

BAY AREA MONITOR

 A Publication of the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area

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**Bad Air,
New Tech,
and You**

**Equity on the
Coast**

**Creek
Connections**

**Filling the
Missing Middle**

A Monitor by Any Other Name

Our humble magazine originates out of a longstanding League of Women Voters program: the observer corps. Under this program, volunteers attend government meetings, take notes, and deliver reports back to the League. The *Monitor* got its start more than 40 years ago when League leaders realized that a growing number of people in the Bay Area wanted to read these reports, leading to the hiring of an editor to consolidate such information into an official publication.

These days, we do our reporting with paid journalists, as we see undisputable value in having this kind of work carried out by trained and experienced professionals. However, we believe that volunteers continue to play an indispensable role in keeping a watchful eye on the policy issues that affect our communities.

This notion comes across in our front cover photo, which features Lafayette resident Jim Leach out on his patio with his personal air quality sensor (also shown on this page in the photo to the right). The sensor collects real-time data about air pollution, and integrates those findings into a worldwide online map (viewable on the smartphone Jim is holding in the cover photo) that draws on a massive network of other sensors. By maintaining this sensor — and in his efforts with the non-profit group Sustainable Lafayette — Jim is participating in the kind of grassroots, civically-minded stakeholder engagement that supports and informs policymaking, working alongside government regulators and private tech firms to protect our health. These stakeholders operate as another type of observer corps, conducting another style of monitoring the region.

As for our own *Monitor*-ing, Leslie Stewart's article about Jim and the evolving field of local air quality assessment



Jim Leach's air quality sensor.

photo by Alec MacDonald

awaits on page 5. Robin Meadows examines creeks and tidal baylands on page 7, and Cecily O'Connor looks at zoning near transit on page 10. And just inches away, page 3 offers Aleta George's coverage of the push for more equitable recreational access to the coast, complemented there and on our back cover by beautiful photos from the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy's Alison Taggart-Barone.

We hope you'll find all of this inspiring. And if you're looking to turn that inspiration into action, the League's observer corps will welcome your involvement.

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Opening the Coast to All

By Aleta George

In just a few years, Monterey Bay will have a new campground with 40 tent sites, 45 RV sites, and 10 walk-in or bike-in sites. The property for Fort Ord Dunes State Park was acquired in 1995 and opened as a state park to the public in 2009. The new campground will provide affordable overnight accommodations in a popular coastal tourist area with few low-cost options to spend the night.

“I have a feeling it will be filled up on day one. People like to camp in coastal areas,” said Patricia Clark-Gray, interpretive specialist with the state parks department’s Monterey District. She reported that the campground is estimated to open in late 2021.

The planned campground at Fort Ord Dunes State Park is listed as an example of a low-cost coastal accommodation in the State Coastal Conservancy’s draft assessment for the agency’s Explore the Coast Overnight program. In 2017, the California legislature enacted Assembly Bill 250 (Gonzalez Fletcher), which called for the Coastal Conservancy to develop a program that addresses the scarcity of affordable overnight accommodations for lower- and middle-income individuals and families visiting the coast. Last year’s Proposition 68 designated \$60 million for the program, with \$30 million going to projects within the state parks department, which owns one-third of California’s coast. The other \$30 million will be distributed by the Coastal Conservancy through grants. The agency recently gathered public comments on the assessment and will release a final document in March.

The Coastal Conservancy expects to put out a call for proposals this summer with two types of projects being sought. About 95 percent of the funds will go toward projects that increase the number of low-cost coastal accommodations (including campsites, cabins, hostels, and motels) through new construction and acquisitions or the expansion of existing ones. Up to 5 percent of the funding will support efforts that increase the use of accommodations by people with lower incomes and people of color, such as those that

provide outreach, environmental education, outdoor gear loans, transportation, and reservation system improvements. Project partners will include non-profits, agencies such as the Presidio Trust and Hosteling International, and private hotel developers that can ensure public benefit.

The California Coastal Act of 1976 gave all Californians equal right to access the state’s coastline, but economic factors can erect barriers to keep people from enjoying the coast equitably. In the last few years, several studies have addressed the issue. Parks Forward, an independent commission created to help



The Coastal Conservancy’s new call for proposals continues the agency’s efforts to fund equitable recreational access to the coast, like the Community Shuttle program that brought these kids to Baker Beach in 2014. photo by Alison Taggart-Barone, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy

the state parks department update services and address California’s changing demographics, advised an increase in overnight options to mitigate inequity. The Institute of the Environment and Sustainability at UCLA also did a study and reported that while the “coast and beaches are among our most democratic spaces,” access is becoming a problem due to limited affordable overnight options.

For their own assessment, the Coastal Conservancy conducted a statewide phone survey. The survey found that 90 percent of Californians

relate emotionally to the state’s shoreline even when they aren’t near it. It also found that although many Californians visit the coast, most of them don’t deepen their experience by spending the night, especially those who are younger, are in a lower-income family, or are people of color. The survey concluded that the luxury of staying overnight is primarily reserved for those who are white, over 55 years old, and have incomes above \$200,000. While more than half of people who live within 150 miles of the coast are low-income, only 21 percent of all coastal accommodations are lower cost.

Camping can be a good option for low-cost coastal accommodations. It can also be fun. For some, the night sky and hoot of an owl create awe. Others spend the night on the coast to deepen ties with family and friends. But for those who have never done anything like it, the experience can prove profound.

“Staying overnight adds a layer of resiliency,” said Andrea

continued on page 4

Opening the Coast to All (from page 3)

Fraume, outreach coordinator for Bay Area Wilderness Training (BAWT), a project of the non-profit Earth Island Institute. BAWT's mission is to create equitable access to outdoor experiences for youth of color and low-income youth. Fraume said that "sleeping on the ground when it's cold can be scary, but when done in a group with a mentor, it can be really powerful. It's especially meaningful to marginalized youth who have experienced trauma." Trauma, she added, can result from living in poverty, being bullied, or encountering racism as a person of color.

Omar Gallardo, the outreach and diversity director for LandPaths, said a senior-class trip to Yosemite changed his life. As a kid growing up near Geyserville, Gallardo's family rarely went to the coast, and when they did it was a treat that his parents had saved for. They never spent the night. In college, Gallardo witnessed what being outside could mean to others. He worked with a program that took the children of Latino, Laotian Hmong, and Asian Indian migrant farmworkers camping for a week. "They didn't speak the same language, but the outdoors brought them together. They could dance and share the same trails. It was beautiful," he said.

There are more barriers at play to keeping the coast equitable. "There's an intimidation factor just to go hiking or camping, let alone being at the coast," said Gallardo. "I don't want to speak for all Latinos or people of color, but many Latino families don't necessarily want to spend the night outdoors anywhere. You have a house for a reason. At LandPaths we try to overcome cultural barriers and at least offer opportunities."

LandPaths offers no- or low-cost outings to Sonoma County

residents, including some overnight camping trips. A lack of outdoor gear can be a barrier, and even when they have it, they aren't confident that they're using it right, said Gallardo.

"Equipment is a huge barrier," said Scott Wolland, BAWT's executive director. In addition to providing wilderness training to teachers and others who work with youth, the nonprofit operates three gear libraries, including one in Oakland that can outfit over 500 people for an outing. Upon completion of a BAWT training program, gear rental is free for individuals who serve low-income youth and youth of color. "We provide free equipment to most of our groups, which helps them to have a safe and awesome experience to broaden their world," Wolland said.

Reserving a campground or cabin can also pose a challenge. "People who have free time and know how to make the system work are the ones who get the reservations," said Wolland. Even teachers who know their way around technology find the systems difficult, he said, noting that "ways to make these systems more equitable might include reservation set-asides, or free and low-cost permits issued to non-profit community groups in advance."

In the Explore the Coast Overnight draft assessment, the Coastal Conservancy offers examples of projects beyond new or expanded campsites. Other low-cost coastal accommodations given as examples are in various stages of the planning process. These include plans to build 13 cabins at Angel Island State Park, the enlargement of a bunkhouse at Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center on the Mendocino Coast, and an expansion of the hostels at Pigeon Point and Point Montara lighthouses.

It takes work and money to bring equity to the outdoor world. "I've heard hollow words all over the nation from the movement to get people of color outside. If you mean it, you must invest in it," said LandPaths' Gallardo. "Offering first contact is worth the investment. It's not just for us, it's for our babies." 

Aleta George covers open space for the Monitor.

Thank You for Your Support

The *Monitor* would like to acknowledge recent donations from Crownie Billik, Susan Polgar, Paul McCauley, Roberta Borgonovo, Judy Potter, Sherry Smith, Janice Blumenkrantz, Karen Butter, and Stephanie Peters. Such generous financial contributions are greatly appreciated, and help this publication continue to fulfill its mission. Donations to the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area, a non-profit organization, are tax deductible.

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All Particulate Is Local: New Tech Helps Map Community Air Quality

By Leslie Stewart

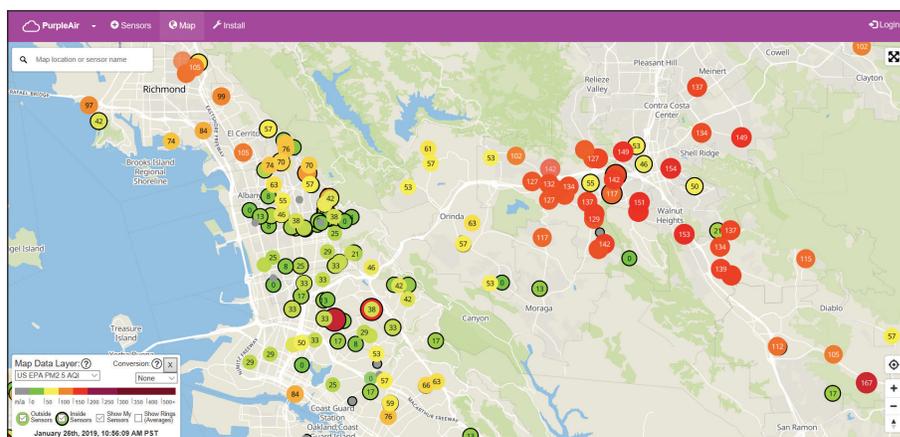
“If we can’t see or smell fine particulate matter in our air, it’s hard to be concerned about it, but it can still harm our health,” warned Jim Leach in an online presentation targeted at his neighbors in Lafayette. In his YouTube video posted last August, he urged them to install small monitoring devices outside their homes, schools, and offices to detect worrisome levels of fine particulate matter. Leach is part of a growing movement, sometimes referred to as “citizen science,” in which ordinary individuals use smaller, more affordable devices to monitor and assess their environment.

In his case, Leach relied on a device made by a grassroots group calling themselves PurpleAir, a reference to the “very unhealthy” category on the Environmental Protection Agency’s Air Quality Index scale. He first purchased the device to explore local movement of wildfire smoke, but once he started exploring the data mapped by PurpleAir’s network of devices, he became aware of the many ways in which air quality can vary within a community. Lafayette may be a leafy suburb, but it is bisected by a busy freeway and its quiet neighborhoods lie in valleys that can trap smoke. PurpleAir’s online mapping showed higher levels of pollution in areas near the freeway and in certain neighborhoods, levels that might concern a resident planning to jog or school athletes practicing outdoors.

Leach is participating in the simplest form of hyper-local air quality monitoring. Propelled by leaps in technology and data communication, there is now a plethora of monitoring devices available for a few hundred dollars, rather than tens of thousands, opening up both new ways to assess our environment and new challenges involving what to do with that data.

The California Air Resources Board webpages on community monitoring reveal that many factors must be considered, such as the number of pollutants a device can measure, how it communicates its data, and whether that data is compatible with other monitoring systems. The issue of compatibility is important in order for monitoring data to be compared with or integrated into regulatory programs.

Fern Uennatornwarangoon, Bay Area Air Quality Policy Manager for the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), said her organization recognized the need to better capture air pollution at a very localized level, and saw an opportunity presented by the proliferation of new environmental sensors making it



PurpleAir online mapping of the East Bay at the end of January shows real-time air quality data from sensors around the region.

image captured on 1/26/19 from PurpleAir.com

possible to collect data at previously unachievable scales. But methodologies to manage and use the new data didn’t exist.

After using different instruments and techniques in a range of projects, EDF is developing and publishing data standards guidelines. “EDF started this program out of necessity,” she explained. “It was a completely new field; no one else was doing it.” They have addressed how to format data (i.e., adding a time stamp), but guidelines on how to calibrate instruments to ensure data reliability and consistency, how to maintain quality assurance and quality control, and how to adjust for changes in weather and over time are still in the pipeline, Uennatornwarangoon said, adding, “We are catalyzing a space, trying to create infrastructure that can be used by others. Our goal is to make the data findable, accessible, and usable by people, but we’re still a ways off.”

How people will use the data is also still evolving. Like Leach, people can buy a monitor that measures one pollutant, or several at a time. They can use the data to guide their daily activities, or as members of a group that is pressuring regulators for greater pollution controls.

Or they may live in a community like West Oakland or Richmond, where there are a number of sources of pollution, but most residents can’t afford to purchase their own devices. These two communities are improving their monitoring by participating in the Bay Area Air Quality Management District’s Community Health Protection Program, created by 2017’s Assembly Bill 617 (C. Garcia).

It might seem tempting to simply blanket a community with small individual devices and utilize those reporting networks. However, laboratories for the South Coast Air

continued on page 6

New Tech Helps Map Community Air Quality (from page 5)

Quality Management District, the largest air quality regulator in the state, report error rates as high as 30 to 50 percent for some sensors. And there's another problem. Eric Stevenson, meteorology and measurement director at the Bay Area's Air District, commented, "You can't just put PurpleAir all over. That may be a starting point, but in order to fully characterize a small area, you'd need hundreds of sensors, which is expensive even though each sensor is relatively inexpensive."

Where to place them matters, too. EDF's Uennatornwarangoon said these efforts face a complex question: "How do you determine the most representative location or area in a community?"

One option is mobile monitoring. Google, EDF, the University of Texas at Austin, and environmental tech company Aclima conducted an innovative one-year air quality streetmapping study in West Oakland ending in May 2016. New compact

sensors measuring black carbon and nitrogen oxides were installed in Google Street View cars, which repeatedly drove a set pattern of routes throughout the community. The sensors collected extremely large amounts of data from the constant sampling, which were matched with Google mapping to pinpoint hyper-local variations in air quality within the community. By comparing results to existing Air District monitors in the same area, as well as to other information on pollution sources, researchers confirmed that the sensors were showing places, and points in time, when pollution was highest in certain locations.

Melissa Lunden, chief scientist at the San Francisco-based Aclima, is excited about the potential of using streetmapping for neighborhood monitoring. "It's a way for a community to make sure that there are answers for the questions that are being asked, without needing to hire their own computing experts," she observed, explaining that the vast amounts of data acquired by the sensors requires "meta data centers" to process the information. "It allows a community member to take the information and create their own story that they can then use for action." In West Oakland, streetmapping verified a local pollution source, a metal recycler. "Community members are talking about moving the facility so that it's not

in a residential neighborhood, to where it can expand and use new control technology," Lunden reported.

Aclima will continue to work with West Oakland representatives on their monitoring plan and is open to participating in Richmond. "We are talking about how to design a sampling program to give reliable standard results, and we would suggest options to the community," Lunden said. "Our program is easily deployed to map an area of any size. It's flexible and mutable."

Stevenson noted that unlike West Oakland, Richmond is just getting started. Following an Air Quality summit scheduled for February 16, which will educate the community about the issues, a steering committee will guide the design of a monitoring plan. "The Air District will start with asking 'What are your biggest concerns? Here's what we can do to monitor for those concerns,'" said Stevenson. "We

have a general idea of the air quality based on our current network," he explained. "We need to devise a screening method with enough accuracy to ID sources."

Stevenson emphasized that the focus is on the community rather than the source. "The message is that we want to monitor in your neighborhood, but we want to do it in an efficient and effective way," he said,

adding that "once you have sound data that people can agree on, people respond to it."

Stevenson said he considers a mobile platform like Aclima's to be the best solution for screening for local sources of pollution, but he noted that there is still a role for the "citizen scientist," particularly for specific events like wildfire smoke. While Aclima's mapping cars tracked the invasion of smoke from November's fire in Paradise into the region, Lunden reported only a couple of cars on limited routes provided early data, and once smoke was more dispersed, results were not as clear. "PurpleAir monitors are great for seeing changes in air quality moving through the Bay Area. By comparing various locations against each other at a given point in time, they can help with forecasting and tracking movement [of pollutants] through the area," Stevenson concluded. 



In an example of Aclima air quality mapping technology, this image shows nitrogen dioxide emissions in the Bay Area from April 2016 to October 2017.

image courtesy of Aclima

Community members are talking about moving the facility so that it's not

Leslie Stewart covers air quality and energy for the Monitor.

Climate Resilience: Reconnecting Creeks to Tidal Baylands

By Robin Meadows



Novato Creek (the thin line of water snaking out from the bottom left side of the above photo) in eastern Marin County is one of three Bay Area creek systems to have gone through a visioning process for establishing a more natural interface with tidal baylands.

photo by Sue Lattanzio

A new approach to flood management around the San Francisco Bay could trim maintenance costs for water agencies, restore habitat for endangered species, and help protect against rising seas. What links the three? Sediment.

Winter storms push sediment down creeks that flow into the Bay and, long ago, these waterways fanned out when they reached the edge. Sediment settled there, nourishing tidal baylands — salt marshes and mudflats that are rich in wildlife, and also buffer the shore from storm surges, the highest tides, and sea level rise.

Today few of these low-lying tidal baylands remain. Seeing them as useless swamps, people built levees around them so they could be drained for development. But levees also disconnect tidal baylands from the creeks that once fed them.

Creeks that are confined by levees no longer have room to move naturally, so they don't spread out and build salt marshes along the edge of the Bay anymore. "Levees lock

creeks in place," said Scott Dusterhoff of the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI), a Richmond-based nonprofit that provides independent scientific support on environmental issues. "Many of them flow straight out to the Bay."

Now SFEI is working with stakeholders — including water agencies, regulators, and landowners — to find a common vision for reconnecting creeks with tidal baylands. "There's a shift in the regulatory agencies," Dusterhoff said. "The new thinking on flood control is to increase resilience by working with natural processes." The time is right, he added, because much of the Bay Area's flood control infrastructure was built in the 1950s and is nearing the end of its lifespan.

So far, three creek systems have gone through this visioning process: Walnut Creek, which flows into Suisun Bay; Novato Creek, which flows into San Pablo Bay; and Calabazas and San Tomas Aquino creeks, which merge and flow into the South Bay. Visioning was funded by the U.S. Environmental

continued on page 8

Reconnecting Creeks to Tidal Baylands (from page 7)

Protection Agency. And funds to help turn these visions into reality could come from Measure AA, which voters across the region's nine counties collectively passed in 2016, and which will raise about \$25 million a year over two decades for restoration projects in the Bay.

Walnut Creek

The Walnut Creek project is farthest along. The lower reaches of the creek were straightened to facilitate shipping but this also had other consequences. "For the last almost 60 years, the channel has filled in very quickly with sediment," explained Paul Detjens, a civil engineer at the Contra Costa County Flood Control & Water Conservation District.

On the good side, this creates marsh inhabited by rare and endangered species, like black rails and salt marsh harvest mice. On the bad side, sediment in the channel impedes flood water conveyance and must be removed regularly. The district has dredged a total of about 1.4 million cubic yards of sediment from the channel since 1965, which lessens flooding but also renders the marsh habitat temporary.

Walnut Creek originally had room to move freely near its mouth, meandering through — and bringing sediment to — a floodplain up to three-quarters of a mile wide. "The creek used to squiggle but now levees separate it from the floodplain," Detjens said. The district wants to reconnect the creek to its floodplain by moving the levees back about 500 feet. This was one of the visioning team's recommendations, Detjens said, adding, "We benefitted greatly from the expertise assembled."

Allowing nature to take its course will move sediment from the channel to the floodplain, cutting dredging costs and boosting sustainable marsh habitat. Moreover, a regular supply of sediment will help the marsh growth keep pace with sea level rise, bolstering flood protection in the future. "We are designing for the next 50 to 100 years," Detjens said. Scheduled to begin construction in 2020, the project will restore the lower four miles of Walnut Creek and the district has requested Measure AA funds to help pay for the estimated \$15 million cost.

Novato Creek

The tidal baylands around Novato Creek were diked off more than a century ago and converted to agriculture, primarily ranching. Today, the channel is choked with sediment. "You used to be able to sail schooners up it but now you'd be lucky to get a kayak up," said Roger Leventhal, a flood control engineer with the Marin County Department of Public Works.

Moreover, draining the tidal marsh exposed the organics-rich peat to air, and the soil slowly decomposed. This led to a topsy-turvy landscape: the soil has subsided so much that the bottom of the creek, which is bounded by levees, can be several feet higher than the land around it.

Reconnecting Novato Creek with its former tidal baylands will help solve both problems. The department wants to start by breaching a levee in Deer Island, which is about three miles from the creek mouth near the intersection of highways 101 and 37. "We'll punch a hole a couple hundred feet wide to let the water in," Leventhal said. "The tides will come up, and eventually they will naturally scour out the channel and build up the marsh."

The Deer Island project will both restore up to 180 acres of salt marsh and help control flooding of Highway 37, which was inundated and closed near Novato during heavy rains in early 2017. The project was awarded a \$510,000 Measure AA grant for the design phase in 2017, and total costs will run an estimated \$8 to \$12 million. Leventhal anticipates that the department could seek construction funds in 2020.

Calabazas and San Tomas Aquino Creeks

Like Novato Creek, Calabazas and San Tomas Aquino creeks were leveed about 100 years ago. The combined creek flow was rerouted through a slough, and the tidal baylands there were converted into ponds for commercial salt production. Moreover, in the 1960s San Tomas Aquino Creek was realigned to accommodate a landfill, giving the



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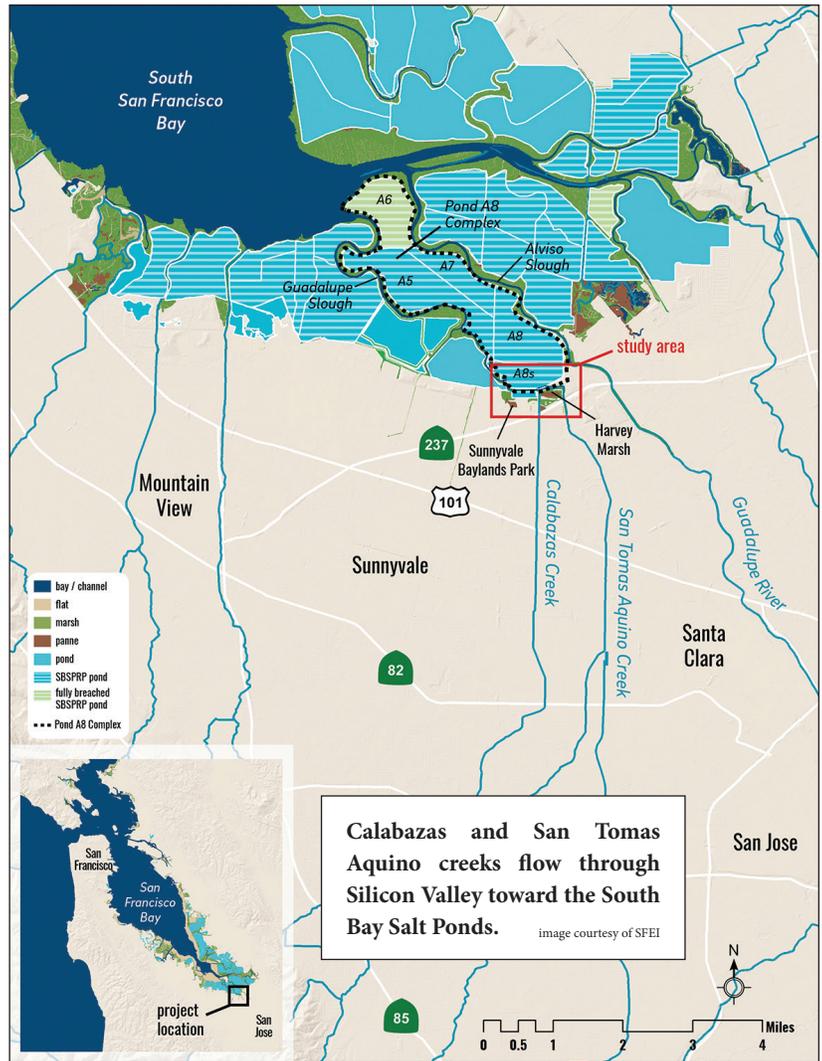
waterway an unnatural 90-degree bend.

These alterations exacerbate sediment accumulation, and between 2000 and 2016 the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) dredged about 260,000 cubic yards of sediment from these creeks at a cost of about \$11 million. "Reconnection would allow the creeks to deliver some of the sediment naturally to a former salt pond," said SCVWD water planner Judy Nam. This would accelerate tidal marsh restoration in the pond, which is part of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project that will transform more than 15,000 acres of industrial salt ponds back into wetlands.

Nam credits the SFEI visioning with smoothing the district's planning process. "Having technical experts who were not project proponents was very useful, and it was very helpful to walk regulators through the issues," she said. "It was so much more efficient — we got an indication on whether it was a go or no-go."

SCVWD proposes undoing the sharp bend in San Tomas Aquino Creek, redirecting the flow through a nearby marsh remnant, as well as breaching the levee that separates the creeks from the former salt pond. "This will create a nice little delta and make fantastic habitat," Nam said. "Nature is the best engineer." 

Robin Meadows covers water for the Monitor.



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The Fifth Element: Housing Reform Meets in the Middle

By Cecily O'Connor

In July of 2017, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) adopted Plan Bay Area 2040, a long-range blueprint to guide transportation investments and land-use decisions in the nine-county region. Advocacy groups who participated in the plan's development expressed concern that it didn't do enough to address housing affordability, and asked the agencies to identify ways to help low- and middle-income households avert displacement risk and gain better access to jobs.

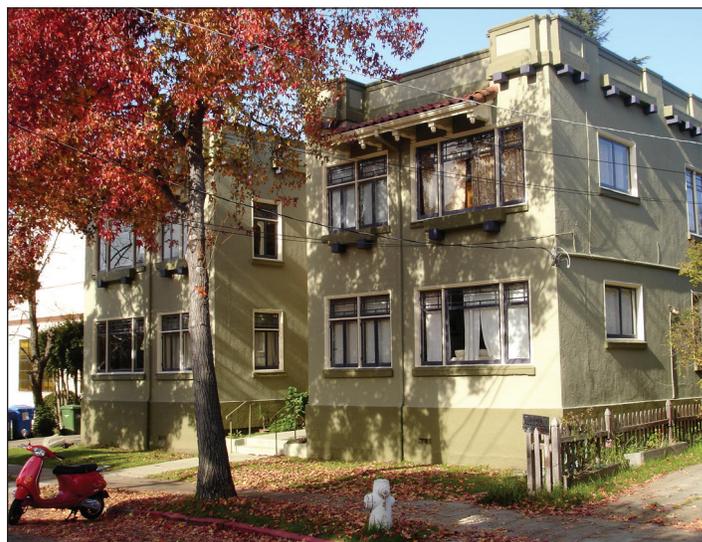
In response, ABAG and MTC assembled CASA, or the Committee to House the Bay Area. It's a task force led by three co-chairs and comprised of representatives from labor groups, large technology companies, affordable housing developers, and the government and nonprofit sectors, among others. Their work culminated last month with the final approval of a "compact" consisting of 10 policy recommendations for housing preservation, production, and protection.

"The compact was set up and conceived as a way of bringing together what had been disparate issues related to the housing affordability crisis in the Bay Area," said Ken Kirkey, director of integrated planning for MTC/ABAG.

ABAG's executive board voted 21 to 9 on January 17 to authorize its president to sign the compact, following an MTC board blessing the month prior with a 14-3 vote. A great deal of debate preceded these votes. In letters sent to MTC at the end of 2018, several city officials expressed concern that CASA's effort lacked input from smaller jurisdictions and that proposed zoning changes could pre-empt local control over development.

The compact "denies the fact that cities have put thousands of hours into writing their overall general plan, their housing element, and the provisions for environmental protection," said Susan Kirsch, founder of Livable California, a group that supports local community planning.

Nonetheless, CASA members offer minimum zoning near transit as one of their 10 recommendations to get the ball rolling on housing affordability. Identified in the compact as Element #5, the recommendation is intended to provide cities the ability to add housing near transit by producing an inclusive mix of "missing middle" types such as duplexes and fourplexes. The CASA compact's overall production target is 35,000 units a year, with 14,000 being affordable to lower-income households, and 7,000 being affordable to moderate-income ones.



Regional policymakers see "missing middle" types of housing as vital to addressing the Bay Area's housing crisis. photo courtesy of Opticos Design

There is a "strong focus on trying to get more of the development that happens to not be just affordable housing, but also inexpensive housing near transit," said Stuart Cohen, a CASA steering committee member and the outgoing executive director of TransForm, a transportation advocacy group.

Specifically, Element #5 sets minimum zoning on residential, commercial, and institutional areas to allow missing middle housing types up to 36 feet tall, or roughly three stories, in neighborhoods where there is high-quality bus service. Minimum zoning jumps up to 55 feet tall (or 75 feet with a density bonus) for midrise housing huddled around major rail stations and ferry terminals.

Element #5 is important because it melds transportation and land-use planning to advance home rental and buying opportunities. It also folds into larger policy goals aimed at reducing traffic congestion and long commutes, as well as greenhouse gas emissions.

"To the people around the CASA table, [upzoning] felt like a reasonable next step to accomplish the CASA compact goals that are imperatives, not just in the Bay Area but statewide," said Denise Pinkston, CASA's production workgroup moderator.

Additionally, Element #5 stipulates that when a major transit stop is located in or next to a "sensitive community" with low-income residents, density increases could be deferred for three years while the individual city develops a community plan to divert potential displacement risks.

Other housing production elements in the 10-part

compact call for a more streamlined review process, expedited approvals, and builder incentives.

Some portions of Element #5 are familiar, too. It lists 2018's Senate Bill 827 (Wiener) as a reference. The bill aimed to create denser development around transit, but was killed in committee. State Senator Scott Wiener later introduced similar density-driven legislation, The More HOMES Act (SB 50), with some new provisions to confront housing shortages experienced throughout the state.

In the Bay Area, a comparison of job and housing data shows what residents are experiencing. While the Bay Area has added 722,000 jobs since 2010, it's only constructed 106,000 housing units, according to CASA data. Nearly 190,000 workers commute from outside the nine-county region to Silicon Valley business parks and the Tri-Valley, while more than 220,000 East Bay residents cross toll bridges to the Peninsula daily.

"The housing crisis is real and impacting residents, making it in many cases too expensive to live in the city or difficult to find housing, whether it's a rental or those who want to get into the housing market," said Robert Merkamp, zoning manager for the City of Oakland.

The City of Santa Rosa was already experiencing "a housing crisis at all affordability levels" when the Tubbs Fire struck in 2017 and destroyed 5 percent of the housing stock, said David Guhin, assistant city manager and director of planning and economic development.

Missing middle housing is viewed as a solution because it includes a range of types from duplexes and townhomes, on up to live-work units, said Dan Parolek, principal at Opticos Design who coined the term in 2010. These homes were somewhat common in pre-war East Bay and Peninsula neighborhoods, but construction later slowed due to regulatory factors, as well as trends toward suburban, car-dependent sprawl and single-family home ownership.

Individual units in missing middle structures are smaller than a single-family home. But when a developer puts 16 units on a lot, for example, the result is a supply boost that can relieve pressure off regional housing costs.

"A lot of it has to do with efficiencies," Parolek said. "You can have a fairly small lot but get a number of units on it."

As cities digest details about CASA's zoning proposal, at least two with whom the *Monitor* spoke said the desired effect of creating housing near transit is consistent with some long-term goals. But there still are matters that will need to be addressed.

"There are elements in the compact we've started working toward and even going beyond," Guhin said. Santa Rosa city officials recently approved an update to the state density bonus, agreeing to 100 percent bonuses for developers to allow for more units per acre downtown, he said.

The city also put in place a series of housing initiatives, including a reduction in impact fees, expedited permitting, and updates to its 2007 Station Area Specific Plan that provides California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) coverage.

In Oakland, city officials will be looking at zoning in response to CASA's recommendations this year. In general, Oakland's mixed-density requirements vary between 25 feet and 45 feet, so they already are in the "sweet spot" of CASA's recommendations, Merkamp said.

Neil Gray, a City of Oakland planner, added that generally he doesn't expect CASA's zoning recommendation will have a "huge effect" on the city. However, it could have consequences that reduce the city's discretion over design review.

"There may be specific neighborhoods where this program is controversial due to increased densities, heights, and general lack of discretion regarding design review," he said.

But for CASA's leadership right now, the emphasis is on engaging with state and local elected officials with the aim that they will green-light legislation that implements the compact's zoning and other recommendations. 

Cecily O'Connor covers transportation for the Monitor.



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