

**Summary of San Rafael General Plan 2040 Steering Committee Meeting
Meeting #10 December 12, 2018
6:00-8:30 PM at 750 Lindaro Avenue**

Attendance

Members Present: *DJ Allison, Jenny Broering, Maribeth Bushey, Bill Carney, Omar Carrera, Berenice Davidson, Richard Hall, Linda Jackson, Margaret Johnston, Jeff Jones, Bonnie Marmor, Robert Miller, Stephanie Plante, Kate Powers, Jeff Rhoads, Jackie Schmidt, Roger Smith, Sparkie Spaeth, Eric Spielman, Karen Strolia, Cecilia Zamora*

Alternates Participating: *Jack McGinn (for Bella Bromberg), Jed Greene (for Drew Norton)*

Excused Absences: *Bella Bromberg, Eric Holm, Drew Norton*

Alternates in Audience: *Jim Geraghty*

Guests: *Quinn Gardner, Kif Scheurer (alternate)*

Staff Present: *Allison Giffin, Paul Jensen, Barry Miller*

Public: *Shirl Buss, Chris Hart, Natalia Davidson*

Welcome/ Roll Call

Chair Plante called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM. Project Manager (PM) Miller took roll call and reviewed the agenda.

Acceptance of Meeting Summaries

A Motion and Second were made to approve the Minutes from November 14, 2018. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

None

5. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Report from Laurel Dell School

A group of Laurel Dell fifth grade students, working with Shirl Buss of Y-Plan, gave a presentation of their vision for San Rafael 2040. The presentation highlighted issues around sea level rise, public space, and making San Rafael more colorful and vibrant in the future. Following the presentation, Committee members had a chance to ask questions:

- How long did it take to prepare the presentation? (One of the students indicated it took an hour. Ms Buss noted that there was more time involved with preparing the study models and that a lot of deep thinking and teamwork went into the presentations).

- What is the structure that looks like two new buildings? (Students responded that this was a new Gateway that would provide a colorful entrance to Fourth Street.)
- Tell us about the roller coaster. (The students responded it would be fun to have this in the city)
- What are all the colors going up B Street to Boyd Park? (The teacher responded that the students wanted to connect B street to Fourth Street and then up to the park, where there would be sculptures of animals. She added that the students also wanted to make a colorful staircase.)
- Why is color so important? (The students responded that color was nice and bright and a good idea for downtown. The teacher indicated the students were inspired by pictures from cities around the world.)
- What are the ideas for the Canal? (The students responded that their model shows how the city will respond to sea level rise, and also provide housing for the homeless).

B. Updating the Safety Element and Overview of Local Hazard Mitigation Plan

PM Miller discussed the changes to the Safety Element and noted that many of the new State requirements for General Plans affected this element. He also noted that much of the content of this element was covered by the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP), which had been adopted by the City a year earlier. He introduced Quinn Gardner, the Emergency Services Coordinator for the City of San Rafael. Quinn provided a report on the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Highlights of Quinn's remarks included:

- The LHMP is a science based document.
- Marin County has just completed its own Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan which is broader than the City's---the City will adopt the County Plan and thus increase its eligibility for funding
- Some of the actions in the LHMP are already being implemented
- The hazard that has caused the most fatalities in San Rafael is water---e.g., people drowning in the Bay
- Risk is created by where we choose to build/ how we interact with the environment
- Mitigation is the study of how we can reduce the impacts of the risk---examples include levees, vegetation management, fire-resistant construction
- There is also a need for retroactive retrofits (for existing development)---not just requirements for new development
- Continuity planning (for when disaster strikes) is a critical part of this. How do we respond to the loss of the workforce, the loss of technology, and the loss of physical space?
- Also need to address mutual aid partnerships (to supplement our firefighters in emergencies)

Questions and comments were raised after Quinn's presentation. *Staff responses are noted in italics:*

- How does the LHMP evaluate things like pumping stations along Highway 101? How do City departments coordinate to implement the LHMP? How does this Plan interface with the General Plan?
LHMP is a collaborative document that is prepared by all departments, but much of the implementation falls on Public Works. There are specific CIP items in the Plan. The Planning Department relies on it as well---it informs the General Plan.
- A lot of our workforce lives in compromised areas and also speaks other languages. A multi-cultural aspect to the Plan is needed.
Demographics are very important in the risk profile and things like age, rental versus ownership of property, etc are taken into account.

- There's a lot of communication between police and fire departments, but what about between these departments and residents? We need communication warning systems in the community (e.g., air raid sirens) which can warn people of disasters (especially when people are asleep). *A few cities have done this—there are many different types of alert systems being explored. Sirens may not be the answer, though—they are not designed to be heard indoors. GP 2040 could support a study of better warning systems.*
- One of the lessons learned in the Paradise fire is that traffic calming measures (bulbouts) reduced street widths and constrained evacuation capacity. How can we avoid this in San Rafael? Also, how high do ladder trucks go, if we are thinking of taller buildings? Also, what is being done about the increase in homeless camps in fire-prone landscapes? *Quinn noted that the Fire Department was equipped to deal with structure fires in taller buildings. CD Director Jensen also noted that the City tests building proposals based on the fire-fighting equipment available and applies different Code requirements based on height. Quinn added that the Homeless Encampment Action Team is actively engaged in the issue of encampments and the City will close open space as needed to prevent potential fires. She stated that there will be a Wildfire Action Plan presented to the City Council in January. Fuel management is now one of the city's highest priorities—and the existing General Plan calls for Fuel Management Plans. Jensen noted that the Marin Open Space District recently partnered with the City to develop such a Plan for San Rafael.*
- Will there be minimum standards for vegetation management? What happens to the loss of carbon sequestration potential when we remove vegetation? *CalFire has many grant opportunities for vegetation management, which the City is pursuing. We are targeting high risk areas.*
- Is the LHMP on line? *Yes*
- How will this affect where we grow? *There is a paradigm shift wherein homes are now being considered potential "fuel." CD Director Jensen noted that the City has an Wildland Urban Interface program where defensible space requirements apply.*
- What is the status of the County's Multi-jurisdictional LHMP and what does the City gain from adopting it? *Quinn noted that it addresses topics that the City's plan doesn't cover, like tsunamis.*
- Rather than thinking of the LHMP as "where we shouldn't allow development", we should think of it as "where do we need to minimize risks". We can engineer for hazards—this is a built environment, but we need to address issues like utilities, infrastructure, and transportation. We should be innovative. When thinking about new buildings, remember to think of minimizing risks.
- How is the City planning for mass evacuation? How do people know what to do and where to go? *Quinn responded that the City has an evacuation plan and works closely with the County to identify primary and secondary routes and mutual threat zones. We instinctively think of getting to 101 but there are more viable shelter-in-place options, like the quarry, Peacock Gap golf course, and large parking lots.*
- The LHMP has great maps—they are the nexus to the General Plan. The General Plan should look at how we adapt to the hazards identified and make sure our land uses are reflective of hazard levels.

Some areas are safer than others—our densities should reflect that. Also, the LHMP is lengthy—can a summary be prepared?

- We have made mistakes in the past—like Los Gamos Road not going through—this was a bad choice made to satisfy a few individuals---how do we avoid this in the future? Don't let a few neighbors impede citywide public safety.
- There are a lot of hazards in San Rafael, and the City has finite resources to address them. I'd like to see a better cost-benefit analysis to determine what the best, most fiscally feasible solution is to create a safer city. What do we get for our money if we build a levee, etc?
- What will happen in 2040 when we are no longer relying on cars? It is naïve to think that 85 year olds will evacuate their homes on bicycles or on public transit buses. How will we adapt?
One of the strategies is to make it less necessary to evacuate, by creating "defensible" spaces around homes and making our communities more resilient.
- Our choices need to be evaluated in the context of how we are likely to live in the future—which may be different than the way we live today. Science is constantly changing.
- Prevention issues are key—particularly when it comes to sea level rise. It may be better to look at ways to prevent a potential disaster (by building taller levees) – though costly, this may be cheaper than the loss of life and property that would result if we did nothing. It would also reduce the risk of displacement and the human cost of a disaster. It's not so much a cost-benefit analysis as a risk analysis. What is the consequence of inaction? What is the consequence of prevention? Cost alone should not drive safety policies.
Quinn mentioned that a lot of the areas that are most affected by high sea level rise are also most affected by liquefaction and subject to earthquake damage.
- Those who died in the Butte County (Paradise) fires were mostly elderly (40% over 85 years of age) and Marin County has a similar population profile. The "Get Ready Marin Program" is a good example of neighbors helping other neighbors in emergencies. The cost benefit analyses and focus on mitigation should not impede the current quality of life that San Rafael residents currently enjoy. There are a lot of bills coming down from the State which will potentially help cities mitigate impacts of disasters.
- The time for "studying" the issue has passed—now we need to take action. We can learn from other countries that are using more innovative, less costly approaches. Get everyone to the table and start implementing these measures now.
- Hazardous Materials are not really covered by the LHMP. What's the risk like?
Quinn responded that there is some risk of spills on 101, but there are no rail-related hazmat issues in the County. Industrial spills should be considered, but risks are relatively low.
- What about soft-story buildings (2-3 story apartments over open parking bays, without sufficient lateral strength to withstand major quakes)? *There are some in San Rafael, and we should address them. It would be appropriate to cover mitigation of these hazards in the General Plan.*

Chair Plante brought the discussion to a close and restated the question posed by staff—which is how to do we make San Rafael a more resilient and safer city?

A Committee member provided his ideas on this subject:

- 1) Update and implement our wildfire fuel reduction measures. This could include replacing eucalyptus, acacia, pampas grass and Scotch broom with native plants and other plants that are more resistant to fire. This is a priority in the Dominican area, where cut vegetation has been stacked in a questionable manner.
- 2) The City should prepare a Community Based Shore Plan addressing sea level rise.

In response, another Committee member stated that much has already been done to reduce hazards in Dominican area, and that the City should not over-regulate. Quinn indicated that vegetation management standards were enforced, and violations should be reported.

Keep in mind that the flood risk is not just Canal and East San Rafael, it extends all the way to China Camp and North San Rafael/ Santa Venetia. Another committee member noted that Loch Lomond also was at risk, including tsunami risks.

Another Committee member noted that there was a cluster of hazards associated with climate change. We are planning for a future we do not know, yet our planning toolkit reflects the past—this is the challenge.

C. Planning for Sea Level Rise

PM Miller noted that the issue of Sea Level Rise had come up at almost every Steering Committee meeting, and that the General Plan team was seeking final resolution on how this would be addressed in General Plan 2040. He indicated that this was more than just a Safety Element issue, and would affect how the Land Use and Transportation Elements were structured as well. Miller indicated that San Rafael would be on the cutting edge in its approach, as most cities simply included a Safety Element policy or action saying they would study the issue later.

Kif Scheuer who is a Steering Committee Alternate, a San Rafael resident, and an employee of the California Local Government Commission specializing in climate resilience, gave a presentation on Adaptation Planning and how other cities are looking at these topics. He said there were five key takeaways:

- (1) Adaptation planning is not very common in general plans, though becoming more common
- (2) Can't take a one-size-fits-all approach
- (3) Continued process is needed, as we don't really know what we're facing yet
- (4) Proactive adaptation yields benefits that outweigh costs
- (5) Don't treat sea level as an outlier issue—it's integral to all issues

Some examples of best practices include Hermosa Beach (2016 Local coastal plan—integrates resilience and requires development to address sea level rise), Imperial Beach (the Mayor supports managed retreat), DelMar (they rejected managed retreat and are looking at protection strategies); Humboldt County (created an overlay zone, with disclosure requirements and construction restrictions in the zone), Hayward (disclosure requirements), Richmond (changing some light industrial to open space), Oxnard (has a robust policy and preference for green infrastructure rather than coastal armor), and Santa Cruz (strategic recommendations).

Committee members discussed the materials presented and asked questions.

Does the City have the authority to take property and reduce property values because of this threat? *CD Director Jensen remarked that the recommendations in the General Plan would be made with caution and legal review to ensure that “taking” issues were not involved.*

This discussion drives home the point that we need to think about the cost and fiscal impacts of our solutions. What is the cost to defend 100% of the City from sea level rise? What is the cost to defend 80%? 50%? We need to think about how we are going to pay for this—Sales tax? Property tax? Most people don’t understand the cost.

Committee member Rhoads indicated he had done research on this topic and could share that with staff and provide information for the Committee’s benefit.

Councilmember Bushey questioned why we were having this conversation and what direction staff was trying to get from the Committee. PM Miller responded that the intent was to get consensus that we were not pursuing a strategy of managed retreat (e.g., abandoning developed areas and relocating households to higher ground), although some of the Committee members had expressed support for this approach previously, and it was included in the Resilient by Design work. Clarity on this point was important in order to proceed with land use planning. CDD Director Jensen added that managed retreat might be appropriate on open space and wetland sites, or on sites with chronic flood issues, though not applied on a broad level to all properties.

Additional committee comments included:

- San Rafael has a constrained land supply, and most of the City’s economy relies on the very lands that are most vulnerable. There is limited space to “retreat” to. Recognizing the high cost of solutions, and the long-term nature of the issue, we should identify our highest priorities over the next 20 years, 50 years, and 100 years.
PM Miller remarked that an idea we are pursuing is to include an overlay designation on the General Plan Map that designates where we anticipate that there will be tidal inundation in the future. Certain policies and requirements will apply in that area.
- Not planning for this now is like speeding down the highway with dirty windows. We need to look at the County Vulnerability Assessment and the Adapting to Rising Tides reports. What do we want to do as a community to protect these areas. What are the right adaptation responses in different areas? We have to be proactive. Perhaps organize a group of stakeholders and start to look at developing adaptation responses to the key assets in the City. There is grant money to do this.
- The cost of inaction is far greater than action. If you don’t plan ahead, you’ll make it more costly in the future. The City could be legally vulnerable if it fails to plan.
- We are talking about future threats, but the threat is already here. Look at the Bay Area Council report “Surviving the Storm” – much of the city would already flood during an atmospheric river storm.
- A catastrophic flood is possible today and would cause major damage. It would impact 66% of our economy and 25% of our population. Not all solutions are big ticket items. There are many incremental things the city can do now. We should address present problems of flood risk and how that will impact its residents and businesses. Irrespective of sea level, the General Plan should include strategies to reduce losses in East and Central San Rafael due to flooding.

- There is not really an issue to debate here—we all agree. We should develop solutions as we go. We need to have a sensible plan that recognizes that this is a long term, systemic ongoing issue that we will work on each year. Solutions will evolve over time.
- Much of Downtown is in a flood zone. That area will grow over time. We need policies that recognize this is a risk that is growing and will expand in the future.
- We should plan for the area currently at risk, and acknowledge that this area is going to grow over time.
- We can't solve this problem at the local level—it's too expensive. We need to look at regional solutions.
- What would be the cost of buying all the flood prone properties or relocating all the people now in danger due to flooding?
Staff noted that there is a study called BayWave (Marin County) that has some numbers associated with property impacts.
- We are having this conversation at the right time—it affects a lot of people and properties.
- Levees are already included in the LHMP. How do we build them if there is no funding source?
CD Director Jensen commented that we should start with the basics, like having an overlay of where sea level rise is expected in the General Plan. We have a lot of good resources to work with already. Further, rather than having an Adaptation Plan, he recommended an Adaptation Study, which puts together all the pieces that should be considered. The process will continue after the General Plan is adopted. We may ultimately decide that retreat is the best course of action in a few areas.

Committee Alternate Comments

There were no comments.

General Business Items

A. Next meeting – the next meeting is February 13, 2019 at Bio Marin (current location).

B. Staff Announcements – Barry noted that a report summarizing the Community Workshops would soon be posted to the website. In the meantime, staff had posted the questions from these meetings on the General Plan website, and was encouraging community members to weigh in.

C. Member Announcements – None.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.