

To: Town of Fairfax Staff and Town Council
From: Town of Fairfax Climate Action Committee
Re: Response to 2019-2020 Marin County Civil Grand Jury report "Climate Change: How will Marin Adapt?"
Date: 2020.11.18

The purpose of this memo is to respond as required by Penal Code Section 933.05.

The Grand Jury Report specifically requires us to respond to Findings 1-5, and 7, and Recommendations 1,4, and 6.

Please note: The Town of Fairfax was the first jurisdiction in the County of Marin to adopt a Climate Emergency Resolution. Our Resolution commits us to achieving zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Many of the actions required to achieve this goal will require collaboration between the various towns and the County in concert. To that end, we have many more recommendations and we look forward to being able to collaborate with the County and the other Towns of Marin to rapidly de-carbonize the County, in ways that promote social justice and resilience.

Our required responses are as follows:

I. Findings:

F1. Finding: Climate change mitigation efforts by Marin governments have been notably effective in meeting their goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Response: In some measure, we agree. For example, we were able to achieve our 2020 greenhouse gas emission goal by the end of 2016, rather than the end of 2020. However, we recognize that the vast bulk of this accomplishment came as a result of the State of California Renewable Portfolio Standard on the electricity grid, the introduction of Marin Clean Energy and particularly its Deep Green offering, coupled with its adoption by such county-wide entities as MMWD. That is, our emissions have come down by more than our target. But the progress has largely been due to work others County-wide besides the Town. And, the IPCC recommends that we achieve a reduction that is twice as large in the next ten years. We have taken advantage of low-hanging fruit. We must significantly increase our efforts if we hope to achieve even a similar level of achievement in the future.

Marin cannot mitigate climate disaster alone, but Marin has and should continue to have a major influence as an example to other communities, which gives us the opportunity and the responsibility to act swiftly and aggressively.

F2. Finding: Adaptation planning is essential to protect local public utility and transportation infrastructure as well as private property interests, and to enable Marin's citizens to maintain their current standards of living.

Response: We agree that adaptation planning is essential. We are particularly concerned with the threats from wildfire. We note, however, the seductive nature of investing in adaptation. That is, adaptation is popular because it is protection from a very direct threat, whereas mitigation has much more diffuse, much less obvious benefits. And yet, mitigation, in the larger frame, is significantly more important than adaptation. The climate is changing, and, if we do not stop its advance, we will never have the resources to keep up with it in our adaptation efforts. Small prevention is always worth a pound of cure, but prevention must be collective, while adaptation can be more individual. We must be exceedingly careful not to divert resources to adaptation and thereby starve mitigation efforts. The best course will be to focus heavily on responses that can build both adaptation and mitigation. For example, if we were to provide batteries in every building, it would make us much more resilient, but it would also mean we could avoid deploying a lot of gasoline generators: mitigation and adaptation.

F3. Finding: With the BayWAVE and C-SMART initial vulnerability assessments completed, the county is now well-positioned to focus on adaptation planning and policies related to sea level rise.

Response: No comment.

F4. Finding: The existing adaptation efforts across the county pay insufficient attention to the other potential effects of climate change, including impacts on public health, ecosystems, and social equity.

Response: We agree.

F5. Finding: There are insufficient staff and financial resources devoted to climate change adaptation efforts across county government as well as in the cities, towns, and other agencies, and many of the existing efforts are highly dependent on grant funding.

Response: We strongly agree.

Please note, we again urge that the County not over-emphasize the adaptation task, and that we collectively commit to mitigation.

F7. Finding: Cross-jurisdictional collaboration and coordination will be required for successful adaptation efforts, but Marin lacks any overarching organizational or governance structure to facilitate this.

Response: We strongly agree on both counts. Note, we have created a loose connection between the official Town-authorized Climate Action Committees/Sustainability Commissions through the County, to try to make first steps toward addressing this issue. We welcome further discussions as to how we can build on this foundation.

And, as previously noted, we urge a stronger emphasis on mitigation, as compared to adaptation.

II. Recommendations:

R1. Recommendation: The board of supervisors, in collaboration with the municipalities and other agencies affected by climate change, should convene a multi-jurisdictional task force (referred to in this report as the Marin Climate Adaptation Task Force) charged with developing a single, comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional adaptation strategy for all of Marin.

Response: We strongly agree. We are ready to immediately join. We strongly recommend that this be undertaken by the Climate Action Committees of the various towns, potentially building upon the cross-town organization now operating across Fairfax, San Anselmo, and Sausalito.

R2: You did not require us to respond to this Recommendation, but we strongly support it.

R3: You did not require us to respond to this Recommendation, but we strongly support it.

R4. Recommendation: Each member of the Marin Climate & Energy Partnership, should declare its support for broadening the partnership's mission and increasing its funding as necessary to enable it to support overall climate change planning efforts, including both mitigation and adaptation in cities, towns, and other member agencies throughout the county.

Response: We agree in part. We agree that we need increased funding for MCEP. We agree that membership should expand to include, especially, membership from the Town and City Climate Action Committees/Sustainability Commissions. We disagree with changing the focus to adaptation. The County is already focused on creating a multi-jurisdictional Adaptation task force, as noted in Recommendation 1. We emphasize, again, the fundamental need to accelerate our collective action on the issue of mitigation. We must not allow MCEP to lose its focus. We must invest in adaptation, yes, but let the Adaptation committee do this work, and keep MCEP focused on mitigation. And, we must strengthen MCEP and all of our work, before the window to do so closes. We do think there are mitigation strategies that also improve adaptation, and we can emphasize such strategies with co-benefits.

R6. Recommendation: Each city and town, if it does not have a full-time sustainability coordinator (or similar position), should appoint a committee or commission charged with monitoring and reporting on its climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Response: We agree in part. Fairfax has a committee charged with monitoring and reporting on our climate change mitigation efforts. It is NOT a substitute for a full-time staff person. For us, or for any jurisdiction to make needed progress will require significantly more investment. Each city and town need to develop both a committee and full-time staff.