

Opinion

Marin Independent Journal

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The Independent Journal's editorial board meets weekly to talk about the paper's editorial positions. The board currently has four members.

EDITORIAL

Anti-sprawl goals are a good beginning

THE PREMISE of Plan Bay Area is to stop sprawl in its tracks by steering future growth away from a pattern of leapfrogging suburbs. It would do this by preserving open space and agricultural land from development and focusing new housing near transit and transportation.

If that sounds familiar, it should.

Marin created that template in 1973, when supervisors adopted zoning restrictions that protected West Marin's rolling grasslands from being carved into subdivisions and determined that the county's future growth would be focused along the Highway 101 corridor.

Sacramento lawmakers, in their implementation of the state's landmark legislation aimed at stemming global warming, asked regional agencies to come up with a plan for handling growth.

Plan Bay Area is the Bay Area's response to that mandate. It's not perfect, but for most Bay Area counties, the plan represents an important shift toward smarter and greener land-use patterns that have been on Marin's books for years.

Locally, the primary worry about the plan has focused on having a regional agency dictating building densities for affordable housing.

Language was added to emphasize the plan does not usurp local control over land-use decisions. And later, promises were made that localities that did not follow the plan would not lose their fair share of transportation funds.

But there remains distrust, founded in part by the premise that those promises could easily be

voided in future plans and policies, erased by officials whom Marin voters didn't elect.

Marin residents take seriously their democratic right to elect their representatives. Some believe the plan erodes local control by compelling the county and cities to follow planning standards approved by regional leaders.

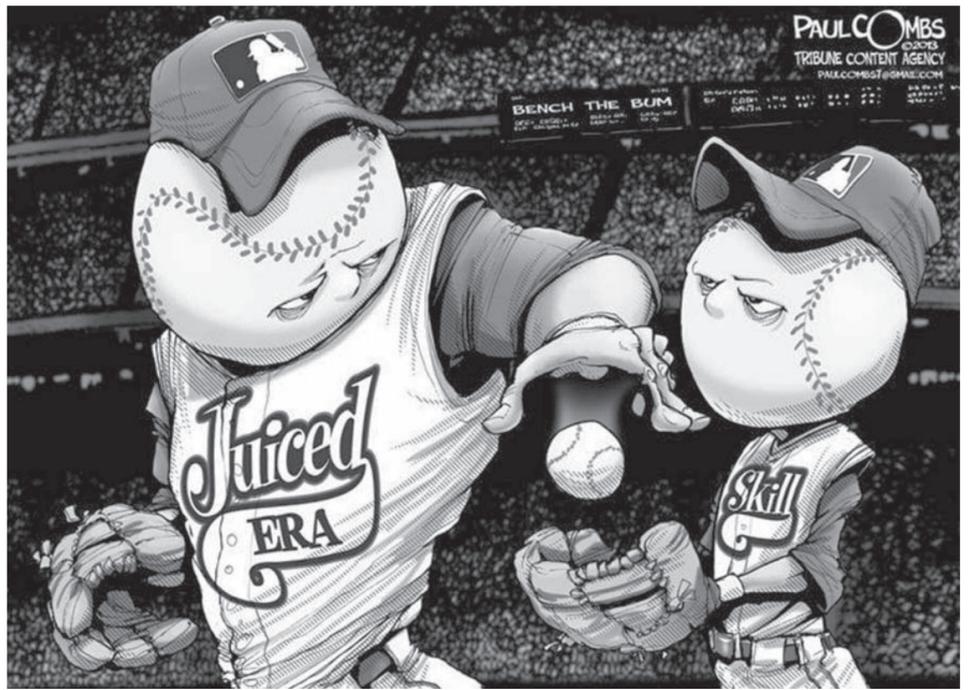
Time will tell. The Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the two lead agencies in Plan Bay Area, need to address a troubling disconnect that contributed to sharp criticism that the plan is developer driven and bypasses environmental safeguards.

ABAG's refusal to hold a general assembly vote on the plan — instead leaving the decision to its executive board — was an example of this disconnect.

Marin has a responsibility to contribute to solving regional problems, such as the need for affordable housing and easing traffic jams. For example, Marin's high-priced real estate has put pressure on surrounding counties to provide affordable housing for people who work here, but can't afford local housing.

Plan Bay Area underscores the need to continue to pursue opportunities to build affordable housing in Marin. It also makes sense to build housing close to transit hubs, jobs and services. But developments should be well-designed, right-sized and well-managed.

The test of the plan will be how it is implemented and how it lives up to its promises to respect rather than undermine local control.



MARIN VOICE

Greener approach to planning

IHAVE LIVED IN MARIN virtually my entire life. I know the history of this county, respect its core conservationist and community values, and I bring that knowledge and those core values to my decision making as county supervisor.

I am a believer in planning — specifically land-use planning — because it is the primary tool used to implement and assure that a community's values are embedded in the blue print for future development.

Those of us who live in Marin are beneficiaries of prospective land-use planning and development decisions made back in the 1970s which had the specific intention to prevent sprawl, target growth, preserve our agricultural lands and protect our open space.

Plan Bay Area is a regional effort to apply similar values and achieve similar objectives throughout the Bay Area with the added goal and responsibility of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It also fulfills a statutory requirement (SB375 adopted in 2008) which requires the Association of Bay Area Governments and Metropolitan Transportation Commission to develop and adopt an integrated transportation and housing plan for the Metropolitan Bay Area region of which Marin County is a part.

Plan Bay Area is not a mandate to build housing. It does not erode, diminish or supersede local control, local planning or local decision-making authority for this county or any other in the region. The County of Marin as well as

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Marin Supervisor Katie Rice of San Anselmo is the county's representative to the Association of Bay Area Governments.

each of our cities and towns have general plans in place that prescribe land use and zoning. Changes to those general plans can only be made by the local governing authority (the Board of Supervisors or city council) not by ABAG or MTC or other regional agencies.

Marin County and the entire Bay Area region stand to benefit from planning that seeks to encourage all counties (and jurisdictions within them) to plan for future growth/development with foresight that reduces sprawl, protects our agricultural lands and open space, links future job growth with housing and transit, and as a result reduces vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions.

That said, this first edition of Plan Bay Area is far from perfect — for example:

► The plan does not identify or address how communities will fund the expansion of public infrastructure neces-

sary to accommodate projected growth, should it occur;

► The plan does not address water resources and whether there is adequate supply to support projected future growth;

► The plan needs to do a better job addressing and respecting differences in size, density, and community character of cities throughout the Bay Area;

► Neither Plan Bay Area nor its DEIR come close to adequately addressing or accounting for sea-level rise, acknowledging the need for climate adaptation strategies, as well as identifying the funding mechanisms necessary to support implementation;

► The plan does not recognize or account for local projects or programs that reduce greenhouse gas emissions such as Marin Clean Energy.

But perhaps the biggest problem of all, has been the process in which Plan Bay Area was developed. Though years in the making, the general public did not become engaged or involved until the end and by then most major policy decisions informing the plan had been decided.

Plan Bay Area will be updated on a four-year cycle. The beginning of that update should begin the day after it is adopted.

Authentic engagement and involvement by local delegates, planners and the public early on in the revision cycle will make for a process that builds confidence, and results in a better plan and planning tool for Marin County and the greater Bay Area.

READERS' FORUM

It's not that easy

On Thursday morning, I was scratching my head over the incongruous parallel drawn by Chris Hunt (Readers' Forum, July 25) between President Barack Obama's statements regarding the perception toward black men and where the president chose to send his daughters to school.

I grew up in Washington, D.C. and attended both public and private schools. I was just there visiting family. There are a wide array of excellent public schools from which to choose, all of which are perfectly safe, as the Obama family is aware.

More importantly, however, I suspect it would be a huge cost to the taxpayer for President Obama to send his daughters

to public school because of the security requirements and the necessary infrastructure that would have to be built at taxpayer expense in whatever school a president's child selected.

The freedom of Amy Carter's tenure at D.C. public schools is long gone since 9/11. Currently, the president foots the tuition bill and accompanying expenses for his daughters' education, and since Chelsea Clinton attended the same school, the buildings already were wired for necessary security.

Further, it is well known in Washington that within a couple of weeks of President Obama's first election, the secret service was confronting the worst volume of hate-filled threats toward a president in

its history and I would assume there are an unfortunate equally record-breaking number of threats toward his children as compared to other presidential families.

What this says about race in this country I leave to the readers, but it is a sobering topic to reflect upon.

Elizabeth Connell Nielsen,
NOVATO

'Total destruction'

Your editorials continue to say, "Hurry up with the Ross Valley flood control plans." They also quote the wrong price for the construction planned for Memorial Park in San Anselmo.

As far as I (a 54-year neighbor of the park) am concerned, the plan for our beloved park is total

destruction.

Plans include dismantling our creative Millennium Playground and rebuilding it at the picnic area. How do they plan to move the dinosaur?

Shocking to the many volunteers who built the Elders Garden, it will be eliminated for more parking, thus eliminating water seepage into the aquifer and a shady place to just relax.

Also in the works, cutting down the eucalyptus tree by the path to the shopping center (habitat for a red-shouldered hawk) and eliminating our path to the shopping center.

Dump trucks will haul out thousands of yards of dirt for up to two years to dig the playing field 8-10 feet deeper. A new sewer line under the baseball field is not even a year old.

The IJ has quoted the cost for the above work to be \$6.5 million and \$8.7 million, but it is closer to \$17.5 million. Much more will be needed to pay for this. Our tax bills already have a Ross Valley flood fee, which is not enough to pay the higher amount.

I recently went down the path for the Creek Park Film Night in downtown San Anselmo and was shocked to see all of the concrete abutments holding up commercial buildings that were built over the creek. It's a maze of structures that could catch debris and add to the potential for flooding.

First, let's deal with that part of the solution and leave Memorial Park alone.

Carolyn J. Turner, SAN ANSELMO

Letters

Confine them to 250 words. We don't have room for all of the letters we receive; we give preference to shorter letters and to letters from people who live in Marin or Southern Sonoma counties. Letters are edited for length, grammar, spelling, clarity, style, libel and civility. We do not

publish form letters, "open" letters, petitions, individual consumer complaints or letters published elsewhere. Letters must include the writer's name, address and daytime phone number so we can verify authorship (we publish only the writer's name and hometown).

Marin Voices

Columns are limited to 600 words and are edited like letters (see left). We give preference to writers who have personal or professional expertise on a topic. Submissions must include the writer's name, address and daytime phone number for verification of authorship.

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Emails are preferred for letters and Marin Voice columns to the address above. Typed submissions may be mailed or faxed. Fax to 382-7209 or mail to Readers' Forum, Marin IJ, 4000 Civic Center Drive, Suite 301, San Rafael, CA 94903.