

Adequacy of Water Supply

Few things are more vital to human existence than water. We rely upon a daily supply of water for all of life's important functions. This reliance is so vital that one of the cornerstone tests of whether a government is properly serving its citizens is whether the government guarantees a supply of clean and safe water. Yet excess growth now proposed for Marin in the 2005 CWP Update threatens our supply of water.

A general plan amendment, such as the 2005 CWP Update, is supposed to be supported by appropriate findings in an EIR. The DEIR that was distributed with the 2005 CWP Update analyzes the anticipated affects of the 2005 CWP Update on Marin County's water supply. When you read the DEIR, you don't see a pretty picture when it comes to the expected demand for water from the new development expected under the 2005 CWP Update. Our County already engages in a delicate annual juggling act to satisfy the existing water demand. When you take a good look at it, ours is a fragile water supply with sources consisting of several mountain reservoirs, imported water from Sonoma County and a minor amount from groundwater aquifers. The County's juggling act will become more difficult with the additional the commercial and home construction allowed under current zoning laws. However, it appears from the pages of the DEIR itself that the juggling act would certainly fail if the development plans under the 2005 CWP are adopted. The current water supply is about 47,500 acre feet per year. Within the DEIR, the supply is projected to increase merely to about 48,700 AFY by the year 2030, so constrained is Marin County's water supply by its geographic boundaries. Obviously, we have no Great Lakes, Mississippi River or even over-utilized Colorado River to tap into. So a mere 2.5% projected increase in Marin's water supply is supposed to somehow satisfy the approximately 18% increase in demand by the year 2030 as projected by water suppliers, a demand that will be fostered by the build-out under the 2005 CWP Update now before the Planning Commission. This projected problem is on top of the existing problems that are illustrated by the following paraphrased passage from the DEIR:

Water supplies are currently strained: Marin Municipal Water District and North Marin Water District in Novato have current supply deficits. Bolinas Community PUD and Dillon Beach's Coast Springs Water System have connection moratoria; West Marin, Bolinas and several other water suppliers have summer peaking problems.

I probably don't have to tell you that most of the water service areas experience water supply deficits during extreme droughts.

The DEIR states that these problems exist and are projected to get worse. I note that these observations are made not knowing what effects climate change may have on our water supply or demand—positive or negative.

The DEIR is organized to describe what anticipated affects or “impacts” the 2005 CWP Update will have on various aspects of our environment. Under California law, the DEIR must state which of the impacts are expected to be “significant” in the negative sense of the word. For any significant impacts, the DEIR must state which impacts can be reduced or “mitigated” to an insignificant level by some action of the government, property owner or private developer. Mitigation measures would include increased water conservation and increased water storage capability.

Using criteria required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the DEIR found that the planned build-out under the 2005 CWP update would have 6 significant negative impacts on the Marin water supply. The DEIR stated that 5 of the 6 of these negative impacts could not be reduced or mitigated to a less-than-significant level. Even after the implementation of all feasible mitigation measures, each of these 5 of 6 identified environmental impacts “would remain a significant unavoidable project and cumulative impact.”

1. Adequacy of water supply during a normal year. With planned build-out under the 2005 CWP Update, water supplies would be insufficient to serve some of the unincorporated and incorporated areas in normal rain years.
2. Adequacy of water supply during a drought and multi-drought years.
3. Impact to groundwater supply. Land uses and development consistent with the 2005 CWP Update would result in increased rural demand for groundwater supply. Due to lack of comprehensive information regarding the County’s groundwater resources, it is uncertain if groundwater supplies would be sufficient to meet rural water demands, especially in drought.
4. Interference with or degradation of water supply. Land uses and development consistent with the 2005 CWP Update would increase water demands and result in interference with and/or degradation of water supply quality.
5. Secondary impacts. Implementation of the 2005 CWP Update would result in the building of new homes and businesses. The consequent increase in water demand would lead to alteration of streams and creeks in Marin County with subsequent effects on the habitat of fish, frogs and other aquatic life.

Only 1 of the 6 significant environmental impacts on our water supply was thought to be reducible to a less-than-significant level: the impact due to the construction of new or expanded water supply facilities. It was thought by the drafters of DEIR that the policies in the 2005 CWP Update would promote additional water conservation, reduction of water facility waste streams, less reliance on dams, etc. and that these would balance out the negative affects of facility construction. However, the DEIR noted that construction of these facilities could result in environmental physical effects on the environment including erosion, noise and dust and that such site-specific impacts cannot be determined until such time that they are proposed and undergo environmental review.

I and, I believe, many other people support the mitigation measures mentioned in the DEIR. Improved water conservation, among these measures, is paramount even without

the pressure of additional development. The construction of a desalination plant would help as well, though the projected additional supply from this facility would amount to only 1-2% of Marin's water needs and, as a recent article in the Marin IJ pointed out, this additional supply would come with a disproportionately high price tag to be born by consumers.

I would like to leave the Commission with a single over-arching thought as it considers the impact of the build-out under the 2005 CWP Update on the water supply and other environmental aspects of our County. Please consider why the people of this County should accept a rate of growth just because developable land appears on a planner's map and because ABAG statisticians recommend that Marin County accept a share of the projected overall job and population growth projected for the Bay Area. There is a strong indication that our County doesn't want its job or population growth dictated by an outside party. I believe that most people living in this County cherish its semi-rural feeling and that they would not look favorably upon extraordinary measures to add water supply capacity that would encourage a transition to an urbanized environment.

Thank you.