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CP&DR News Briefs August 16, 2022: Los Gatos Housing Revolt; Fracking Moratorium; Livermore Housing Suit; and More

by McKenzie Locke on Aug 16, 2022

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Los Gatos Group Pushes for Ballot Referendum to Rescind General Plan Update

Despite a statewide housing crisis, a group of Los Gatos residents is launching a ballot-box challenge (<https://www.mercurynews.com/2022/08/09/los-gatos-residents-attempt-repeal-of-2040-general-plan/>) to the town's 2040 General Plan for planning for too many housing units. The Los Gatos Community Alliance filed a referendum against the plan that was -- by a small margin -- approved by the town council in June. The residents are also claiming that town officials should outline more incentives for constructing affordable housing and should draft a fiscal impact analysis. While Los Gatos town planners chose to concentrate new housing in high-density neighborhoods instead of bringing denser development to single-family communities, the alliance believes that more apartment complexes will negatively impact the "small town atmosphere" and aesthetics of Los Gatos. If the group gathers 2,200 signatures, the Town Council would be forced to either place the referendum on an upcoming ballot or rescind the General Plan of its own volition.

State, Feds Agree to Halt Issuance of Fracking Permits

California and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management have reached (<https://www.mercurynews.com/2022/08/02/settlement-blocks-new-federal-fracking-leases-in-california/>) a settlement that will temporarily block new fracking leases on federal land. If approved in court, the federal government will not be able to lease over 2,500 square miles of Central Valley land containing oil and gas drilling spots until it conducts an analysis of the environmental dangers of fracking. The settlement comes after environmental groups and California sued a Trump administration extension of an Obama-era plan to lease land for extraction. The move prompts widespread celebration for reducing water pollution, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, land extraction, and more, though closing extractive sources without implementing more renewable and efficient energy systems may induce worries about energy cost increases and job losses.

Attorney General Weighs in on Livermore Housing Dispute

Attorney General Rob Bonta is providing (<https://www.sfchronicle.com/eastbay/article/Why-California-s-attorney-general-weighed-into-17364584.php>) significant backup to Livermore, whose plan for a 130-unit affordable housing development in the city's downtown area is facing backlash from Save Livermore Downtown. Livermore is hoping to dismiss or expedite the residential group's appeal filed in attempt to stop construction on the complex, which Save Livermore Downtown claims will "degrade" the city center and increase congestion. Bonta filed a court brief in support of the city, stating that Save Livermore Downtown is unfairly relying on CEQA by doing so not out of concern for environmental burdens but in order to prevent a new development that would provide housing for over one hundred low-income families.

Newsom Pushes Smaller Version of Sacramento Delta Water Tunnel Plan

In response to California's severe drought, Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration has introduced (<https://www.montereyherald.com/2022/07/27/california-water-new-16-billion-delta-tunnel-plan-released-by-newsom-administration/>) a scaled-down version of Gov. Jerry Brown's Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley Delta tunnel plan. Newsom's plan includes one 45-mile long, 39-foot high tunnel under wetlands and marshes set to break ground by 2029 instead of the previously-proposed two tunnel approach. State officials hope that their underground plan to pump water from the Sacramento River to the State Water Project will steer clear of pumping limits put in place to protect wildlife. The plan finds support from several significant water districts, including Santa Clara and Los Angeles, who are concerned about the potential impacts of an earthquake and climate change on water flow. Opponents, composed of environmental groups and Delta residents, do not want to see the state and big agriculture extract large sums of water from the Delta.

CP&DR Coverage: San Francisco Housing Process Under Scrutiny

The Newsom administration has taken unprecedented step of initiating (</articles/hcd-review-san-franciscos-housing-processes>) a review of the City and County of San Francisco's housing processes – the most aggressive move so far by a state government that is increasingly pressuring cities around the state to plan for approve more housing. HCD's review will be undertaken in collaboration with UC Berkeley's Institute for Urban and Regional Development – part of Berkeley's College of Environment Design, which also contains the Department of City and Regional Planning. HCD's move is likely to increase tensions between the state, which is promoting increasing both affordable and market-rate housing supply, and housing advocates in San Francisco, who believe that the private market cannot solve California's housing affordability crisis and favor only new deed-restricted units.

Quick Hits & Updates

Berkeley voters will make their voice heard on a \$650 million bond measure (<https://www.berkeleyside.org/2022/08/04/berkeley-vacancy-tax-2022-election-bond>) that would pay for infrastructure and affordable housing initiatives on the November ballot. The measure would also place a tax on vacant houses and apartments.

A Modesto developer's lawsuit (<https://www.modbee.com/news/local/article264103791.html>) against the city whose downtown reconstruction it helped build came with a \$776,000 price tag for the city to settle. The developer, Civic Partners, claims that Modesto's Redevelopment Successor Agency overcharged for a lease payment.

A new study (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0966692322000473>) evaluates the impacts of bus rapid transit systems on nationwide property values and suggests the positive potential of BRT ridership improvement. The results included a mix of appreciation, depreciation, and no change data, with multi-family properties seeing more appreciation and single-family properties seeing depreciation.

The Downtown San Francisco Partnership's newly-released Public Realm Action Plan (<https://www.downtownsf.org/public-realm-action-plan/>) includes six defined initiatives to make the

area that is currently auto-centric more pedestrian-friendly, vibrant, and green. The plan includes (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-02/a-rescue-plan-for-san-francisco-s-half-empty-downtown>) investments in public art, accessibility, and nature.

Watsonville's November ballot will include (<https://santacruzlocal.org/2022/08/05/watsonville-ballot-measures-tackle-development-farm-land/>) two measures that will face off to determine the future of the city's housing, retail, and green spaces. With approaching expiration dates on agricultural land boundaries, Measure U could extend farmland protections until 2040, while the "counter measure" would grant officials the opportunity to decide which areas should be developed and how.

Long Beach officials have released (<https://lbpost.com/news/new-city-report-details-history-of-long-beach-housing-discrimination>) the findings of a new study that explains the city's extensive history of housing discrimination. The report also includes an explanation of the exclusionary policies that intentionally prompted segregation and disparate access to resources for white residents and residents of color.

A recent PPIC survey investigates (<https://www.ppic.org/publication/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-the-environment-july-2022/>) Californians' opinion of the environmental crisis and illuminates drought as the primary concern for most residents, with wildfires and climate change following. Many surveyed also voiced that climate change is not a distant worry but an existing harsh reality that severely impacts quality of life and the economy.

Rising housing values statewide have created (<https://www.ppic.org/blog/californias-high-housing-costs-have-created-a-million-house-rich-millionaires/>) a new, very large group of California residents, up to 1.2 million, who have become millionaires due to the appreciation of their homes. These millionaires, according to data from the PPIC, are typically older, white or Asian, have paid off their mortgages, and are long-time homeowners.

Increased access to electric bikes and ride sharing programs may soon come to Stockton after the city's Mobility Collective introduced (<https://www.recordnet.com/story/business/transportation/2022/07/20/electric-bike-and-car-sharing-programs-preparing-launch-stockton/7707301001/>) its plan to improve transit options for low-income residents. The program is funded by a \$7.4 million state grant from the Sustainable Transportation Equity Project.

What used to be San Geronimo Golf Course is in the process (<https://www.mercurynews.com/2022/07/11/this-old-golf-course-is-now-a-nature-preserve-2/>) of becoming a nature preserve intended to propel climate and environmental health and resilience. The Trust for Public Land purchased the Marin County space and intends to transform it into the San Geronimo Commons with uncovered creeks and habitats and new hiking and biking trails.

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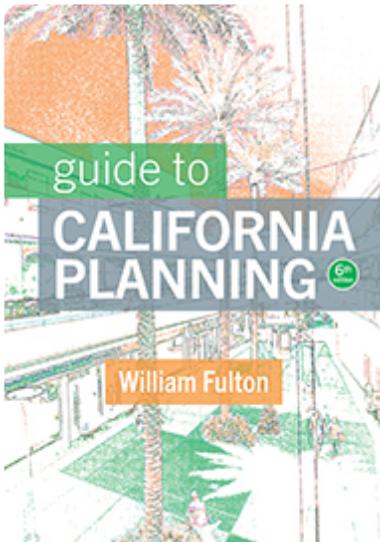
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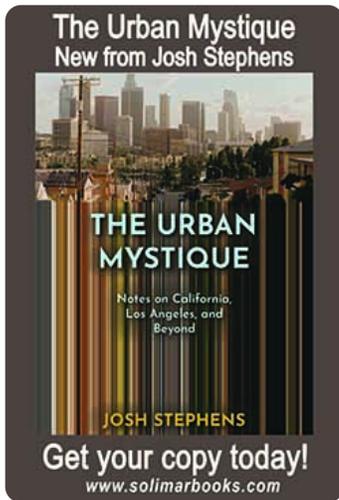
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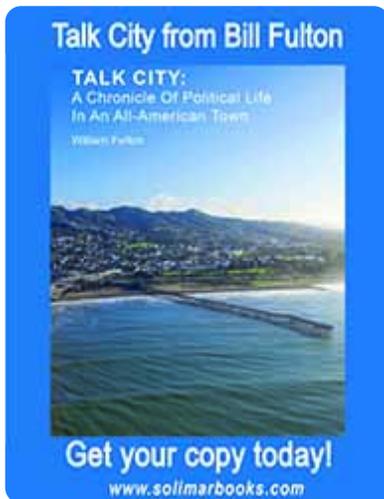
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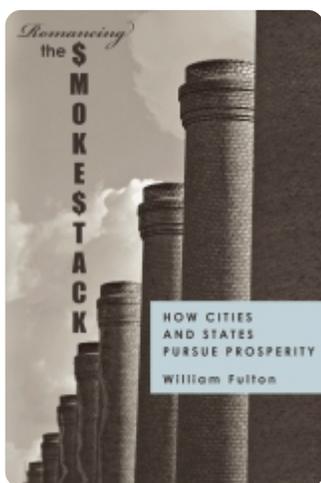
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