



**Lower Russian River Municipal Advisory Council**  
**Minutes**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**October 12, 2023 05:30 PM**  
**Monte Rio School, 27000 Foothill Drive. Monte Rio, CA**  
<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/lrrmac>

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 pm by Chair - Rio Nido Representative Pip Marquez de la Plata.  
Betsy Van Dyke arrived at 5:34 PM

**A. Pledge of Allegiance**

Lead by Chair - Rio Nido Representative Pip Marquez de la Plata

**B. Roll Call**

Present: Chair - Rio Nido Representative Pip Marquez de la Plata, Pocket Canyon & Greater So Guerneville Representative Betsy Van Dyke, Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative Cynthia Strecker, Cazadero / Duncan Mills Representative Mike Nicholls, Hacienda Representative Vicki Clewes, Forestville Representative Vesta Copestakes, Forestville Alternate Lucy Hardcastle, Guerneville Alternate Kathy Dahl

Absent: Vice Chair - Forestville Representative Lisa Nahmanson, Guerneville Representative Joe Rogoff, Guerneville Representative Nic Pereira

Staff Present: Debbie Ramirez, Lupe Catalan, Tracy Lyons (remote)

**2. Approval of Agenda, Chair Pip Marquez de la Plata** Cazadero / Duncan Mills Representative Mike Nicholls motioned to approve. A second was made by Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative Cynthia Strecker.

The motion passed with the following vote:

8 In Favor    0 Opposed  
    Abstained        Absent

**3. Statement of Conflict of Interest**

there were none

**4. Consent Agenda**

**A. September 14, 2023 Minutes**

It was noted that a section of the September minutes was missing so the minutes were not approved and will be revised and brought to the October meeting for review and approval.

**5. Council Member Comment: On matters not listed on the agenda**

Betsy VanDyke announced a cleanup event scheduled for the following morning in the town of Guerneville, inviting volunteers to participate from 9:00 AM to approximately 11:30 AM. This event was a joint project involving the Pride committee, the Cleanup committee, and Riverkeeper. VanDyke, who chairs the trash committee for the Pride committee, highlighted the significance of the Pride celebration, mentioning that it would feature family-friendly events throughout the weekend. She detailed a wellness fair organized by the Health Center on Saturday, followed by a panel discussion on the history of the AIDS epidemic and its impact on Guerneville. Additionally, she mentioned that the parade was scheduled for noon, with a lineup at 11:00 AM, expected to last about an hour and culminate in a dance and

celebration at Johnson's Beach. VanDyke also noted that the cleanup committee would be active post-celebration. She advised checking the River Alliance website for more information on the various events, including a senior brunch, an event by After Wine, and a unique installation called "Flag in the Map," representing a rainbow flag in unexpected places worldwide.

Lucy Hardcastle announced a Forestville Planning Association town hall meeting on October 26 at Forestville Elementary School, scheduled from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM. The meeting's agenda included revisiting the housing element, updates from affordable housing advocates, local community group updates on crosswalks and sidewalks, and an opportunity to comment on the asphalt plant proposal.

Vesta Copestakes reminded attendees of the upcoming MAC (s)elections, emphasizing the importance of participation and voting.

## 6. County Report

In her update, Supervisor Lynda Hopkins provided comprehensive information on various infrastructure and community projects in the area.

Hopkins began with road updates, mentioning the near completion of repairs on Moscow Road's east end slide area, with the road now open for use. The larger slide on the west end towards Duncan Mills is still under repair but is expected to be completed by year-end, weather permitting. She also noted the operational traffic signal at the Monte Rio Main Street bridge over Dutch Bill Creek, eliminating the need for detours along Fur Road, although the option remains available. Bridge debris removal work is set to begin in the fall, but full repair is pending due to the lack of permits for instream work, expected by spring.

She then discussed the Neely Road and Vacation Bridge, with the seasonal crossing scheduled for removal and no further closures impeding evacuation routes. Hopkins gave a shoutout to MAC representative Patty Theer for advocating improved access to a walking path near Monte Rio School, which has been made more accessible for strollers and wagons.

Hopkins encouraged visiting the new Monte Rio Redwoods Regional Park, praising its beauty and ongoing improvements. She also mentioned the upcoming release of a final draft of the governance study for community input, with a large meeting scheduled for January 20th. Small group discussions are welcomed, including a Spanish language meeting on November 4th.

Regarding the MAC selection process, Hopkins announced three applicants for two open seats in Forestville and three applicants for one representative seat in Guerneville. She expressed gratitude to retiring founding members Vesta Copestakes and Lucy Hardcastle.

Hopkins also highlighted upcoming vacation rental information workshops in Monte Rio and Guerneville, aiming to clarify current regulations and gather feedback for the general plan update process starting in December.

Lastly, she emphasized the focus on human-powered transportation, mentioning the Sonoma County Transportation Authority's active transportation plan. This plan seeks community input for improvements like crosswalks, bike lanes, and traffic calming measures. Additionally, the Bay Area is updating its bike plan, identifying barriers to cycling and prioritizing improvements. Hopkins encouraged community engagement in these processes and mentioned the availability of approximately \$5 million in community infrastructure funds for projects in Western Sonoma County.

Vicki Clewes inquired about the scope of the Sonoma County Transportation Authority's active transportation plan, specifically questioning if it included road improvements like paving for safety reasons. Supervisor Hopkins encouraged adding such concerns to the plan, emphasizing the importance of detailed comments for safety improvements.

Vesta Copestakes asked about the feasibility of installing a crosswalk from the Monte Rio park and ride to the Riverside of River Road and to Steelhead Beach. Hopkins advised adding this suggestion to the transportation plan and acknowledged the need for such a crossing for public safety, especially during summer. Vesta also brought up the tragic death of a young man on River Road, questioning if it could inspire a higher level of priority for safety improvements in the area. Hopkins confirmed ongoing discussions with Sonoma County Public Infrastructure about traffic calming in that area and expressed her concern about the potential for more fatalities.

Cynthia Strecker raised a concern about the lack of transportation options for those without cars or with disabilities. She highlighted the disparity in services between West County Community Services and Sebastopol, noting the limited number of drivers available for transportation assistance. Hopkins acknowledged the challenge and suggested that community infrastructure funds from the 2022-23

budgeted funds could potentially support such services. Tourism Impact Funds are also appropriate for this sort of project.

Lucy Hardcastle asked about the allocation of funds for sidewalk and crosswalk projects in downtown Forestville, specifically regarding the use of quarry mitigation funds versus county funds. Hopkins clarified that Forestville could apply for community infrastructure funds for additional projects and that the quarry mitigation funds should be used as originally intended.

The discussion also touched on the potential for matching funds for a skate park in Forestville, improvements to the Forestville Youth Park, and the development of a downtown square. Hopkins mentioned the formation of a committee to prioritize infrastructure projects and the growing interest in community spaces post-pandemic.

## 7. Presentation by Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) on Community Concerns

In the presentation by Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) at the Lower Russian River MAC Meeting, Melinda Rivera, working in local government affairs for PG&E, introduced the session. She mentioned her service territory includes Lake and Sonoma Counties. She was joined by Dave Canny, the regional vice president, who delivered the majority of the presentation. They were accompanied by David Wentworth, a member of the local leadership team for vegetation management in the Sonoma division, and Joe Hak, superintendent of electric field operations, who resides in West County.

The presentation began with Rivera highlighting the availability of PG&E representatives to answer questions post-meeting and the presence of detailed poster boards for attendees to review. Canny then took over, emphasizing PG&E's focus on safety and preparedness, and introduced the community wildfire safety program, addressing evolving wildfire threats. He mentioned PG&E's layered approach to protection, including undergrounding power lines, Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS), Enhanced Powerline Safety Settings (EPSS), and overhead hardening. Canny provided a detailed overview of the EPSS program, explaining its role in reducing wildfire risks by detecting faults faster and operating with less fault energy, thus reducing the chances of ignitions. He also discussed the installation of sectionalizing devices to manage the distribution system more effectively.

David Wentworth then discussed PG&E's vegetation management efforts, including tree trimming and removal to reduce wildfire risks. He explained the shift from a broad approach to a more targeted strategy, focusing on areas with high volumes of outages. The presentation included detailed statistics on tree trimming and felling activities in the Lower Russian River area, along with the process of vegetation management and community resources available for reporting safety concerns.

Canny returned to elaborate on the EPSS program, explaining its daily operational adjustments based on wildfire risk assessments. He also detailed the response process to unplanned outages, emphasizing the importance of quick response times and accurate estimated times of restoration.

The presentation concluded with Canny discussing customer resources available for energy resiliency, including portable battery programs, generator and battery rebate programs, and the Self-Generation Incentive Program (SGIP). He also highlighted partnerships and resources for personal preparedness and planning, encouraging attendees to utilize the PG&E report app for non-emergency conditions. Overall, the presentation focused on PG&E's efforts in wildfire risk mitigation, vegetation management, and customer support for energy resiliency, with an emphasis on safety and community engagement.

Councilmember Q & A included:

- **Residential vs. Non-Residential Vegetation Management:** There was an inquiry about the process of vegetation management for non-residential areas, with a specific example of trees being cleared on a property in Reno without proper notification to the Russian River Recreation and Park. The response highlighted the necessity of notification for all types of properties and suggested a follow-up for unresolved issues.
- **Notification Process:** The methods of notifying residents and agencies about vegetation management were discussed. It typically involves a knock at the door, a phone call, or a door hanger. The effectiveness of these methods in areas where residents are not always present was questioned, highlighting the need for more effective communication strategies.
- **Wood Hall and Fire Risk:** Concerns were raised about wood left on-site after vegetation management, which increases fire risk and obstructs defensible space. Suggestions included better coordination with firewood companies and local communities for wood removal.

- **Undergrounding vs. Insulating Wires:** The strategy of undergrounding power lines versus insulating them was a significant topic. The utility company's representative explained that undergrounding is more effective for wildfire risk reduction, though it is a long-term solution.
- **Impact of Vegetation Management on Local Communities:** The impact of vegetation management on local communities, including aesthetic considerations and the potential for environmental damage, was discussed. The importance of considering tree species and growth patterns in management decisions was emphasized.
- **Scotch Broom and Fire Risk:** A concern was raised about Scotch broom, an invasive plant, increasing fire risk in cleared areas under power lines. The utility company agreed to follow up on this issue.
- **Sectionalizing and Redundancy in Power Distribution:** Questions were asked about the utility company's plans to sectionalize power distribution to reduce outage impacts and the need for redundancy to prevent widespread outages from single incidents.
- **Local Contractors and Quality Standards:** There were queries about the percentage of contracts awarded to local contractors for vegetation management and the standards set for the quality of work, especially regarding tree species and growth patterns.
- **Financial and Operational Aspects of Undergrounding:** Questions were raised about the financial and operational aspects of undergrounding power lines, including the cost-benefit analysis compared to other risk mitigation strategies.

A member of the public asked if there is a percentage of contracts granted to local contractors to keep the money in the community with treeworkers who know the community and know the roads. The response was that Kingsboro Atlas, a Santa Rosa company has been doing some of their work as a first step. A second question was about who sets the standards regarding the work, particularly regarding the aesthetics.

Another member of the public asked about undergrounding - in terms of new construction vs. conversion and asked about the opportunity cost regarding undergrounding. The response was that the program is focused on converting from overhead to undergrounding.

## 8. Public Comments

There were no public comments on items not on the agenda.

## 9. Committee Reports

### A. Community Clean Up Ad Hoc, Report from Chair Lisa Nahmanson delivered by Vicki Clewes

Vicki provided a report highlighting the partnership with the Pride parade and Johnsons Beach post-parade party. She also mentioned that the MAC will have a booth at the Johnson's Beach event.

### B. Communications Ad Hoc

Betsy reported that the Communications Committee would love participation from MAC members who would like to do a 2 hour stint at the MAC table between 1- 5 PM. She noted how rewarding it has been for her, Joe, Vicki & Patty to have a presence at events to help community members learn about the MAC and what it does and how it can help.

## 10. Adjournment

Mike Nicholls moved to adjourn and the chair adjourned the meeting at 7:18 PM.