



THE CITY OF  
NOVATO  
CALIFORNIA

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**STAFF REPORT**

**MEETING**

**DATE:** May 31, 2011

**TO:** City Council

**FROM:** David Wallace, Community Development Director

**PRESENTER:** David Wallace, Community Development Director

**SUBJECT: CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF THE INITIAL VISION SCENARIO FOR THE BAY AREA-WIDE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES STRATEGY**

**REQUEST**

The City Council discussed the Initial Vision Scenario on May 3, 2011 and provided direction to staff for preparation of a letter of comment to ABAG. The Initial Vision Scenario (IVS) is also being discussed by a county-wide Ad Hoc group assembled to share information regarding this issue and potentially comment to ABAG. The City Council agreed to discuss the IVS further to provide direction to the Council member representing Novato on this Ad Hoc Group.

**BACKGROUND**

The Initial Vision Scenario is intended to implement compliance with AB 32 and SB 375, two pieces of State legislation focused on reductions in green house gas emissions. The comment letter to ABAG (attached) identified the interests and concerns of Novato related to the Initial Vision Scenario. Staff has also attached a white paper titled Potential Areas of Agreement for Marin County. This document was assembled by staff from another Marin jurisdiction for discussion by the county-wide Ad Hoc Group.

There are 17 points of potential agreement discussed in the white paper. Points 4, 5, 6, and 13 are similar to comments raised in Novato's letter to ABAG. Points 7, 8, 9 and 10 reflect general environmental benefits of the agricultural economy in Marin, Marin transportation programs that assist with GHG reductions and GHG reductions related to vehicle choices in Marin. These are all positive considerations.

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The City Council may wish to focus its discussion on the other points raised in the paper. Points 1 and 2 discuss the benefits of regional planning. Point 3 states that expected demographic changes in Marin may lead to increased demand for housing types other than single family. Point 11 calls for the regional pursuit of additional transportation funds. Point 12 advocates for changes to State review of Housing Elements to support the Sustainable Communities Strategy. Point 14 requests initiation of environmental review exemptions for projects that are in compliance with the final Sustainable Communities Strategy. Points 15 and 16 recommend that development be focused along Highway 101 and around SMART stations and requests revisions to the Initial Vision Scenario consistent with that land use pattern. Point 17 calls for preparation of a subsequent land use/transportation plan and that there be an opportunity to further revise the SCS at a later date based on that land use/transportation plan, with the possibility during that process of refining or redistributing the division of the growth projected for Marin.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Novato Comment Letter to ABAG
2. Potential Areas of Agreement Document



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City Manager

Michael S. Frank

May 16, 2011

Ezra Rapport  
Executive Director  
Association of Bay Area Governments  
P.O. Box 2050  
Oakland, CA 94604-2050

RE: Sustainable Communities Strategy: Initial Vision Scenario

Dear Mr. Rapport:

The Novato City Council considered the Initial Vision Scenario for the One Bay Area Sustainable Communities Strategy at their May 3 and 10, 2011 meetings. The City of Novato appreciates the opportunity to comment on this important planning effort. The City acknowledges the regional perspective of ABAG and MTC, but Novato is very concerned about the loss of local control that this planning effort represents. Future discussions regarding the initial Vision Scenario need, to the greatest extent feasible, accommodate local concerns and local planning authority. In response to the Initial Vision Scenario, Novato has the following additional comments:

- 1) The housing growth projection for Novato of 778 units from 2010 to 2035, though high, is a realistic number based on the location of the city, the suburban character of the town, the resource base of sites available, Novato's voter adopted Urban Growth Boundary, and the constraints of water, sewer, school funding and the current jobs/housing balance.
- 2) Furthermore, the projected housing growth rate for Novato is consistent with the 3% growth that occurred between 1980 and 2000. After 2000, the housing growth rate in Novato was artificially increased by the construction of housing in Hamilton Airbase, a unique circumstance that no longer exists, as the Hamilton housing area is built out.
- 3) The factors and constraints discussed above should be considered in developing alternative vision scenarios, rather than an arbitrary distribution of a percentage of growth to each jurisdiction or around transit stations.
- 4) The projected employment numbers for Novato are unrealistic given the economic conditions, the small amount of commercially zoned land in Novato, the limited availability of vacant commercial land and the high vacancy rate of retail and commercial buildings in the City.

- 5) If the housing units currently designated for the San Quentin area must be redistributed, those numbers should be redistributed in the County, as that is where they are currently located, and not to Marin cities.
- 6) Alternative scenarios that project higher levels of job growth in PDA's and GOA's should be developed, as is stated will occur in the Initial Vision Scenario. These scenarios should at a minimum project 70% of the development in PDA's and GOA's and 30% in the non-designated areas. Novato is not a PDA or a GOA, nor is it geographically situated to be a higher growth area. If reallocation of growth projections for Marin occurs, any revised projections should be based on the slower growth trends in Novato enumerated above, and Novato's location away from the center of the County and the largest employment centers.
- 7) The city would like to initiate discussion of the manner in which housing units in the sphere of influence are allocated between the City and the county. Previously that split has allocated 75% of the units to the cities and 25% to the County; Novato believes the allocation should be 50%/50%.

On behalf of the Novato City Council, thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the process.

Sincerely,



✓ David Wallace  
Community Development Director

Cc: City Council  
City Manager  
Planning Commission  
City Attorney  
TAM

**Sustainable Community Strategy Initial Vision Scenario  
Potential Areas of Agreement for Marin County**

1. Marin County endorses the value of regional planning with the intent to affect climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions (All Marin jurisdictions have already supported climate action on their own.
2. Marin County acknowledges the need to effectively coordinate jobs, housing and transportation investments that maintain a dynamic and growing regional economy that benefits everyone in the Bay Area.
3. Marin County recognizes the coming demographic changes to the region (particularly household formation trends and an aging population) and how that will impact housing needs and the demand for housing types other than traditional low density, detached single family development.
4. The jobs numbers are inflated and need to be reexamined by ABAG staff. The SCS job forecast for Marin is greater than the job growth rate we have experienced between 1995 and 2010. There are virtually no vacant commercially zoned sites remaining in Marin, and there is currently a vacancy rate in excess of 20% for office space.
5. Regarding overall growth in jobs and housing, the current vacancy rates in Marin indicate that some time will be needed to allow economic recovery sufficient to support further growth. ABAG is encouraged to modify the early year expectations of housing and job growth reflecting that economic recovery is still occurring.
6. The total projected households for Marin is a reasonable proportion of the growth being planned for the Bay Area.
7. Marin has designated 84% of the total county area as preserved open space, the home of federal, state, and local parks and recreational areas and facilities. Marin's role in providing recreational space for the Bay Area should be taken into consideration in the allocation of regional transportation funds. There is a need for funding for roads, transit, and bike/ped facilities to support these Bay Area-wide recreational attractions. Funding is critical to maintain and grow our recreational economy.
8. As one of the Bay Area's top agricultural counties, Marin's economic vitality is dependent on sustaining its farm-to-market economy through the provision of goods movement corridors and appropriate land use development that protects its agricultural lands. Land use/transportation planning in Marin must include recognition of and provisions for protecting our agricultural contributions to the region.
9. Since the basis for the proposed density increases is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles, Marin should be given credit for what will certainly be a significantly higher proportion of electric vehicle ownership, powered by Marin Clean Energy.
10. Greenhouse gas emissions are being reduced through innovative programs such as Marin's Safe Routes to School program and Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program. Credit should be given to the affect these programs have and will continue

to have on reducing greenhouse gases, through effective facilities and programs that support behavioral changes.

11. The desired increases in density in already developed areas is dependent upon not only sustaining transit funding, but successfully addressing the historical needs for additional funding of transit and alternative modes of transportation. Both efficiencies in existing systems along with additional revenues must be pursued regionally to achieve climate goals along with maintaining a reasonable quality of life.
12. The Housing Element law should be amended to give deference to compliance with the adopted SCS in HCD's evaluation of housing elements.
13. State HCD needs to be more flexible in its administrative policies related to the counting of housing units towards local needs, particularly housing for seniors and mixed use redevelopment of underutilized sites.
14. ABAG, MTC, BCDC and BAAQMD need to coordinate their policies to support the implementation of the SCS, and not create impediments. CEQA exemptions are needed for development consistent with the adopted SCS.
15. Development in Marin should be focused along the Highway 101 corridor and around SMART stations. Communities without Highway 101 frontage or SMART stations should encourage nodal mixed use development served by transit.
16. ABAG and MTC staff should be requested to prepare an SCS Detailed Scenario based upon the land use/transportation framework described above working with the county's planning directors.
17. A subsequent land use/transportation plan should ideally be developed over time to refine and detail the development framework described above, with appropriate funding assigned to such an effort. This planning should include design guidelines to assure that future development reduces vehicular trips, maximizes the use of convenient transit and retains community character. This countywide planning process must include extensive community input. There should be an opportunity at the completion of the land use/transportation plan to revisit and revise the adopted SCS Scenario for Marin to refine the division of Marin's portion of the Bay Area's planned growth.