

Citizen Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
October 25, 2010

Present: All members of the CAC except for those listed below.

Absent: Alice Anderson, Tony Catrino, Mike Folk, Mike Koeppel, Julie Leitzell, Zachary Perry, and Robby Ronayne.

Staff: Planning Director Nancy Kaufman, facilitator Ben Noble, Senior Planner Neal Toft, and Contract Planner Julia Capasso.

1. Announcements

Planning Director Kaufman asked that anyone who needs to make-up a tour of the subareas contact her. Ms. Capasso announced that the Planning Commission will be reviewing the Draft Housing Element at their October 26 meeting.

Senior Planner Toft gave a brief report on the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conference held on October 22, which he and several CAC members attended. The conference was intended to share the latest scientific data regarding sea level rise in the Bay and establish cooperative adaptation methods to make communities resilient to rising tides. There is \$600,000 of federal funding available to conduct a sub-regional sea level rise adaptation pilot program, which will be used as a template for other Bay Area cities. Mayor Lundstrom said that the ideal sub-region for this pilot program will have a variety of land uses- e.g., agricultural, commercial, residential, roadways, etc.

Nancy Nakai also attended the conference and said that she found the presentation very sobering. She thought that Larkspur would be an excellent candidate for the sub-regional study, which would help the City make informed land use decisions. Both subareas lie within the existing flood zone and will most likely be submerged in the future. Bruce Friedrichs, who also attended, said that an excellent point made at the conference was that the cost of adapting to rising sea levels now is considerably less than the cost of not doing anything or waiting until it's too late.

Ms. Kaufman said that there was a very short timeline for submitting an application for this study (applications are due on October 29). She needs to discuss it with the Mayor and the City Manager. James Moore asked if there was a cost associated with applying. Mayor Lundstrom said that the cost of such grants usually includes staff time and providing matching funds. She also noted that other regions may be better qualified than Larkspur, such as Richmond which has over 30 miles of land along the Bay and a variety of residential and industrial uses in the waterfront. Mr. Toft said that in addition to a variety of land uses, the agencies are looking for sub-regions with local interest and the capability to work with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and scientific research, and with highway and transportation infrastructure. Priority Development Areas (PDA's) are preferred. Larkspur has some of those elements and could be a candidate.

2. Public Comment.

There was no public comment.

3. Wrap-up discussion of Circulation Element Goals

Facilitator Ben Noble noted the discussion questions provided to the CAC [NOTE: See the “Circulation Element” handout provided at the 10/11/10 meeting; also available online.]

Should the Trails and Paths Element be integrated with the Circulation Element?

All CAC members present agreed with this statement. Ms. Weninger stated that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan also should be incorporated into the General Plan. The Plan contains a lot of detail about goals and data for specific projects.

Should local serving retail and personal services be prioritized? Should the City reconsider how to minimize traffic on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (north of Corte Madera Creek) while encouraging retail and personal services that bring vitality to the area?

Mr. Noble noted that this question specifically refers to Policy C of the Circulation Element, which limits commercial development north of Corte Madera Creek to reduce congestion on Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Mr. Toft said that the question refers to whether regulating certain types of uses that are technically considered higher traffic-generating uses is the best way to regulate traffic, or whether the City should look at other methods of regulating traffic that allows for a better balance of uses north of the Creek. The policy places very restrictive limitations on any redevelopment or use changes.

As an example, there is a vacant real estate office property on Sir Francis Drake Blvd. that was formerly a restaurant. The real estate use was considered a lower trip generating use than the restaurant, which was why it was allowed. The office building has been vacant for a number of years and the property owners would like to change it to a bank, which would be a higher trip generating use and is not allowed under the policy. It’s difficult to bring back commercial and retail uses once properties have established uses with lower trip generation. The policy also impacts other commercial properties north of the Creek.

Ms. Kaufman said that the policy makes it difficult for property owners to change uses to typical uses allowed within the same zoning district, and it’s doing very little to stop congestion on Sir Francis Drake. Most traffic on Sir Francis Drake is regional coming from the east and west. Helen Heitkamp asked how changing the policy would impact the traffic generation restriction that is part of the Bon Air development. Mr. Toft said that the Bon Air Center was developed prior to the current traffic policy and is required to have a certain balance of square footage and number of uses. Larkspur Landing/Marin Country Mart was also approved according to having a certain amount of traffic generation. There is more flexibility built into those centers that were established with a mix of uses. The City would have to look at how changing the policy may impact those centers. He said that the principle question for the CAC to address is whether the City will

continue zoning through traffic generation models or if it should look at more flexible approaches based on a mix of uses.

James Holmes said that circulation is a limiting factor to development in Larkspur. There is an iron triangle, the three legs of which are Sir Francis Drake, Magnolia Ave., and the highway. Unless the CAC feels there is some alternative to offset the traffic, it seems like it would make things worse to eliminate the policy. Joakim Osthus asked whether the City had data about how much of the traffic actually ends in the areas affected by this policy. He assumes that only a small portion of the traffic has a trip end in the area. From a cost-benefit standpoint, there is a high cost in limiting development in Larkspur, and little benefit in reducing the traffic on Sir Francis Drake which is influenced by factors outside of the City.

Elise Semonian said that it seemed like a ridiculous policy. She understands there is a lot of traffic on Sir Francis Drake, but it can't all be attributed to the City's businesses. If it's precluding people from opening new businesses, the City is punishing itself. A restaurant or other successful business would be better than a vacant office building. Perhaps business owners could be required to contribute funding to alternative transportation. We are assuming that people will be using automobiles to get to those businesses, which is shortsighted. We have no control over what other jurisdictions to the west develop, and they get to fill up our road as we limit development in our community.

David Sternberg said that it is imperative that the City coordinate with other jurisdictions to the west. If a proposed use is not allowed because it will add a half percent of traffic, that has no impact on the majority of the traffic coming from the west. The City should dovetail their policy development with the policy development of neighboring jurisdictions. Ms. Weninger stated that though we have no control over sea level rise, we and the other jurisdictions around us, and as people, have a great deal of control over whether we drown in a sea of automobiles. This policy does little to address that and is the wrong way to go.

Mr. Noble conducted a straw poll that showed a majority of members thought that the City should study revising this existing policy, with one member disagreeing. Ms. Nakai added that the City should coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions. Mr. Holmes said that the study should consider alternatives to controlling traffic, and unfortunately transit and development don't occur in tandem.

Should the Circulation Element better identify areas of the City where complete streets are needed?

Mayor Lundstrom noted that she received emails from two Larkspur families who would like to walk with their children to school in Corte Madera. There are many areas along the route without sidewalks, and many major crossing areas lack crosswalks. The families suggested that there could be restricted parking in certain areas. There is a definite opportunity to make policies that encourage walking and biking to school.

Mr. Osthus said that incorporating the Trails and Paths Element and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan will help identify where we have complete streets or not. Daniel Kunstler said that

complete streets should be the rule, and incomplete streets should be the exception. The concept touches on many areas including the environment and health. As to the parking, he has seen urbanization studies that suggest restricting parallel parking on streets may not be a good idea because drivers tend to go faster. Parallel parking may represent a natural barrier to excess speed.

Mr. Friedrichs said that the City does a good job of talking the talk, but needs to supply the means to make it safe and convenient to walk or bike. Ms. Semonian said there is also a financial incentive to adopting complete streets policies, which would give them priority in State funding. David Sternberg said it should be clearly enumerated which streets should be complete streets, such as main thoroughfares. Secondary streets are not as much of a priority. Ms. Weninger stated that a complete streets policy is required as part of the General Plan. Her understanding of how the policy works is that Public Works staff are required to look at all users of the street when they begin new projects. It is applied as projects come up.

Mr. Holmes said that complete streets policies could be phased in. One way to identify where *not* to have complete street policies is where trees would have to be cut. Developers should be required to provide sidewalks (where practical) with residential and commercial development. Mr. Osthus said that “complete streets” is an ideology that guides the design of transportation projects, and specific factors at each project location will impact how the project turns out. Ms. Semonian said that the City could develop policies that require developers to put in sidewalks or other improvements, such as widening existing sidewalks, for new development or significant remodels. Mr. Holmes said that streets east of the highway would be good candidates for complete streets policies.

Mr. Kunstler said the City should identify specific routes for different types of traffic. San Anselmo has a very clearly marked route just for bicycles in order to avoid the main thoroughfare. Nancy Spivey said that paths should also have clear signage. Jerry Hauser said that a study of common bicycle and pedestrian routes in the City would help coordinate the complete streets process. Many bike paths in the city just end with no connections, or dump users on the wrong side of the street (like the multi-use path at Doherty Drive). He disagrees that requiring homeowners to put in sidewalks when they redevelop their property is practical. His street has no sidewalks, and a few homeowners were required to put in sidewalks, at great expense, that are not connected to any others.

Mr. Toft said noted the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan identifies many existing bike routes, some of which have been since improved and others that still need to be completed. However, it is really a plan about certain routes and trails, and doesn't identify a complete streets policy. It also doesn't identify policies regarding sidewalk improvements in neighborhoods or frontage improvements in commercial developments, or address neighborhood connectivity. Mr. Hauser said there are only so many routes to get through town, and it would be most practical to identify those routes and focus on their development, rather than focusing on connecting all neighborhoods.

David Esposito said that the City should identify some bicycle hubs and spokes. Schools are great examples of hubs, or perhaps retail areas like North Magnolia that aren't serviced by bike paths.

We can identify those areas that will be developed over the next twenty years from a hub and spoke mentality. Mr. Sternberg said that it was important to connect neighborhoods with existing circulation routes. The proposed residential development at the Niven property appeared to lack any fingers going into the local community, such as walking paths or bike paths that connect to the existing streets.

Mr. Noble said that it seemed there is a desire for pedestrian and bicycle improvements to be closely coordinated and based on an analysis of where trips originate and end to provide a targeted approach to these improvements.

Mr. Noble introduced discussion of the Circulation Element's current goals.

Mr. Holmes said that Goal 17, "Mitigate the traffic impacts of new developments," should coordinate circulation and land use planning. Intensity and density of development should reflect road constraints. Policy O of the Circulation Element should also be strengthened to coordinate better with public transit. Mr. Kunstler said that the number of goals should be consolidated. He noted an apparent contradiction between Goal 1, "Regard quality of life in Larkspur as more important than mobility of traffic," and Goal 11, "Obtain safe freeway access for Larkspur." We have to decide whether we want to serve the automobile or encourage other means of transportation. Making it easier to get on and off the freeway doesn't serve the purpose of Goal 1. Ms. Weninger said Goal 11 is referring to improving the safety of the highway interchanges, not improving traffic mobility. Mr. Kunstler said Goal 11 could be revised to more clearly emphasize safety over mobility.

Mr. Esposito said it isn't likely that the population will explode in the next twenty years, and we most likely will not see a huge increase in the number of automobiles. Households today have anywhere from 3 to 5 cars per household, which might be reduced in the future. Cherie Daly said that she agreed that there were too many goals, and they conveyed no sense of priority or urgency. It doesn't give a sense of direction and there are some goals that seem contradictory. She also noted that the group has not discussed transit at all. Mr. Noble noted that Goals 5 through 9 address alternative transportation, with Goal 6 in particular referring to transit.

Mr. Osthus referred to Goal 13 and asked whether Magnolia Ave. was not supposed to be a major arterial. Is the goal meant to reduce cars on the street or just have slower traffic? Mr. Noble said that the City wants people to travel to downtown as a destination, rather than travel through downtown. Planner Toft said that it emphasizes that it is the downtown area, although it serves as a through corridor. Mr. Kunstler referred to Goal 6, and asked how much influence the City has over the transit authorities and how the City can gain more influence over their decisions.

Mayor Lundstrom said that all transit systems are being cut back now. All transit systems are subsidized; the fare box only covers a portion of the operating cost. Transit budgets will likely face cuts for the next five to ten years at least. In terms of influence, the transit authorities provide service for 12 entities in Marin (all 11 cities and the County). Service is dependent on ridership. Each line is rated by number of users, and the lines with the lowest ridership get cut. They do consider transit-dependent patrons who depend on transit to get to their jobs. Mr. Kunstler said

that the direct bus service to San Francisco has decreased since 2001. Would the CAC consider policy to encourage a direct link to San Francisco operating throughout the day and into the evening, or a connection between the ferry and downtown Larkspur? Mayor Lundstrom said that there was once a connector bus but it did not get enough ridership.

Mr. Noble took a straw poll that showed the majority of the group found that the Circulation Element goals should be consolidated, and goals should be prioritized.

4. Brainstorming Session on Constraints and Opportunities for the two Subareas

Ms. Capasso showed a slideshow of photos from the two subarea tours.

Mr. Noble opened up the discussion beginning with Subarea 2.

Mr. Esposito said that he was concerned with flooding risk to homes and businesses in the subarea, which already have issues with flooding. Should the CAC plan to relocate structures or raise the ground elevation? Ms. Nakai said she was surprised to see how many people were living in the area. She recalled the Ninth Ward in New Orleans, which was an industrial area with housing that was flooded when the levees failed. On the tour, they learned that a citizen takes responsibility for preventing flooding to the area by placing a bladder filled with water across the street near the Greenbrae Boardwalk. She is also concerned with health impacts from people living so closely to industrial uses, like the concrete factory.

Mr. Sternberg said that he doesn't believe any more residential development belongs in the area short of what is already there. The area is too industrial. He added that he did a remodel of a house in Stinson Beach, which has an ordinance requiring homes to be elevated eight or ten feet after exceeding a certain threshold of work. It was a pretty draconian but necessary ordinance. A similar requirement could be implemented in this subarea. Ms. Kaufman noted that the City required the administrative building for the Marin RV Park to be raised to meet the standards of FEMA's 100 year flood plain when it was built.

Mr. Holmes said he was impressed with how serviceable the area is, and it contributes to a balanced community. As the 1990 General Plan states, the variety of commercial uses meets community needs and the mobile homes provide affordable housing. The General Plan also notes that a 1987 survey found most residents and business owners preferred to maintain the status quo in the area. Constraints include that all of the existing development is on non-engineered fill, and any substantially increased uses would require more dikes. He thinks the General Plan should reflect the inadvisability of increasing diking except where necessary to protect existing property.

Mayor Lundstrom said that an EIR had been conducted ten years ago or more that showed a 12 foot levee would be necessary to protect existing development in Larkspur and Corte Madera from a 100 year flood. Property owners on Lucky Drive were not interested in such a levee. Caltrans will only contribute to the project if it addresses the 100 year flood plain. Mr. Osthus said that the largest constraint is the sea level rise in this area. He agrees that they should minimize the potential damage by avoiding higher density residential use in that area, thereby limiting the

number of people who would be impacted and minimize the severity of that impact. It is important to maintain the existing low-income housing, but we shouldn't encourage more dense residential development. The current use is suitable to the area.

Mr. Sternberg suggested that the City coordinate with BCDC to expand BCDC's jurisdiction to those areas that will be flooded in the future. Ari Blum asked the CAC how they thought the SMART train connector would affect the use of the area. Mayor Lundstrom said that a pedestrian connector over the creek is planned. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments want the City to look at that area adjacent to the SMART station to see whether it can accommodate denser housing and jobs. Mr. Esposito said that if the train extended down to the Village in Corte Madera, it would eliminate a lot of the open space and the pedestrian path. Mayor Lundstrom said that there are currently no plans to extend the train from Larkspur Landing to across the creek. SMART is reserving the right of way for possible future development but has no immediate plans for it.

Ms. Semonian said that she agreed with Ms. Nakai's observation about the risk posed to the residents in the area. She was very happy to see the variety of industrial uses there, even though it is so close to the Bay. She understands that the mobile homes are affordable, but found it sad that that's how people have to live to be in affordable housing. It seems they have to either give the area up to housing and lose the industrial area, or keep it the way it is and try to phase out some of the housing, perhaps locating it somewhere else that's safer.

Jared Polsky said that they have to be careful not to craft a policy that would not allow the industrial uses to do the kinds of repairs and upgrades that they will need in the future. Policies shouldn't be so restrictive that they can't maintain their facilities. James Moore said that the same caveat could be applied to the housing there. It may not be the best housing, but it is affordable and the alternative could be much worse. The housing provides a significant service to the community.

Mr. Osthus noted that there are very limited pedestrian facilities for the people living in the mobile home parks. Old Redwood Highway in particular lacks sidewalks, especially in the areas of the two pedestrian overpasses (over the highway and the Creek). Pedestrians coming from the north over the Creek are dumped right in the street. Ms. Nakai said that the City should address the drainage issue near the Boardwalk so that private citizens don't have to do it. Mr. Sternberg said that if we are assuming this area will be flooded in 20-30 years, the City should consider moving the existing development elsewhere.

Mayor Lundstrom said that the trailer parks are family-owned businesses. If down the road the families decide they want to get out of the trailer business, the City should think of an alternative use for that area. The Niven property was a commercial nursery for years, and the City had a policy that if the nursery ever closed it would be zoned residential. Mr. Holmes said that a site is zoned for a particular use, then development has to conform to that use. Mayor Lundstrom said that the policy would be a fallback if the current use was discontinued.

Mr. Noble opened up the discussion to Subarea 1.

Ms. Weninger said that north Magnolia Ave. is a major bicycle route, and is the primary route for anyone coming from the south to west Marin. There are no bicycle facilities whatsoever on north Magnolia Ave. Bicycle circulation is particularly important for this area. Mr. Osthus said that the two different commercial zonings on either side of the street don't promote the same kind of use. One is more car oriented, with people expected to drive there and have ample parking. The other is geared toward neighborhood services that people can bike or walk to and have a more vibrant street atmosphere. It is hard to have both of those on the same street. He also agrees with Ms. Weninger that more bicycle facilities are needed.

Mr. Esposito said the new Bon Air Bridge should connect to the bike path on North Magnolia over the Creek. Also, a roundabout near the Masonic Lodge could help calm traffic and integrate different modes of transit. Mr. Holmes said that the City Council hasn't supported roundabouts in the past for various reasons. Ms. Semonian said that a large concern in this area is pedestrian crossings and safety for kids. A roundabout could be a great feature on that roadway. She also thinks the CAC needs to determine what the constraint is to business development on north Magnolia.

Ms. Kaufman said some of the obstacles the City has heard include the lack of parking, the unstable hillside, the age of the buildings, and that rents are too high. She thinks it is a combination of things. Corbet's hasn't been out of that property for very long, and the bicycle shop moved to another location. The vacancies appeared when that property changed ownership. The other side of the street appears to be leased out, except for a few vacant offices. Mr. Hauser said he heard the new property owners did not want to enter into long-term leases because they plan to tear it down and get new tenants.

Mr. Kunstler said that it seemed there has been more attention paid to the aesthetic appeal of the east side of the street than the west. The area would be an excellent location for a new library, which would be a magnet for people and businesses. Mr. Sternberg said that the Kentfield Vision Plan proposes a roundabout at the 5-way intersection near Woodlands Market. Additionally, he stated that he does not see a parking problem in this area. Mr. Toft said parking is more of an issue on the west side of the street, which has shallower lots. There's probably ample parking on the east side. The City sees a problem with the lack of distinction between public and private parking. The center at the north end, if it was fully built out, would not have enough parking.

Mr. Noble said it seemed like a parking management rather than a parking supply problem. Ms. Semonian said that if the City wants successful businesses, it has to accept that there will be parking impacts. However, she also does not see a parking problem. Mr. Hauser said that the uses in the area are balanced in terms of parking; for instance, Ambrosia is only open during the evening, and when Corbet's was there, it was only open in the daytime.

Mr. Noble asked about the scale of development in the area and whether it should be maintained or possibly expanded. Mr. Polsky proposed a policy to encourage vibrant commercial uses along that corridor. Currently, the storage facilities are like broken teeth. Another policy could be to phase out industrial uses, like the policy suggested by the Mayor for the Redwood Highway area.

Ms. Nakai said that if the former Corbet's structures are torn down, or if the warehouse facilities are rezoned, it would be an excellent place for retail with second-story residential. The hillside would mean that no one's light would be blocked.

Mr. Osthus said that second-story residential would also help buffer the noise from the corridor for the existing residential neighborhoods. Mr. Kunstler said that the west side of the street already has some successful small businesses that are very appealing. Ambrosia, Rustic Bakery, the bicycle shop and Table Café attract a steady clientele. These are light commercial uses that are appealing and do not detract from the neighborhood quality.

Mr. Holmes said that the land on the east side is fill, which could be a constraint. The overall area is further constrained by the hills on one side and the marsh on the other. There is also one road leading in and out of the neighborhood. He also noted that the recent redesign of the streetscape made it more cluttered, and may need further redesign. Mayor Lundstrom said that the trees and landscaping on the west side are an asset to the commercial businesses there. It was barren before and did not encourage people to stop and use the shops. The road was reduced from four to three lanes in order to accommodate the landscaping.

Ms. Heitkamp said that the west side was originally a residential area. The area was not planned, and the industrial uses infiltrated. The City zoned it commercial eventually, but left the industrial uses there. She thinks the industrial uses could be phased out, and new development would have to meet commercial zoning requirements. Ms. Semonian said that the sidewalks end at the former Corbet's property and they should be extended. Planning staff noted that the sidewalk is flush with the building frontages. Ms. Semonian said she likes the landscaping, and more could soften the paved College of Marin site and other paved areas.

5. Subgroups establish meeting times

Ms. Kaufman said that staff recommends not having a full committee meeting in November. After discussion and members' objections to different meeting times, she proposed that the separate subarea groups be dissolved and the entire Committee meet on November 8 at 6:30 p.m. to discuss Subarea 1. The Committee will be split in two discussion groups. The entire Committee would meet again on November 15 at 6 p.m. to discuss scenarios for Subarea 2. The CAC agreed with this proposal.

6. Review of October 11 meeting minutes

There were no corrections to the minutes.

Next meeting: November 8, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The CAC will discuss alternative land use scenarios for Subarea 1, North Magnolia Ave.

Adjournment

The CAC adjourned at 8:05 p.m.