

**Lower Russian River MAC**

**Minutes**

**August 19th, 2021**

**5:30-7:30pm**

**Call to Order at 5:32pm Chair/Pip Marquez de La Plata**

**Pledge of Allegiance MAC Clerk/Mary Agneberg**

**Roll Call MAC Clerk/Mary Agneberg**

**Present:** Pip Marques de La Plata, Vesta Copestakes, Jeanette Dillman, Tony Goodwin (Alternate),

Nic Pereira, Naomi Huffstutter, Kyra Wink, Lisa Nahmanson, Alice Teeter

**Absent:** Mike Nicholls

1. **Approval of the Agenda**
2. **Statement of Conflict of Interest**

No reported conflicts of interest.

1. **Correspondence -** No correspondence.
2. **Consent Calendar**
3. Approval of the June 17, 2021 minutes
4. Approval of the April 15, 2021 minutes

Motion to approve the April and June 2021 minutes by Vesta Copestakes, seconded by Lisa Nahmanson, and passed 8-0.

Motion to approve the Consent Calendar by Tony Goodwin, seconded by Nic Pereira and passed 8-0.

**Public Comment -** No public comment on non-agendized matters.

**Regular Calendar Items**

**1. Opening Comments from Supervisor Lynda Hopkins**

**Supervisor Hopkins -**

**Update on Unhoused:** On July 22nd we had a meeting at the Senior Center to bring together the neighbors of the original encampment in downtown and then the sort of secondary encampment that was then shifted over to the park and ride and the service provider. We will extend an invitation to our local MAC reps and also the chair as well. It was intended to be a listening session to hear concerns of the neighbors of the encampment downtown and the impacts that have occurred. There was a County process moving forward when residents sort of took the matters into their own hands.

Solutions that the community members present:

* Acquisition of George’s hideaway for homeless services and potentially a tiny house type village in the back portion of the property. There was also the property owned by Herman J Hernandez on the other end of town. State funding is potentially available Project Homekey is the state funding that we utilized to acquire the Sebastopol inn and Hotel Azura will be broadening the eligibility.

* The group was looking at Laura's Law implementation in Sonoma County which can mandate treatment for folks who are at risk of harming themselves or others. The county has not yet had the kind of the funds and the means to implement but it's something that we could consider implementing in Sonoma County
* Another solution that was supported by the community was looking at expanding homeless or drug court in Sonoma County using probation as a tool to encourage folks to accept treatment services. Sonoma County is trying to encourage folks to stay on that path.

The encampment clearing day at the park and ride on Wednesday August 4th resulted in many of the campers accepting services. A huge amount of credit goes to the county outreach workers who were there, but more importantly to Tim Miller at West County Community Services and to Amy McGraw who had developed individual relationships with the folks at the encampment.

Regarding the concern about fire risk at homeless encampments- there is a plan to map out to the rural homeless encampments so that we can get those on a map literally and on the radar for service from West County Community Services and County outreach street teams, and folks like Keary Sorenson who can educate folks on fire risk, give out fire extinguishers, etc. The County can't kick people off of private property. Property owners need to work directly with the Sheriff's Office. We have stepped up patrols of regional parks and we're working actively to try to open that park to the community

We will be working to schedule a town hall in Guerneville (and virtually) regarding a couple of different types of property acquisitions. On the agenda will be:

* Homeless services and what we can do to address homelessness
* Public safety buildings in Guerneville - the sheriff substation and the fire station are both unreinforced masonry and they need to be replaced urgently.
* Vet’s Hall – Is in bad shape, no formal foundation, all four walls are starting to kind of lean in opposite directions and ultimately we know that it's in the floodplain on the Bank of the river and so you know if that building is not going to be functional in the future.
* We also have an opportunity to look at neighborhood service center so instead of having to drive to downtown Santa Rosa to meet with the county right you could actually have an annex that would be in.
* We want to talk about the emergency pre-positioning of supplies in the event of an earthquake.

**COVID Surge**

More than 80% of our population has had at least one dose of a COVID, and of those 72% have the full two doses. There has been an uptick in demand over the past couple of weeks. The bad news is the delta variant continues to spread in Sonoma County. Sonoma County now has mandatory masking indoors and public setting, and just passed a policy for our more than 4000 county employees that says either you need to show proof of vaccination or you need to be tested for COVID-19 on a weekly basis .

There is a significantly higher transmission rate in unvaccinated residents compared to vaccinated residents, and we're also seeing a much higher rate of hospitalization with intubation and ventilation in unvaccinated residents as compared to vaccinated.

**Parks Update:**

The Board of Supervisors and did award the Guerneville River Park phase two bid last Tuesday. This is a roughly $1 million project includes constructing a non-motorized boat staging and portage area, and a second park entrance with a parking lot. There will be more invasive species removal and native planting as well as new ADA accessible path. And more picnic sites for groups. Construction starts in September and the new facility is expected to open this year or next year. More information to come.

**Council Comments:**

**Vesta Copestakes -** Applauds consideration of the former Georges Hideaway as a potential site. People could help build to learn carpentry skills, electrical, and plumbing. It does need work but it is a rather perfect location that doesn't impact neighbors, and it's close enough to town, with a bus stop for people to get to work.

**Nic Pereira -** Disagrees and notes a long list of other reasons other than the condition of the buildings as to why that site was not ideal. Will share those reasons as things progress.

**2. Presentations: Russian River Confluence and Revitalization projects**

**1. Elise Weiland**

The Russian River Confluence was formed in 2017 in response to the fact that the Russian River watershed is really struggling. The water quality and quantity continue to degrade even though we have a lot of different organizations working on it. The concept was to bring together organizations that are working on the river to row in the same direction to set priorities and to work together on the mission to drive community action towards a healthy, resilient and regenerative Russian River and to aim for a healthy, economic, environmental, recreational and spiritual heart of the river.

We have over 18 organizations including County Supervisors, First Nations Water Board, Sonoma County Tourism and many more organizations that are coming together to work on this. Confluence will identify the most damaged points in order to triage and address the issues with the river.

The communication strategic priority is to establish effective communications across the watershed and campaign for watershed health and recovery. We want to *inspire and engage* communities to contribute towards the health of the river. We also want to have the communication send people towards pathways for beneficial participation integrating stewardship of the river into participation, engaging businesses land owners residents and visitors and interest interestingly enough as since getting this started we've been hearing so many great things that are going on and it's going to be really wonderful this year and expand those activities through this communications channel we want to *communicate the vulnerability of the river* I mean now in the drought it's kind of obvious but you know in good years it's hard to see and that the need for immediate and urgent actions and we also want to *create an understanding* of how projects in one area affect another and *connect the dots* to how the watershed works.

People upstream will do projects that we've never heard of that are affecting downstream quite a bit, and they may not be understanding how they're affecting the river downstream. And people downstream may not understand why things have changed. Russian River Confluence put together a request for proposals (RFP) and the marketing committee did a rigorous analysis of the different proposals and chose Catch Creative.

**2. Catch Creative**

**Brandt/Ryan -**

Catch Creative is a full service design, creative and marketing agency based in Healdsburg right across from the river. This is that we've gotten the opportunity to kind of get to know different types of organizations in a variety of different industries everything from the corporate world to the nonprofit world to the local government which has made our creative knives somewhat sharp. We did the Sonoma Land Trust re-brand a few years back, the same with Becoming Independent, biodynamic wineries with a bio dynamic kind of organic focus with Fetzer, the agricultural community, folks like Nordstrom in Seattle and Whole Foods.

On a personal level, I grew up on the river and I've lived in many different towns along the river, my grandparents moved up here in the 50s and my parents grew up here. This project is at an intersection between my personal life and my professional life.

We broke this project down into three phases:

* Phase one: research discovery planning. We've just learned an immense amount talking from everybody from business owners to county professionals to tourists to collect information and trying to understand the issues
* Phase two: identity design campaign development. That's where we take all the research all the thinking all the conversations we've had and put together the creative materials for this campaign
* Phase three: campaign expression and outreach. It's getting it out there getting the word, spreading the word and doing whatever is possible to extend all of the great ideas and to elevate the perception of this region with whatever tools we have accessible to us.

We’re trying to talk to as many people as possible. We have a big list of key stakeholders to have an interview. We've gotten you know maybe 25% response rate which is good, but we thought people would be more excited to talk to us. So we become more proactive- sent street teams out for meeting people at popular places for having conversations, engaging them to find out what they love about the river. What things that they don't like about the river and really just trying to understand as many perspectives as possible to be inclusive and a community led sort of initiative. We want to be inspired by the community and do our best to do something that represents the people.

We need help getting the word out there, spreading the ideas that we have, being part of maybe potentially a behavioral shift. It’s an aspirational goal that's going to need a lot of people's participation. We have the domain [Russian River Revitalization.org](http://www.RussianRiverRevitalization.org). It's bilingual so it can be in English and Spanish which it's been incredible to just see how many Spanish-speaking individuals are really enjoying the river.

There's an interactive online survey that is a great tool and it's a great place to go and to provide information. We were excited to have the ability to do some polling with you all to collaborate with you and to get some insight from you all. It'll be really a great tool for us in general for the MAC to be able to poll people on different questions.

**Council comments:**

**Vesta Copestakes -** I was unaware of your research how do we find it so that we can participate and share that with people?

**Catch Creative -** We now have the website russianriverrevitalization.org and on there is the survey and a way to sign up for more information and also to participate.

**Tony Goodwin -**  Sounds like we're talking about the river area in general not just the river itself is exactly that the entire Russian River watershed. During the drought there are people whose wells are right on the very edge of the river and they say well we don't take any water from the river. Obviously the uplands of the trees that are in the watershed the creeks that are feeding into the watershed everything from the head waters to the ocean is a very important part not the of the whole

**Elise Weiland -** One of the keys is bringing together the information of the whole it was great this weekend I was able to sit down with some people from Jackson family wineries that are working on groundwater recharge. How can they take wastewater and help recycle that water? It's great to see so many different projects happening there's a First Nations project where they took out invasive weed and were able to reclaim 10s of millions of gallons of water went back into the river. We want to take the good things that are happening on the watershed from the tip to the stern and replicate those and expand them throughout. One of the goals of the project is to have different users work sustainably together. We can create a great iconic Keep Tahoe Blue kind of brand that promotes the river as an ecotourism spot throughout the country and the world.

**Tony Goodwin -** Our economy is based on tourism and finding that happy medium is important. A lot of our families and children are moving out of the area to suit more tourism, Airbnb etc. Is this in this survey and this what these well there's the survey?

**Catch Creative -** Affordable housing and vacation rental structure are at the moment being worked on.

**Naomi Huffstutter -** Part like part of the presentation is about taking care of the environment but I'm wondering if it's really based upon increasing tourism and making things more inviting for visitors ?

**Catch Creative -** This is not a tourism campaign by any means. We're not trying to necessarily attract more people. It's about protecting the health of the river itself and the community that depends on a healthy river. That's a behavioral thing. People are coming in there and in the last five years we've seen a major spike in what's happening to the river, but as people are coming the health of the river has been diminishing by the way people are treating. If people are going to come why can't they be stewards of the river? Why can't they make it leave it better than they found it? It is completely possible and very aspirational but it's something that we should be working towards.

The goal is 2021 to launch the campaign and it will take time to build momentum as brands and campaigns do education and opportunities are being explored.

**Nic Pereira -** Guerneville has project fatigue because we just went through a re-branding a few years ago, and this sounds so similar to what we were pitched the last time around. I understand it's not necessarily the same thing but it sounds and looks very similar and may be some of why you're not getting the engagement that you think you should.

**Elise Weiland-** This project, unlike the last one, has a lot of participating organizations behind it. We’re following the model of “Keep Tahoe Blue” which has been successful for over 35 years. There is a lot of will here to improve our watershed because the Russian River really communities really do care about our natural beauty that we live in and depend on. I really appreciate the research and the reaching out to community members here to get their input into this process, and so if you can break down any of that resistance before you can get to the creative part it will make it a much more successful campaign.

**Vesta Copestakes -** I'm very grateful that it's a local company with people who grew up here and understand the river.

**3. Presentation: Fire Chief Marshall Turbeville, Fire Prevention**

**Fire Chief Marshall Turbeville -** Presented fire videos specific to the lower Russian River area and northwest portion of Sonoma County and the redwood forest, beginning with video from August 19th of 2020 during the Walbridge fire. Notes we're in the middle of the current 2021 fire season. Too late to do vegetation management so the focus is on preventing fires and being prepared to evacuate. (Video showed extreme fire behavior in the redwood forest with fiery material falling from the trees and embers blowing.) The fire creates its own weather with the tree branches moving and the leaves moving with the wind. What can we do to prevent loss of life? Evacuation. When the Sonoma County Sheriff through the fire agencies calls for an evacuation like during the Walbridge, the Kincade and during the Myers fire last year - we need to get you out of harm's way so we can focus on saving your house.

Structures primarily catch fire from radiant heat and embers. Video shows how this fire behavior picks up and how embers cause additional fires.

What you need to do now what you need to be prepared

* Keep your roof free of material since that's where embers can land
* The county does have fire adapted communities - So Co Adapts is coming to portions of the lower Russian River providing an opportunity for some reimbursement. Permit Sonoma is heavily involved in that. Start looking at retrofitting structures to be more fireproof/resistant
* Get out early to avoid getting stuck.
* Think about your gas tank vehicle being ready
* Check on your neighbors who maybe don't have cell phone service, seniors
* Ham radios and GMRS radios are being used for people to work neighbor to neighbor
* Do your part at your house to do defensible space, manage roadside vegetation
* More vegetation management along roads roadside treatments so firefighters can get in
* Be extra-prepared on the red flag days

My purpose tonight was not to scare anybody - just to educate and inform that redwood forests do burn and there is something you can do to get ready. Let's keep this this momentum going into the winter and the fall months and prevent fires whenever we can prevent them. Then let's keep being prepared by taking care of ourselves and our neighbors.

**Council Comments:**

**Alice Teeters -** what we need to do with our propane tanks when evacuate?

**Chief Turbeville -** Inside your building or structure, or in an area that's not going to burn like a gravel driveway. Just remember then they could surprise a firefighter. And if it's a vacation rental, make sure those folks have a checklist of what they need to do if there's a red flag/fire watch.

**Vesta Copestakes -** Are those “evacuated” signs still available?

**Chief Turbeville -** Try the sheriff substation first and if they don't have any you can give me a call. Also, some people don't know that Sonoma County animal control does come by and take care of animals when you've evacuated. Call them to get on their route.

**Lisa Nahmanson -** Free home hardening inspections by the fire inspector – they walk around your property and tell you what to do to make your house even safer

**4. Information: El Molino update**

(Chair Marquez de la Plata advised that the MAC an advisory council with no jurisdiction over school board matters)

**Tasha Mattison/CARE –**

* Discussion of numerous issues with the manor in which the school board implemented unification of El Molino and Analy High School. Board member recall and lawsuit underway.
* On Instagram it's @saveElmo. You can go to [www.saveelmo.com](http://www.saveelmo.com). On September 11th a BBQ and Brews event and then we have our trial for our care lawsuit on September 22nd

**Public Comment:**

**Debbie Ramirez-** my biggest concern for the Russian River area around this is that with the closure of El Molino nobody in the far West county as they're calling it has access to a comprehensive high school. Laguna is a continuation school and you can't get credits there to go on to college.When you look at the size of this school district which is over 400 square miles the majority of the tax revenue that comes into this district is paid by people that are served by the by El Molino High School. I encourage those of you that don't know the full story to go ahead and look at these websites

1. **Committee and Staff Reports**
2. **AdHoc Appointment: Lisa Nahmanson to Chair the Trash Ad Hoc**

MAC Chair appointed Lisa Nahmanson to the trash ad hoc committee and Ms. Nahmanson accepted the appointment.

1. **Vacation Rental Ad Hoc**

**Vesta Copestakes -** The purpose of the Mac is to be a representative our community to the Board of Supervisors in this particular case to Permit Sonoma. On July 20th the Gary Helfrich gave a workshop to the Board of Supervisors. Thank you so much Gary and Permit Sonoma that they actually took some of our suggestions that came from our survey and are at least considering them for the ordinance. Switching to a business license gives more opportunity for enforcement, and has more teeth. One of the issues that we've all had in terms of the community is lack of enforcement from Permit Sonoma. Permit Sonoma has fire safety. Tracking online advertising. Parking rules to be determined. The full report which is attached to the meeting agenda and I'm putting it up on our website to [www.RussianRiverMAC.com](http://www.RussianRiverMAC.com).

Permit Sonoma also has a way of mapping vacation rentals which has been used for fire safety and to determine how many vacation rentals are in a Fire Zone and that could also be used for density so I'm kind of hoping that they will find a way to use their fire safety mapping to solve the issue of how many vacation rentals are in a neighborhood and therefore how many is too many in a neighborhood.

**Gary Helfrich –** BOS Need date for the next workshop. 24/7 to be modeled after Marin County in use. Possibly with the same vendor.

**Neil Baker –** Kudos to Vesta and Nic and subcommittee and Gary Helfrich. Key takeaways – move to business license structure, consider neighbor concerns.

1. **Staff Report**

**Elise Weiland -**

1. **Security and Lighting**

FROG on lighting/cameras with a plan to expand to 3rd/4th Street. Old system at Plaza and bridge is defunct and needs replacement.

1. **Vegetation Management**

Leo Chyi’s report: $300k approved from PG&E funds to resolve CEQA vegetation management issues. Permit Sonoma is using that money to hire two extra senior environmental specialist to do this work the board then set aside $3 million in funds from the next allocation of vegetation management grants to fund these projects.

1. **Parking update**

Regional parks has piloted a new program a shuttle program where people park right next to 101 and then I shuttled here they have gotten up to 400

We've been working with CHP on the bus problems in terms of buses just stopping in miscellaneous places We've been taking photos of the buses I know I personally was stopped behind one that just decided to stop in the middle of the road and then I could not get anywhere which is unacceptable so we've been asking community residents facing those problems to take pictures of the buses and then CHP an we've been working on sending them season just list desist letters

**Council Comments:**

**Jeanette Dillman** - Pocket Canyon is becoming heavily involved in the vegetation management programming and in that huge wide area that I believe also includes the Rio Nido –it’s basically a circle from Forestville down river Rd kind of around Martinelli and then 116. Thank you to Damien Boune for sharing his extensive knowledge of GMRS.

1. **Call for Agenda Items**

* Vacation Rental Committee report
* Expansion of the gas station/convenience store at the corner of Mirabel and 116 – also to the Land Use Standing Committee.
* Update from Supervisor Hopkins about how the fire prevention funds will be utilized.
* Two-three minutes for an update on the work at the Hacienda Bridge, Mothers Beach

1. **Adjournment**

Chair Pip Marquez de la Plata asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Vesta Copestakes made a motion to adjourn, and Tony Goodwin seconded. The motion carried 8-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:18 p.m.