



## Marin Prepares for the Future

By Naomi Lubick, Science Interchange Reporter

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You might not know that only 1% of the food you eat is produced in Marin County. Or that traffic on Highway 101 in Marin is mostly people taking trips within the county -- not commuting to San Francisco. Or that the average single-family home in Marin County costs about \$599,000.

At a recent meeting of a working group of the Marin County Community Development Agency, participants learned these facts as background information. The working group will determine the issues to be faced in the future, in order to create a new development plan for Marin County.

The key theme is sustainable development. "There's a long history here of slow manageable growth," said Alex Hinds, director of the Community Development Agency, but the goal now is to provide for future generations. "Marin County has been very fortunate; people here have had the foresight to look to the future," Hinds said. "The '70s [county development] plan was a landmark document. Nevertheless, we now have traffic congestion, high cost housing, and we have to review it."

The plan established for Marin in the 1970s divided the peninsula into three geographic regions: city-centered, inland rural, and coastal recreation. Despite these separations, urban and rural concerns intersect, and population growth (though less than 1%) has had an impact. For example, Marin has a housing vacancy rate of less than 5%, which is considered a public health issue.

At last month's working group meeting, the main topics were agriculture, housing, and transportation. Stacy Carlsen, Marin's agricultural commissioner, Barbara Collins, an affordable housing specialist with the county, and Dean Powell, a transportation expert with the Department of Power Works, gave introductory presentations to the attendees, summarizing Marin County trends from housing availability and quality to pesticide application and predator control for livestock. The participants then broke into three groups, each with a focus on one topic. Within each group, participants brought their own experiences to bear on lively discussions.

Kathy Lowrey, a volunteer with the Marin Conservation League, said, "There are a lot of good heads here to come up with a plan." With regard to something like the gridlock on Highway 101, Lowrey said, "the answer elsewhere would be to add a new lane," which won't be the answer for Marin, she said.

As urban centers will continue to expand around the 101 corridor, the transportation and housing groups discussed how to encourage quality low-income housing, improve transportation conditions, and plan for Marin's "graying" population. Ranchland and farms maintain open space in the region, and Carlsen, Marin's agricultural commissioner, said that "livestock is the key economic impact in the county," grossing up to \$150 to \$200 million yearly. One concern is how to encourage dairy and organic farmers and make sure they remain solvent.

Last month's meeting ended with each group summarizing the points they wanted addressed for Marin's next development plan. Each point reflected other concerns from different segments of the working group—from education about agriculture and "eating locally" and organically, to who is doing the labor in the county and how far they have to drive to find affordable housing.

Despite the complexity of the issues, the people doing the brainstorming seemed hopeful that they would find good solutions. Carlos Porrata, a park ranger at Tomales Bay State Park and participant in the agriculture discussion, said, "We've got to actually try to dream."

## RESOURCES

County of Marin Community Development Agency: [co.marin.ca.us/comdev/](http://co.marin.ca.us/comdev/) or call (415) 499-6269.

Marin County Countywide Plan Update:  
[www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/CD/main/comdev/ADVANCE/CWP/INDEX.cfm](http://www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/CD/main/comdev/ADVANCE/CWP/INDEX.cfm)

Redefining Progress Sustainability Program/Ecological Footprint:  
[www.redefiningprogress.org/programs/sustainabilityindicators/ef/Footpdist/](http://www.redefiningprogress.org/programs/sustainabilityindicators/ef/Footpdist/)