



August 3, 2020

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415.457.7656

San Rafael City Council  
1400 Fifth Avenue  
San Rafael, CA 94901

**RE: Revised Wildfire Protection Action Plan (item 5a)**

Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers,

You'll recall from our letter endorsing the original Wildfire Action Plan (March 18, 2019, attached) that Sustainable San Rafael has advocated strengthening key aspects of the Plan during implementation, including ecologically sound practices for vegetation management and home 'hardening' and disposal of plant material in ways that minimize greenhouse gas emissions and optimize carbon sequestration.

We're pleased to note that the newly established Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority is taking tangible steps to address these concerns by joining with several climate and environmental organizations in an Ecologically Sound Practices Partnership to help guide its activities and its educational outreach to the public.

In addition, the countywide Drawdown Marin initiative has endorsed a Biomass Recovery effort, working in concert with resource haulers and processors, to identify climate-responsible ways to manage the increasing amounts of organic material being generated by both wildfire prevention activities and curbside collection programs.

We're heartened to see the involvement of key San Rafael staff members in these efforts, and we encourage the ongoing integration of these 'best practices' into the City's wildfire prevention and protection program.

We also continue to urge that vegetation management jobs be locally sourced to provide economic support to San Rafael's most vulnerable residents and communities during these hard times.

Sincerely,

William Carney,  
Board President

*Attachment*



March 18, 2019

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Sue Spofford

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San Rafael City Council  
1400 Fifth Avenue  
San Rafael, CA 94901

**RE: Wildfire Action Plan (item 5.b)**

Honorable Mayor and Council Members,

We again applaud the City's development of a comprehensive approach to managing fire-prone vegetation and buildings, along with increased funding.

The key to success is that while addressing the immediate climate impacts of intensifying wildfires, we also reduce the core causes of the climate change fueling these impacts. That means pulling carbon out of the air instead of releasing carbon into the air. Both vegetation and buildings can help do that, and this Plan offers opportunities to improve both:

1. Encourage healthy yards and open space, less likely to burn and more able to capture carbon in healthy plants and soils. This means a comprehensive approach to the numerous vegetation management strategies suggested in the Plan, combining the expertise of our Fire Department with the ecological knowledge of our Parks Division, with adjacent large-scale land managers like the Marin Open Space District and MMWD, and with non-profits like Marin Master Gardeners. We need to *work with nature comprehensively* to sustain a safe and vibrant environment.

2. Assure that plant debris is properly returned to the soil through the green cart composting and other programs of Marin Sanitary Services. The all-out fuel reduction effort suggested by the Plan presents a huge opportunity to return carbon to the land, instead of overburdening our landfills with methane-releasing plant material. In partnership with programs like the Marin Carbon Project, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, Resource Conservation Service, and Drawdown Marin, San Rafael could help bring carbon sequestration to scale, significantly advancing our Climate Change Action Plan objectives.

3. Concentrate on making buildings safe—and energy efficient. Recent firestorms in California have shown that structures, once ignited, themselves become the primary fuels for conflagration. The Plan's call for 'hardened homes' should receive at least the attention given to vegetation management—in the near term, as suggested by the Marin Association of Realtors, *and at time of sale*. Fire-safe home requirements should be coupled with Vegetation Management Plans and with carbon-reducing energy efficiency plans and incentives like those offered by the County's 'Electrify Marin' program, as well as educational efforts like Resilient Neighborhoods. We should aim to become a community of model homes, both fire-safe and climate-responsible.

We look forward to working with the City as the Wildfire Action Plan is further detailed, implemented and integrated with the General Plan. Please see our January 22 letter (attached) for other comments on particular Plan objectives.

Sincerely,

William Carney, Board President



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January 22, 2019  
*[objectives #'s removed]*

San Rafael City Council  
1400 Fifth Avenue  
San Rafael, CA 94901

**RE: Wildfire Action Plan (item 7.b)**

Honorable Mayor and Council Members,

We applaud the City's development of a comprehensive approach to managing its vegetation and open space, supported by increased funding.

Our goals need to be both a fire-safe human environment and a healthy natural environment—healthy forests, healthy watersheds, healthy soils, healthy habitat—in accordance with the Natural Resources section of the General Plan.

To that end, the 'vegetation management' strategies need to include both fuel reduction and carbon sequestration.

That means not only removing dead, stressed or otherwise fire-prone vegetation, but also encouraging healthy vegetation to thrive, storing carbon in its wood and roots and the soil below, instead of going up in smoke to worsen carbon pollution.

It means assuring proper composting of plant debris, so its carbon content isn't released as greenhouse gas, contributing to the climate change that's making our landscape increasingly combustible. More green cans and close coordination with Marin Sanitary Service are a good start.

Comprehensive vegetation management for fuel reduction and natural resiliency needs to focus first on removing highly flammable non-native plants (such as the acacia, broom and other invasives listed).

Reviving volunteer 'broom pull days' again is a start. But there's also a huge opportunity here to create entry-level jobs reducing fuel and restoring nature through programs like the Conservation Corps and Downtown Streets Team. Goats have their place, but real people and real jobs are also needed.

A smart and comprehensive strategy is key. In requiring Vegetation Management Plans when property is sold, let's also include energy audits to help reduce the climate change that's really fueling these fires.

In reducing fuels along roadways, let's do it in concert with existing General Plan policies calling for Complete Streets and a healthy urban forest that soaks up carbon and cools our neighborhoods.

We're seeing here that climate change is starting to exact real danger—and real costs. Let's assure that our response addresses comprehensively both the impacts and the causes of this growing crisis.

Sincerely,

William Carney  
Board President