



**SAN RAFAEL**  
THE CITY WITH A MISSION  
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**Agenda Item No: 7.a**

**Meeting Date: September 15, 2025**

## **SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

**Department: City Manager's Office**

**Prepared by: Kerry Fugett,  
Climate Justice and Engagement  
Manager**

**John Stefanski,  
Assistant City Manager**

**City Manager Approval:** \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "J. Stefanski", written over a horizontal line.

**TOPIC: EAST SAN RAFAEL AND CANAL COMMUNITY - COLLECTIVE PLANS IN ACTION: PROGRESS REPORT**

**SUBJECT: INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION ON EAST SAN RAFAEL AND CANAL COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE PLANS IN ACTION: PROGRESS REPORT**

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the City Council receive the informational report and presentation. This item is for discussion only; no City Council action is being requested at this time.

### **BACKGROUND:**

For many years, the City of San Rafael, along with numerous local government agencies has conducted extensive community engagement in the Canal neighborhood to better understand the communities' needs. These efforts have included surveys, community meetings, and focus groups aimed at gathering community input on their proposed plans or programs.

While these efforts have been well-intentioned and focused on creating opportunities for community contributions, the City of San Rafael has received feedback that simultaneous and uncoordinated community engagement processes have led to community fatigue and the experience of extractive engagement practices. What staff have heard from the community over the last year is that they want to know what the City has done with their feedback so they know their input is valued and that the City is following up with action. Additionally, they've asked that we circle back and explain why certain initiatives have not moved forward yet. Often, the reason for that is limited resources and capacity, and the community deserves to know why the City wasn't able to implement all of their requests. The City must be accountable to the community in this way, or there can be an erosion of trust. The City highly values the input and lived experience of all City residents. To that end, the City is developing a community engagement guide that will provide City staff with practical tools and standards for planning and carrying out inclusive, consistent, and community-centered engagement. Its purpose is to strengthen trust, improve access, and ensure that diverse voices are meaningfully integrated into City's decision-making process.

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**FOR CITY CLERK ONLY**

**Council Meeting:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Disposition:** \_\_\_\_\_

In 2024, Mayor Kate was selected as one of eight mayors across the country to participate in the [Mayor's Institute on Community Design Just City Fellowship program](#), where she learned about the unintended impacts of making land use decisions without a resident led engagement process, and how lack of consistent follow-up can lead to the degradation of community's trust in government.

The program is a **semester long, hybrid (in-person + virtual) fellowship** that brings together a small cohort of mayors and their staff to address injustices in the built environment through **design centered strategies** [Mayors' Institute on City Design](#).

It's a collaboration between:

- The **Mayors' Institute on City Design (MICD)** a leadership initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Conference of Mayors.
- The **Just City Lab** at Harvard Graduate School of Design, led by Toni L. Griffin, with a focus on combining design and equity.

The Fellowship empowered mayors with **concepts of social impact and justice centered design, equity measurement tools**, and **innovative design practices** oriented toward **just and equitable outcomes**.

It was framed by the **Just City Index**, a tool from Harvard GSD's Just City Lab, and enriched by vibrant presentations and dialogues that brought together experts from disciplines like architecture, planning, public policy, and art activism. Mayors focused on how injustices show up in their cities, crafting what's called a "**manifesto of action**"—a concrete roadmap toward equitable change.

This Fellowship stands out by **fusing design and equity with leadership**—not just offering lofty ideas but equipping mayors with measurable frameworks and collaborative tools to **tackle injustice in real, tangible ways**. Especially effective was how each mayor applied the learning to their city's unique context.

The City Manager and the Director of Digital Service & Open Government also participated in part of the Just City's program along with the Mayor. As a result, staff are incorporating these best practices into the City's inclusive community engagement approach.

The City of San Rafael is deeply committed to co-creating community plans in partnership with residents to ensure equitable representation in decisions that directly affect their lives. We recognize that authentic, resident-led engagement is essential to building lasting trust and achieving just, inclusive outcomes. Through Mayor Kate Colin's participation in the 2024 Mayor's Institute on Community Design Just City Fellowship, we have deepened our understanding of how traditional, top-down planning processes can unintentionally harm communities, especially when engagement lacks meaningful follow-through. Guided by these lessons, the City is prioritizing transparent, collaborative, and culturally responsive engagement practices, particularly in historically underserved neighborhoods like the Canal. This approach ensures that community voices are not only heard but centered in shaping San Rafael's future.

As a result of this work, the City engaged James Lima Planning and Development consulting firm this past Fall, who helped define the project scope and methodology, conduct the gap analysis, and will support compilation of the Collective Plans in Action report. The project team identified 715 initiatives across 20 plans and programs from the last ten years that impact East San Rafael and the Canal neighborhood.

Our government agency partners whose plans or programs are included in this analysis have participated in the gap analysis by identifying which initiatives have been completed, are in process, or yet to begin. The City is grateful for their partnership and participation in this project.

Government agency partners will be invited to provide feedback on the draft sections of the report that relate directly to their work. This agency feedback will be facilitated during meetings with James Lima Planning and Development, and agencies will have additional time to provide their feedback in writing. The City's goal is to ensure alignment with agency partners as part of providing this comprehensive update about the work we are doing collectively to increase the quality of life in East San Rafael and the Canal neighborhood.

The completion of the Collective Plans in Action report will advance the City's progress towards the following objectives contained in the City Council's 3-Year Strategic Plan:

Objective A.3.5 of the [City's 2025-2028 Strategic Plan](#) that states "Develop an East San Rafael Specific Plan using the City's inclusive resident engagement philosophy; collaborate with the community and Canal Alliance to ensure alignment with their community vision plan (Nuestro Canal, Nuestro Futuro).", and Objective G.2.1 which aims to develop a comprehensive inclusive community engagement program. A core value of this program is accountability to the community. The Collective Plans in Action report reflects the City's commitment to reporting back to the community on the outcomes and progress of previous engagement efforts. Providing regular updates after engagement will continue to be a key part of the Citywide inclusive community engagement program moving forward.

**ANALYSIS:**

The purpose of the Collective Plans in Action project is to report back to the community on the status of the initiatives that directly relate to the feedback they've provided, to explain what the limitations are in implementing the remaining items, and to ensure that the remaining initiatives are still a priority for the community. The initial gap analysis of the 715 initiatives across the 20 plans shows what initiatives are completed or ongoing, which are in progress, and what work has yet to begin across the six topic areas of Housing, Development, and Anti-Displacement; Economic Mobility & Development; Transportation and Mobility; Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice; Parks and Public Spaces; and Health and Public Safety. Each of the six topic areas has approximately six community priorities. For example, within the topic area of Transportation and Mobility, a community priority is to "create multi-use transportation nodes". The community priorities reflect a summary of the findings from prior community engagement processes conducted by various agencies as part of developing a plan or program. These community priorities have been aggregated across all the plans in the Collective Plans in Action draft report to provide a holistic snapshot of what was important to the community at the time of engagement. This information will be made available to the public via a virtual database once the report is complete. A comprehensive Collective Plans in Action report is targeted for the end of 2025 and will include narrative sections to contextualize the findings.

This progress update provides the City Council and our partner government agencies with data and information so they can provide input as staff work to finalize the final report scheduled for the end of the calendar year. There are a number of opportunities to use the findings from this project to enhance upcoming planning processes. This includes utilizing the community priorities identified in the report as a foundation for the East San Rafael Specific Plan's community engagement process. The gap analysis findings can be used to establish existing conditions for the East San Rafael Specific Plan. Canal Alliance is also interested in using this gap analysis to identify opportunities for investment as part of the Nuestro Canal, Nuestro Futuro Vision Plan, which is connected with the [Canal Promise Neighborhood Investable](#)

[Plan](#), a plan that will generate targeted investment in high-impact strategies that improve educational outcomes for children in the Canal. The final Collective Plans in Action report will also be used for strategic priority setting, data-driving decision making, enhanced coordination, and transparent communications.

Community members have repeatedly expressed the importance of receiving follow-up information on how their input was used, including what was implemented, what was not, and the reasons why. The Collective Plans in Action project was conducted specifically to respond to this feedback and an effort to acknowledge and value the time, effort, and lived experiences of residents – particularly those who experience significant barriers to public participation – as a step towards increasing trust and accountability in public processes.

**Next Steps:**

The project team is working to turn the quantitative analysis into a narrative format to contextualize what story the data is telling. This will look like an overarching summary within each topic area of what's been done, what is next, and comments on work that have not yet started. The summary will link to a virtual database where the public will be able to view the underlying data set which provides the individual status of all 715 initiatives, searchable by topic area, community priority, status, plan, or agency. The final report will also include an overarching gap analysis and identification of opportunities for greater alignment between community priorities and agency commitments. Partner government agencies will have the opportunity to provide edits on these narrative sections as well. The final report is targeted for release by the end of calendar year 2025. After that, the City will conduct community engagement to report back our progress, confirm initiatives yet to be started remain community priorities, explain why certain initiatives haven't been completed, and get feedback and input on next steps. Next steps will include how to design accessible accountability systems to consistently report back on progress moving forward.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

The Canal Alliance has been a key partner providing input at each stage of the Collective Plans in Action analysis. Local agency partners were critical in providing status updates on each of the initiatives from the plans or programs associated with their organization. This includes input from the County of Marin's Community Development Agency, Office of Equity, and Department of Information Services and Technology; the Transportation Authority of Marin; Marin Transit; Marin Community Foundation; Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District; and Dominican University of California's Center for Community Engagement.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The City entered into a professional services agreement for \$75,000 on September 23, 2024 with James Lima Planning and Development to develop the Collective Plans in Action report. There is no additional fiscal impact associated with this report.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Staff recommends that the City Council receive the informational report and presentation. This item is for discussion only; no City Council action is being requested at this time.