bill 1537 (Levine) cleared both the Assembly and Senate floors with nearly unanimous support. It now awaits the Governor's signature. AB 1537 was introduced by Marc Levine to allow Marin County to have its designation (per state housing law) changed from metropolitan to suburban. This change would amend the minimum density of future affordable housing developments per inclusion in the Housing Element, from 30 units per acre to 20 units per acre. Individuals and organizations throughout the county, The County and Bay Area nonprofit housing agencies have joined together in support of this bill, which will help Marin meet its affordable housing needs at a scale in keeping with existing community character. The governor has until September 30 to sign the bill into law.

Larkspur Station Area Plan Wrap Up

On June 18 the Larkspur City Council voted unanimously to halt review and consideration of the Larkspur Station Area Plan. I closely followed the issue throughout the process and participated in the public discussion on behalf of the greater Ross Valley community.

The Council's decision to shelve the plan was based on its assessment that the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) did not adequately address issues of concern. The Council also agreed with the broader community's sentiment that the plan did not include a reasonable solution for mitigating new traffic that might be generated by future development. The Council agreed that existing traffic and circulation conditions need to be addressed in advance of consideration of future development in the Larkspur Landing Area and vicinity.

As such, the Council requested that during the city's upcoming General Plan Update process, that the Larkspur Citizen Advisory Committee review the Draft Station Area Plan for any policies or proposals (such as suggestions for transit/traffic/congestion relief and bicycle/pedestrian improvements) that would be worthy of consideration to incorporate into the city's General Plan Update. Solutions in the corridor cannot be accomplished by Larkspur alone, however, and in fact will require the involvement and agreement of multiple jurisdictions and agencies.

To that end, I will be working with leadership and officials from the cities and towns with jurisdiction in the general area, to identify and agree on improvements (both infrastructure and operational) towards relieving congestion in the Larkspur/Greenbrae 101 and Sir Francis Drake corridor. Community involvement and support for solutions will be key to making progress. I invite you to be part of the discussion.

Visit the [City of Larkspur's website](#) for more information on the [Larkspur Station Area Plan process](#) and the [General Plan Update process](#).

Traffic/Transportation Updates

A cautionary note: there are no silver bullets, simple or non-controversial solutions to our traffic woes. Multiple contributing factors on Sir Francis Drake and throughout the 101 corridor, including: volume of traffic (both local and regional), infrastructure constraints, competing modes of travel, safety issues, etc. combine to create a complex and challenging situation. That said, I provide updates on three initiatives currently underway, that will provide critically important elements towards overall improvements for Sir Francis Drake and the 101 corridor.

Richmond-San Rafael Bridge: Progress towards Opening a Third Lane

As I discussed in a prior newsletter, one of the outcomes of the Greenbrae/101 Interchange discussion was to direct attention towards capacity constraints on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, particularly eastbound, and the need for a direct connection between Highway 101 and 580.

In June, the Department of Transportation and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) agreed that opening up a third lane eastbound on the bridge is not only necessary, but also a priority project. The agencies' agreement to not only consent to the project, but also to put it on the "fast track" comes at the request of Marin County officials, and is a direct outcome of the Greenbrae/101 interchange discussion and subsequent advocacy and efforts by the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) and our MTC commissioner, Steve Kinsey, to gain regional and state support for the project.

Funding has been allocated by MTC for project planning, which is now underway. The project is not just a matter of restriping for three lanes, but will require modifications to roadway infrastructure on either side of the bridge. During the planning period, MTC, Marin and Contra Costa transportation agencies will be working together to secure construction funding. While no date for completion has been identified, the agencies are anticipating a two to three year time frame for this project.

Sir Francis Drake Boulevard Rehabilitation Project

The County of Marin is undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the Sir Francis Drake corridor from Highway 101 in Greenbrae west to Ross Town limits, towards evaluating the corridor for potential improvements for vehicle flow, transit operations, and pedestrian and bicyclist circulation along and across this important arterial.

The project includes a topographic survey of the corridor, collection of information and data on current travel patterns, seeking public input on concerns and suggestions for improvements, development of design alternatives, design of construction plans, and associated environmental review, ultimately leading to project construction.

The project is funded for both design and construction by Measure A, the Marin County Transportation Sales Tax measure passed by voters in 2004. The Marin County Department of Public Works is managing the project in coordination with agencies with facilities or interests in the corridor. Construction is expected to begin summer 2017.

Go to the [Sir Francis Drake Boulevard Rehabilitation Project website](#) for more information (including a schedule) and to sign up for ongoing email notifications about this project.

White Hill Roadway Improvements

Long awaited improvements to westbound Sir Francis Drake as it passes over White Hill should commence this month. In addition to road resurfacing and striping, the road shoulder will be widened to five feet. This project is critical to improving safety for bicyclists traveling over White Hill.

The Marin County Department of Public works is overseeing the project. Funding comes from a grant from the National Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program as part of a federal program to encourage nonmotorized transportation. Construction should last about two months. Your patience and caution during construction, much appreciated.

Ross Valley Watershed and Flood Protection Program Update

The Ross Valley has a history of severe and widespread flooding. Major floods have occurred 4 times over the past 40 years, causing extensive property damage and economic hardship to residents, businesses, and local governments. Flooding is a public safety, economic and environmental issue for our communities. The Ross Valley Flood Protection and Watershed program was developed after the 2005 New Year's Eve flood, towards finally addressing this serious, chronic issue.

As you'll recall, the program's goals are: to reduce flooding and flood damage; to integrate environmental and watershed restoration improvements with flood control projects; to provide community localized flood prevention support; and to use the local fee collected (\$40 million over 20 years) to leverage outside funding/grants necessary to fully fund the Watershed program.

In addition to creek capacity and constriction removal improvements, the program proposes dual-use detention basins (retrofitting existing fields to enable the capture and holding back of flood waters during major storm events). Though not used currently in Marin County, detention basins/dual-use facilities are commonly used throughout the state and country for flood mitigation.

To date, work on the Ross Valley Watershed program has been virtually invisible. But progress has been made: the hydraulic modeling and other studies needed to bring project proposals to "grant ready status" have been completed. Already, \$15 million in outside grants have been awarded to convert Phoenix Lake and Memorial Park into "dual use facilities" should we decide to move forward with those projects. Four roadway bridges (in San Anselmo and Ross) that span the creek, create constriction points and are major contributors to flooding, have been awarded grants that will pay for 80% of their construction cost, and are now entering environmental review.

Over the next months and years, project proposals will go through thorough environmental review, public process and be discussed and decided on at the local

level. These processes take time, but are critical to ensuring that projects are environmentally sound, have been thoroughly vetted, and will meet program and community objectives and expectations.

Go to www.rossvalleywatershed.org for more information on the Watershed program/project proposals and see the [FAQ sheet](#) specific to the Memorial Park proposal. The Ross Valley Watershed Program Annual Community Meeting will be held on a Saturday morning in October at Drake High School – I will be sharing information/details with you closer to that time.

Drought Update: MMWD Calling for Conservation as a Precautionary Measure

In response to the continuing state-wide drought, the State Water Resources Control Board announced new emergency regulations in July designed to reduce outdoor water use statewide. To fully comply with the state, on August 19 the Marin Municipal Water District Board of Directors adopted an ordinance amending the water waste section of the district's code, triggering the following conservation regulations aligning with new state conservation regulations.

- No irrigating between 9am-7pm, except for system testing and repairs.
- Hoses must be equipped with a shutoff nozzle (free nozzles available at MMWD's Corte Madera office)
- No irrigation resulting in runoff or overspray the irrigated area
- No hosing down sidewalks, driveways, and other hard-surfaced areas
- No non-recirculating decorative fountains

Though Marin's water supply is actually in fairly good shape with reservoirs at 91% of normal storage levels for this date, conservation measures will ensure our supply is maximized during this extended drought period. Thank you for your help in these water conservation efforts. Go to the [MMWD website](#) for more [drought information](#) and [water-saving tips](#), including how to calculate your water use and where you can use less.

Contact Info:

Supervisor Katie Rice
415-473-7825
krice@marincounty.org

District 2 Aides:

Sandy Laird

415-473-6159

slaird@marincounty.org

Nancy Vernon

415-473-7351

nvernon@marincounty.org