



**Joint Meeting of the Lower Russian River and Sonoma Coast Municipal Advisory Councils**

**AGENDA**

**Regular Meeting**

**January 09, 2025 05:30 PM**

**Hybrid Meeting**

**Guerneville School Community Room, 14630 Armstrong Woods Road**

**Second Location: Del Mar Center, 40600 Leeward Road, The Sea Ranch**

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/lrrmac>

<https://sonomacounty.zoom.us/j/92246743570?pwd=bt3hRqtie276AJXobgP2RikxcZAeG5.1>

Chair & Rio Nido Representative: Pip Marquez de la Plata • Vice Chair & Cazadero / Duncan Mills Representative: Mike Nicholls • Guerneville Representative: Joe Rogoff • Guerneville Representative: Spencer R. Scott • Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke • Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative: Cynthia Strecker • Hacienda Representative: Vicki Clewes • Forestville Representative: Lonnie Lazar • Forestville Representative: Thai Hilton • Beth Bruzzone, CMAC Chair • Scott Foster, CMAC Vice Chair • Brian Leubitz, CMAC • Caroline Madden, CMAC • Jill Lippitt, CMAC • Scott Nevin, CMAC • Ginny Nicholls, CMAC

**REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS**

The Lower Russian River Municipal Advisory Council will make reasonable accommodations for persons having special needs due to disabilities. Please contact the Fifth District Field Representative at 707-565-1219 during regular business hours at least 48 hours prior to the meeting to ensure necessary accommodations are made.

**1. Call to Order, River MAC Chair Pip Marquez de la Plata**

**Discussion**

- A. Message from the Spanish language interpreter
- B. Pledge of Allegiance
- C. Roll Call, River MAC
- D. Roll Call, Coast MAC

**2. Moment of Silence in Honor of President Jimmy Carter**

**Discussion**

The Council will observe a moment of silence to honor the life and legacy of President Jimmy Carter. President Carter's lifelong commitment to public service, humanitarian efforts, and

leadership continues to inspire communities across the nation. This observance reflects our respect and gratitude for his contributions to the country and the world.

**3. Approval of the Agenda, Chair Pip Marquez de la Plata**

Discussion  Possible Action

**4. Statement of Conflict of Interest**

Discussion

This is the time for the Chair, Vice Chair and Council Members to indicate any statements of conflict of interest for any item listed on this agenda.

**5. Councilmember Comment & Introductions**

Discussion

This is an opportunity for new and returning Councilmembers to provide a brief introduction. Additional comments are restricted to matters within the Board's jurisdiction. Due to Brown Act regulations, this is not a time for discussion of any item, however a brief dialogue about considering an item for a future agenda is permitted during this time.

**6. Public Comment on Matters not listed on the Agenda**

Discussion

Comments are restricted to matters within the Lower Russian River MAC's jurisdiction. Please be brief and limit spoken comments to two minutes. While Councilmembers may not respond to or discuss comments except to express interest in agendizing the topic for a future meeting, staff can briefly address or follow up after the meeting.

**7. County Update**

Discussion

Updates from Supervisor Hopkins and / or Staff

**8. Open Meetings, Transparency & Public Input: The Brown Act**

Discussion

This session will provide an in-depth overview of the Ralph M. Brown Act, emphasizing its role in ensuring transparency and public participation in local government meetings. Key topics will include open meeting requirements, teleconferencing rules, public access, and best practices for compliance. Attendees will gain insights into avoiding common pitfalls and fostering trust through adherence to open government principles. This presentation is designed for legislative body members, staff, and the public to enhance understanding of the Act's provisions and their practical implications.

**9. Selection of 2025 River MAC Chair and Vice Chair**

Discussion  Possible Action

A. Nomination and Selection of Chair

B. Nomination and Selection of Vice Chair

**10. Ad Hoc Committees and Working Groups**

Discussion    Possible Action

This is an opportunity to discuss the land use advisory role of the MAC in addition to receiving input regarding potential other Ad Hoc Committees and / or working groups.

**11. Consent Agenda - Lower Russian River MAC**

Discussion    Possible Action

**12. Correspondence (information only)**

Bay Area high school students are invited to participate in the 3rd annual "Step Into the Light" Youth-Arts Competition, honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy. The competition, organized by the Cow Palace, includes categories for essays, poetry, fine art, photography, sculpture, mixed media, and video. Grand Prize winners will receive Apple AirPods Max, and Best of Show winners in each category will be awarded \$300. Submissions are due by 6 PM on January 24, 2025.

more information: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BoCh2mJbxbZtq73VOBuj00k8o1hdp76L/view>

**13. Adjournment**



Lower Russian River Municipal Advisory Council  
Minutes

Regular Meeting

December 12, 2024 05:30 PM

Guerneville School Community Room, 14630 Armstrong Woods Road Guerneville, CA 95466

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/lrrmac>

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 pm by Vice Chair & Cazadero / Duncan Mills Representative: Mike Nicholls.

Chair Pip Marquez de la Plata arrived at 5:32 PM

**A. Announcement from Spanish Interpreter**

The interpreter provided instructions for attendees to listen to the meeting in Spanish.

**B. Pledge of Allegiance**

Led by Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative: Cynthia Strecker

**C. Roll Call**

Present: Chair & Rio Nido Representative: Pip Marquez de la Plata, Vice Chair & Cazadero / Duncan Mills Representative: Mike Nicholls, Guerneville Representative: Joe Rogoff, Guerneville Representative: Spencer R. Scott, Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke, Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative: Cynthia Strecker, Hacienda Representative: Vicki Clewes, Forestville Representative: Lonnie Lazar, Forestville Representative: Thai Hilton

Staff Present: Lonnie Lazar, Thai Hilton, and Betsy Van Dyke arrived at 5:35 PM

**2. Approval of Agenda** Monte Rio / Villa Grande Representative: Cynthia Strecker motioned to approve. Hacienda Representative: Vicki Clewes seconded the motion.

The motion passed with the following vote:

  9   In Favor     0   Opposed  
   Abstained      Absent      Recused

**3. Statement of Conflict of Interest**

**4. Consent Agenda**

A. October 10, 2024 regular meeting minutes

the November minutes were approved with a correction to a typo: Aluma should read City of Petaluma.

Guerneville South / Pocket Canyon Representative: Betsy Van Dyke motioned to approve.  
Guerneville Representative: Spencer R. Scott seconded the motion.

The motion failed with the following vote:

**In Favor**    **Opposed**  
 **Abstained**    **Absent**    **Recused**

**5. Councilmember comment on matters not listed on the agenda**

Councilmember Vicki Clewes expressed gratitude to Cynthia and Mike, acknowledging their contributions during her first term. She noted that this might be their last meeting and hoped to see them at future events.

Councilmember Mike Nicholls commented on the progress at George's Hideaway. He observed that a green fence now obscures the property, replacing the chain-link wire that had been there for the past year. He mentioned that some demolition work appears to have started. While he had previously raised concerns about the project timeline, he shared that he had received an update that, weather permitting, efforts would be made to complete the project by June 1st, though this remains dependent on weather conditions.

Councilmember Joe Rogoff reiterated that the plaza project has been funded and approved. He stated that it is moving into the design phase and that options will eventually be presented to the community. He also mentioned an additional funded project that will be discussed later.

**6. Public Comments**

**7. County Updates**

A. Supervisor Hopkins

Supervisor Lynda Hopkins provided an update on recent developments and initiatives in the county. Supervisor Hopkins began by sharing news of the Board of Supervisors' approval of several significant projects during their recent meeting, where they acted as the Board of Directors for the Open Space District. Among these projects was a \$2 million park in downtown Guerneville, which will feature amenities such as a dog park, a children's playfield, trails, and creek restoration. Initially recommended for partial funding of \$750,000, the project received full funding through unanimous board support, which included \$1.5 million from Open Space District funds and \$500,000 from district-specific allocations. Supervisor Hopkins noted that the park's design was enriched by input from students at Guerneville Elementary School, who worked closely with Praxis architects to explore design possibilities and present their concepts.

Supervisor Hopkins also highlighted other approved projects, including a community plaza in downtown Occidental and the new Graton Town Square. These projects demonstrate a concerted effort to enhance community and recreational spaces throughout West County.

She then provided an update on the George's Hideaway project, which was officially transferred to Burbank Housing on December 4. Construction is now underway, and all necessary permits and approvals were secured prior to the property transfer. Supervisor Hopkins emphasized that the project remains on track for a fall 2025 occupancy.

Supervisor Hopkins mentioned two community engagement initiatives currently underway.

The county is conducting a Hazard Mitigation Plan update and has made flyers with QR code surveys available for public input on risk reduction strategies. Additionally, Sonoma State University is leading a study on community-oriented policing, inviting input from residents in unincorporated Sonoma County about their interactions with the Sheriff's Office.

Supervisor Hopkins also expressed concern about a scheduling conflict with a concurrent meeting at Forestville School regarding the unification study for West County schools. While this issue is not directly under county jurisdiction, she highlighted its significance and indicated that there are there are plans to facilitate additional community meetings to ensure broader participation and engagement. This issue has the potential to bring significant changes to the area and warrants continued attention.

Turning to emergency management, Supervisor Hopkins reported on the county's response to recent flooding. In collaboration with the Department of Emergency Management, the CEO's office, and COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster), \$10,000 in emergency financial aid was distributed in the form of gift cards, with another \$20,000 in aid planned. This assistance reached individuals who were otherwise ineligible for Red Cross support, providing critical relief to affected residents, particularly those displaced from flooded trailers.

Supervisor Hopkins presented Gold Resolutions honoring the exceptional leadership and dedication of retiring founding River MAC Representatives Mike Nicholls and Cynthia Strecker. She credited them with establishing the MAC as a vital forum for addressing local issues and elevating its importance within county governance. Mike, who served as the inaugural chair, was recognized for implementing a model inspired by Mendocino County's advisory council framework. Supervisor Hopkins praised both Cynthia and Mike for their compassion, optimism, and unwavering commitment to the community, noting the lasting impact of their contributions. She expressed deep gratitude for their service and emphasized how much they will be missed in their leadership roles.

#### B. Staff - Update regarding compostable plastic processing

Field Representative Debbie Ramirez provided an update on a question raised last month by Lonnie Lazar regarding the feasibility of recycling compostable plastics in the community. After conducting research, she explained that it is currently not possible to recycle compostable plastics due to the absence of processors equipped to handle them, along with other contributing factors. Debbie invited anyone interested in further discussion to reach out to her and encouraged attendees to review the report for more information.

#### 8. **Presentation from Permit Sonoma regarding parcel zoning updates based on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) recently updated Special Flood Hazard Area maps.**

Director Scott Orr opened the discussion, introducing Deputy Director of Engineering and Construction Nathan Quarles and planner Azine Spalding. Azine Spalding, as the assigned planner for this project, led the presentation. Mr. Quarles provided technical expertise on flood-related matters. Director Orr highlighted his role in addressing overarching flood mapping and zoning issues.

The goal of the meeting was to provide an overview of FEMA's updated Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) maps, explain the rationale behind the updates, and discuss the potential impacts.

Before handing the floor to Ms. Spalding, Director Orr reassured attendees that existing flood insurance coverage would remain intact, and individuals affected by flooding would be eligible

to rebuild under FEMA guidelines. He emphasized the county's commitment to protecting residents and businesses from potential flood hazards.

#### **Presentation by Azine Spalding:**

Ms. Spalding began with a foundational overview of key terminology and concepts that would be referenced throughout the discussion:

- **FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency):** Responsible for creating disaster maps, providing flood insurance, and managing federal disaster response.
- **NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program):** A federal program offering flood insurance to property owners in participating communities.
- **Regulatory Floodway:** The channel of a river or waterway, along with surrounding areas, reserved to discharge the base flood without significantly increasing water surface elevation.
- **Floodplain:** Any land area susceptible to flooding. FEMA's mapped floodplain corresponds to the county's Floodplain Combining District (F2).

#### **Why Are These Changes Being Made?**

Ms. Spalding explained that the lower Russian River area had not been mapped or studied in over 30 years. Advances in technology now allow for more accurate mapping. FEMA's updated maps incorporate data from climate science, waterway studies, local surveys, and land-use development information.

#### **Who Is Affected?**

Areas of concern include waterways, population-dense areas along the Russian River, flood-prone regions like wetlands, and channels. Affected property owners were notified via USPS, with notices sent to properties within 300 feet of impacted parcels. Public notices were also posted in key areas.

#### **Key Changes to County Policy:**

Ms. Spalding highlighted the following changes:

- The county implements FEMA maps through zoning adjustments, revising F1 (floodway) and F2 (floodplain) designations.
- Properties in F1 or F2 are subject to FEMA regulations as enforced through county zoning and building codes.
- Structures in F1 areas face restrictions on new construction, with exceptions for repairs, septic improvements, and elevating structures above flood levels.
- New buildings in F2 areas must comply with Chapter 7B of county code, which requires elevation above base flood elevation.

#### **Timeline of Updates:**

Ms. Spalding reviewed the timeline for FEMA map updates:

- **October 2022:** FEMA released preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for public review.

- **June 22 & 29, 2023:** Public notice of preliminary maps was published in the *Press Democrat*.
- **June 29 – September 27, 2023:** A 90-day appeal period allowed residents, businesses, and the county to contest flood risk data.
- **July 31, 2024:** Final maps were published.

### **Examples of Changes:**

Ms. Spalding presented examples of changes to floodway and floodplain boundaries using an interactive online map. She reviewed affected areas such as Guerneville, Monte Rio, and Rio Nido. The maps use color coding for clarity: current boundaries are shown in orange, and proposed changes in blue. Attendees were encouraged to explore these tools for a better understanding of the changes.

### **Implications of Inaction:**

Ms. Spalding emphasized the significant consequences if the county does not adopt FEMA's updated maps and regulations:

- Property owners would lose access to NFIP policies.
- Federal grants, loans, and disaster assistance would become unavailable.
- Federal mortgage insurance for affected properties would be disallowed.
- Community programs, such as the county's Flood Elevation Mitigation Program, would be discontinued, halting critical flood improvement projects.

### **Next Steps:**

Permit Sonoma will continue implementing FEMA maps and rezoning to ensure compliance with NFIP requirements. Ms. Spalding noted that the county is exploring collaboration with FEMA to refine mapping accuracy. Final rezoning decisions will be presented to the Board of Supervisors in January 2025.

### **Resources and Accessibility:**

Ms. Spalding concluded her presentation by directing attendees to a list of hyperlinks for interactive mapping tools, FEMA floodplain comparison maps, and FAQs. These resources will be included in the meeting minutes and made accessible online. Attendees were encouraged to use these tools for further information.

### **Interactive Map Demonstration and Clarifications**

Azine Spalding introduced the functionality of the interactive flood map, emphasizing that this is the first tool of its kind being rolled out. She explained that the map works well on a computer but is not yet compatible with smartphones. On mobile devices, users will see all the map layers but will not be able to utilize the comparison slider to view changes dynamically. She demonstrated the slider, which allows users to compare current flood areas with proposed changes by moving the slider back and forth to visualize differences.

Ms. Spalding used Johnson's Beach as an example, showing how the darker orange zones represented the current regulatory floodway and the lighter orange zones represented the floodplain. She demonstrated how the proposed changes would expand or contract these zones, affecting certain properties while removing others from the flood zones.



## Q&A with Council and Panelists

After concluding the presentation, Ms. Spalding opened the floor for questions, first addressing council members.

- **FEMA's Role in Map Construction:** Ms. Spalding clarified that the maps are developed at the federal level using FEMA's methodologies. FEMA does not incorporate local expertise during its initial mapping process. However, local jurisdictions can propose amendments through Letters of Map Revision (LOMR), which involve conducting additional studies and submitting findings to FEMA for review and potential adjustments.
  
- **Historical Context of Sonoma County's Flood Zones:**  
Director Scott Orr provided background, noting that Sonoma County's flood zones were first established in 1941. Unlike many jurisdictions that automatically adopt FEMA updates, Sonoma's process involves Planning Commission review with every update. Given the age of the original flood zones, the county recognizes the need to reevaluate whether the codes and restrictions still align with modern development needs. He gave the example of the 50% assessed value restriction, which may no longer be practical given the rising costs of construction and development.
  
- **Local Study Examples:**  
Deputy Director Nathan Quarles explained the process of conducting localized studies, known as Letters of Map Revision (LOMR), to address discrepancies or inaccuracies in FEMA's maps. He cited the Todd Creek study as an example, where the county identified errors in FEMA's mapping. A contracted local firm re-studied the area, leading to proposed corrections currently under final review by FEMA. Quarles estimated the cost of similar studies for other areas to range between \$100,000 and \$250,000, depending on scope.
  
- **20% Threshold Clarification:**  
A council member asked about the 20% repair threshold for structures in flood zones. Ms. Spalding clarified that this refers to specific county code provisions allowing limited repairs or improvements to legal non-conforming structures (those that predate current zoning regulations). She emphasized that the county's priority is ensuring property owners can rebuild after disasters, whether caused by flooding, fire, or landslides.
  
- **Impact of Elevation Programs:**  
Ms. Spalding highlighted the county's Flood Elevation Program, which helps mitigate risks by elevating structures above base flood elevations. The intent is to reduce damage while maintaining the natural flow of floodwaters to prevent displacement to neighboring properties.

## Public Comment and Additional Questions

The meeting transitioned to public comment, with attendees directed to the podium for their questions.

1. **Appealing FEMA Findings:** A resident inquired whether the county had previously appealed FEMA's findings.

2. **Diminution of Property Value:** Another resident asked who would compensate for the potential reduction in property values due to rezoning.
3. **Rebuilding After Disaster:** A question arose regarding the process if more than 50% of a property is damaged, for example, by wildfire.
4. **Authority for Rezoning:** A speaker clarified that FEMA and the federal government do not have rezoning authority, which lies solely with the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors.
5. **Commercial vs. Residential Differences:** A request was made to elaborate on the differences between new construction rules for commercial versus residential properties, especially regarding the 50% threshold.
6. **Rebuilding Discretion:** A resident sought clarification on whether the county retains discretion to deny rebuilding permits under the current code.

Panelists emphasized the county's intent to ensure residents can rebuild following disasters and the importance of adopting FEMA's updated maps to maintain eligibility for NFIP and federal disaster assistance programs.

### **Addressing Public and Council Questions**

The panel addressed a range of questions and comments from council members and the public, clarifying the implications of FEMA's revised flood maps, the county's zoning requirements, and related concerns.

#### **1. Rebuilding After Disaster**

- Panelists reassured attendees that homeowners whose properties are destroyed—whether by fire or flood—are allowed to rebuild. Director Scott Orr highlighted the county's experience in expediting building plan reviews for disaster recovery, drawing from lessons learned after the 2017 fires.
- He clarified that FEMA does not have the authority to rezone property but does dictate the flood maps that inform local zoning. Local zoning regulations exist to educate property owners about rules set by insurance companies and federal or state governments. If the county does not adopt FEMA's maps, property owners may be unaware of the rules applied to them by external entities.

#### **2. Commercial vs. Residential Rebuilding Rules**

- Residential and agricultural properties can be rebuilt 100% under current code, while commercial properties are subject to a 50% discretionary threshold. Historically, discretion has been exercised to support local businesses, enabling them to rebuild after disasters. The county is considering changes to these rules to further support rebuilding efforts.

#### **3. Property Devaluation**

- Panelists explained that FEMA's maps are already being used by most insurance companies to assess risk, meaning zoning changes should not directly affect property value. However, public attendees pointed out that some private insurers do not rely on FEMA maps, and this discrepancy could lead to varying impacts.

#### **4. Challenges with FEMA's Process**

- The panel acknowledged that FEMA's timeline and appeal processes can feel inaccessible to the public. Deputy Director Nathan Quarles explained that the county identified major concerns with FEMA's initial study, including floodway boundary discrepancies and the exclusion of certain areas like the Laguna de Santa Rosa. While the county voiced these concerns during the process, FEMA ultimately proceeded with its planned updates.
- The county is now exploring localized studies to address potential inaccuracies, using tools like Letters of Map Revision (LOMR).

#### **5. Notification Concerns**

- Several public attendees expressed frustration about inadequate notification regarding FEMA's updates and the meeting itself. Longtime residents and business owners felt they were left out of critical discussions, especially those directly affected by the proposed changes. Panelists acknowledged these concerns, emphasizing the need to improve community outreach and communication in the future.

#### **6. 50% Rule and Legal Non-Conforming Structures**

- Many attendees voiced concerns about the 50% damage threshold for legal non-conforming structures, which could make properties unbuildable if more than half of a structure is damaged. One business owner pointed out that this rule applies broadly, regardless of the cause of damage (e.g., flood, fire, or an unrelated accident). The county reiterated its intent to review and update these rules, with a timeline to be determined.

#### **7. Implications of Zone Changes (F2 to F1 and Beyond)**

- Panelists clarified that moving from F2 (floodplain) to F1 (floodway) introduces stricter regulations. For residential properties, improvements triggering the 40% valuation threshold would require compliance with elevation requirements or other mitigation measures. For commercial properties, new development is prohibited in F1 zones, with exceptions evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- For properties transitioning from no designation to F2, owners may need to obtain flood insurance and meet elevation standards for new development.

#### **8. Support for Communities Impacted by Zone Changes**

- Panelists explained that FEMA provides limited support for communities impacted by zoning changes, mainly offering insurance guidance. However, FEMA does not assist with property value devaluation or regulatory compliance. The county encouraged attendees to provide specific addresses for review using the interactive map tool.

## 9. Concerns About Property Taxes

- In response to concerns about whether property taxes would adjust to reflect devaluations, panelists clarified that property tax assessments are based on valuation and must be addressed through the county assessor's office.

## 10. Localized Observations and Map Revisions

- Residents inquired about presenting localized flood observations to support potential map revisions. Panelists encouraged submitting detailed data or concerns, which could be evaluated in future studies or incorporated into LOMR processes.

### Key Resident Comments:

- A long-term resident and business owner expressed concerns about the potential loss of property usability and value under the new zoning. They emphasized the need for better notification and opportunities for public feedback.
- A local contractor criticized FEMA's transparency and decision-making process, calling for more thorough planning and community involvement.
- A brewery owner noted discrepancies between the flood maps and observed flooding behavior, suggesting revisions to the maps to better reflect on-the-ground realities.

### Addressing LOMAs, LLARs, and FEMA Protocols

Deputy Director Nathan Quarles provided details on Letters of Map Amendment (LOMAs) and Letters of Map Revision (LOMRs), explaining how property owners can participate in the process to adjust FEMA flood designations for individual parcels or structures.

#### 1. Letters of Map Amendment (LOMA):

- LOMAs are commonly used when the floodplain touches a parcel but not the structure itself.
- A licensed architect or engineer conducts an elevation survey, typically measuring the ground level at the four corners of a structure. If the elevation is shown to be higher than the base flood elevation, the structure may be removed from the floodplain designation.
- This process involves filing an elevation certificate and supporting documentation with FEMA.

## 2. Letters of Map Revision (LOMR):

- LOMRs address floodways and broader discrepancies. Civil engineers can perform site-specific analyses to demonstrate that a structure or parcel is incorrectly designated within a floodway.
- These adjustments are reviewed and approved by FEMA on a case-by-case basis.

## 3. Programmatic Reevaluation:

- Quarles emphasized the need for a broader, programmatic approach to reassess FEMA flood designations, including F1 and F2 zones established in 1941. He highlighted that building codes and disaster response practices have evolved significantly since then.
- A reevaluation would aim to ensure these designations remain relevant and do not create unnecessary complications for property owners.

### **Public Concerns on Notification and Mapping Accuracy**

Multiple residents expressed dissatisfaction with the county's communication about FEMA's map updates and their implications:

#### ○ **Notification Issues:**

- Many attendees stated they only learned about the updates through vague postcards with unclear instructions or broken website links.
- Residents called for improved communication, including plain language explanations, better access to maps, and earlier notification during FEMA's review process.

#### ○ **Mapping Inaccuracies:**

- Concerns were raised about perceived inaccuracies in FEMA's maps. Residents cited neighborhoods and parcels that were added to flood zones despite never having experienced significant flooding, while other areas that regularly flood were excluded.
- Calls were made for the county to challenge FEMA's findings and seek funding for a comprehensive reevaluation.

### **Rebuilding in F1 Zones and Property Rights Concerns**

Several residents sought clarification on rebuilding rights for properties in F1 zones:

#### ○ **Rebuilding After Disaster:**

- Attendees described conflicting information regarding their ability to rebuild if more than 50% of a structure is damaged. While county representatives assured residents they could rebuild within the same footprint, some reported being told otherwise by county staff or real estate disclosures.
  - Residents called for clear, written guarantees of rebuilding rights to protect property value and alleviate concerns about catastrophic loss.
- **Essential Business Overlay Proposal:**
- Supervisor Hopkins proposed exploring an "essential business overlay" within the public safety element of the general plan.
  - This overlay would codify the right to rebuild critical community assets, such as grocery stores and healthcare facilities, in the event of a disaster, even if these properties are located in F1 or F2 zones.

### **Budget Considerations for Reevaluation**

Supervisor Hopkins discussed options for securing funding to conduct a comprehensive reevaluation of FEMA's designations:

- Permit Sonoma could submit a budget request for Board of Supervisors approval during upcoming budget hearings.
- She noted that similar work has been funded in the past without a formal budget request, setting a precedent for potential approval.

### **Resident Feedback and Questions**

Residents shared personal experiences and sought additional clarification:

#### **1. Frustration with Timing and Process:**

- Several attendees criticized the timing of the county's engagement, stating they were not adequately informed during FEMA's appeal period. Many felt that they were presented with the maps as a done deal.

#### **2. Insurance Implications:**

- Residents asked when FEMA's updated designations began affecting insurance rates. Panelists confirmed that insurance companies could adopt the updated maps at their discretion, potentially as early as July when the preliminary maps were released.

#### **3. Rebuilding and Construction Questions:**

- A resident inquired about their ability to demolish a 1,000-square-foot structure and expand their home over that footprint in an F1 zone. Quarles explained that as long as the total displacement of floodwater does not increase, rebuilding and expansion may be permissible with proper documentation.
- Another resident asked whether the county could guarantee the ability to build upwards if horizontal expansion is restricted. Quarles stated that while there are practical limits to height based on foundation stability, there are no FEMA or building code restrictions preventing vertical expansion.

#### **4. Impact on Local Businesses:**

- A brewery owner expressed concerns about the implications of F1 zoning on their ability to rebuild after a disaster. They emphasized the importance of protecting essential businesses to preserve the community's economic and social fabric.

#### **Final Comments and Discussion on FEMA Map Updates**

The panel acknowledged the widespread disappointment regarding the notification process and pledged to improve outreach in the future. Deputy Director Nathan Quarles emphasized that the county cannot rely solely on FEMA to notify affected property owners. Moving forward, the county intends to launch its own notification campaigns for future updates, regardless of FEMA's actions.

#### **Public Comments via Zoom**

- Katherine expressed concerns about her family property, which was designated as F1. She noted that the property has no history of flooding and questioned its inclusion in the floodway. She asked whether the property could still be used for purposes like a community garden.
- Panelists clarified that F1 zoning prohibits new permanent structures but does allow non-structural uses, such as community gardens, which do not require permits.
- Cindy criticized the county for its lack of transparency and accountability, questioning whether the county is prioritizing the community's interests
- Lenora, the new owner of an inn in Monte Rio, expressed confusion about remodeling restrictions. She was concerned that her plans to renovate dilapidated buildings on her property would be prohibited.
- The panel clarified that F1 zoning does allow interior remodeling and renovations that do not alter the footprint or displace flood volumes.
- Alexis raised concerns about the requirement for flood insurance when properties are moved into the floodplain or floodway. She asked if new owners would also be required to purchase flood insurance.
- Panelists explained that flood insurance is required for structures in the floodplain if the property has a mortgage. This requirement applies to current and future owners.

Alexis also highlighted the financial strain of rising costs, including flood insurance, property taxes, and other regulations.

### **Historical Context: FEMA Compliance in Sonoma County**

A council member asked for a summary of past issues with FEMA compliance. Quarles provided the following context:

- In the mid-1990s, Sonoma County failed to fully implement FEMA's flood regulations, including requiring elevation certificates and proper elevation for new construction. FEMA conducted a Community Assistance Visit, auditing the county's flood program and placing it on probation due to noncompliance.
- To avoid losing eligibility for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), the county improved its program, implementing stricter checks for building permits and substantial improvements.
- FEMA conducted a follow-up audit two years ago, during which the county received favorable marks but had to address minor documentation issues for venting on two structures.

### **Additional Resources: Flood Elevation Program**

Quarles reminded the audience about the Community Development Commission's ongoing [Flood Elevation Program](#). Property owners interested in elevating structures above the base flood elevation can apply for this program. Projects are bundled and funded through FEMA and state grants. Over 300 homes have been elevated under this program, with \$27 million invested to date.

**link:** <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/development-services/community-development-commission/divisions/community-development/flood-elevation-mitigation-program>

### **Supervisor Hopkins' Remarks**

Supervisor Hopkins reiterated the county's commitment to improving communication with residents. She acknowledged that existing outreach methods, such as postcards and links to difficult-to-navigate maps, were insufficient. She encouraged collaboration with local leaders and venues to ensure meetings and updates are accessible to all community members.

## **9. November storm impacts and flood protocols**

Jeff Duvall, Director of Emergency Management, provided an overview of the department's role during the November storm and outlined the phases of preparation, response, and recovery. He emphasized the department's coordination efforts with local, regional, and state agencies and highlighted challenges related to the rapidly changing nature of weather events and evolving flood patterns due to climate change.

### **Storm Preparation and Coordination**

Preparation for the storm began well in advance, with discussions starting in late summer. By November, daily coordination calls were being held with the National Weather Service and state forecasting agencies. These efforts included evaluating atmospheric river conditions, assessing river and watershed capacity, and engaging public safety partners to prepare response plans.



- **Notification and Alert Thresholds:** The department worked closely with the Sheriff's Office to determine evacuation protocols, typically triggered by life safety risks or community isolation concerns, such as impassable roads like River Road and Highway 116.
- **Interagency Collaboration:** Coordination included fire districts, law enforcement, public works teams, and neighboring jurisdictions to ensure a comprehensive response plan.

### **Response Phase**

During the storm, the Russian River peaked at 34 feet, just below major flood thresholds, for less than 24 hours. The department utilized predictive data to guide decisions and continuously adapted as forecasts changed. High-water vehicles and other resources were prepared but not deployed due to the storm's short duration and moderate impact.

### **Recovery Efforts**

Post-storm recovery focused on assisting affected residents and addressing gaps not covered by federal or state disaster declarations. Key actions included:

- Activation of the county's Emergency Financial Aid Program, enabling rapid deployment of support through partnerships with organizations like the Red Cross and Child Parent Institute.
- Distribution of cleanup kits and coordination with local nonprofits to address immediate community needs.

### **Public Infrastructure Actions**

Johannes Hoevertsz, Director of Public Infrastructure, detailed the department's work before and during the storm, including the distribution of sandbags and proactive monitoring of flood-prone roads. He noted the success of preemptive road closures in reducing risks to the public and first responders.

### **Challenges and Innovations**

Both Duvall and Hoevertsz highlighted key challenges and innovative solutions:

- **Communication Gaps:** The need for better community education on flood risks, especially for new residents unfamiliar with the area's flood patterns, was emphasized.
- **Radio Communications:** Sam Wallis, Emergency Coordinator, discussed the deployment of GMRS radios to provide critical communication in areas without cell service. These tools enabled community members to conduct wellness checks, share real-time data, and coordinate resource distribution during power outages.
- **Infrastructure Solutions:** Suggestions included adding gates to prevent access to closed roads, expanding sandbag distribution points, and improving communication systems for issuing timely alerts.

### **Future Considerations**

The speakers stressed the importance of proactive planning, community involvement, and refining alert systems to adapt to increasingly unpredictable weather patterns. Proposals included:

- Lowering thresholds for advisory alerts to provide earlier warnings for rising water levels.
- Creating community-based working groups to enhance local response efforts and provide feedback on flood protocols.

The discussion concluded with a consensus on the need for collaboration between agencies and the community to improve flood preparedness and response.

## **10. Committee & Community Project Reports**

There were no committee or community project reports.

#### 11. **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 8 PM

## Debbie Ramirez

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**Subject:** FW: Please share widely! RE: 2025 Step Into the Light Youth-Arts Competition for Bay Area High School Students Created by the Cow Palace/Win Prizes! Entries Due 6PM January 24th, 2025!  
**Attachments:** image005.png; image001.png; image003.jpg; Step Into The Light\_LOGO\_vFINAL.png; MLK Jr Quite on The Time is Right to Do Right.jpg

From: **Rob Bennaton** <[rbennaton@cowpalace.com](mailto:rbennaton@cowpalace.com)>

Date: Mon, Dec 30, 2024 at 6:24 PM

Subject: Please share widely! RE: 2025 Step Into the Light Youth-Arts Competition for Bay Area High School Students Created by the Cow Palace/Win Prizes! Entries Due 6PM January 24th, 2025!

To: [Thai.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:Thai.lrrmac@gmail.com) <[Thai.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:Thai.lrrmac@gmail.com)>, [lonbud@gmail.com](mailto:lonbud@gmail.com) <[lonbud@gmail.com](mailto:lonbud@gmail.com)>, [lisa.rivermac@gmail.com](mailto:lisa.rivermac@gmail.com) <[lisa.rivermac@gmail.com](mailto:lisa.rivermac@gmail.com)>, [vicki.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:vicki.lrrmac@gmail.com) <[vicki.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:vicki.lrrmac@gmail.com)>, [BAndriola.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:BAndriola.lrrmac@gmail.com) <[BAndriola.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:BAndriola.lrrmac@gmail.com)>, [pipmdlp.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:pipmdlp.lrrmac@gmail.com) <[pipmdlp.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:pipmdlp.lrrmac@gmail.com)>, [joe.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:joe.lrrmac@gmail.com) <[joe.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:joe.lrrmac@gmail.com)>, [kathleendahl527@hotmail.com](mailto:kathleendahl527@hotmail.com) <[kathleendahl527@hotmail.com](mailto:kathleendahl527@hotmail.com)>, [emvandyke1@gmail.com](mailto:emvandyke1@gmail.com) <[emvandyke1@gmail.com](mailto:emvandyke1@gmail.com)>, [ghennig1801@gmail.com](mailto:ghennig1801@gmail.com) <[ghennig1801@gmail.com](mailto:ghennig1801@gmail.com)>, [cstrecker.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:cstrecker.lrrmac@gmail.com) <[cstrecker.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:cstrecker.lrrmac@gmail.com)>, [patricia.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:patricia.lrrmac@gmail.com) <[patricia.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:patricia.lrrmac@gmail.com)>, [mcnicholls.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:mcnicholls.lrrmac@gmail.com) <[mcnicholls.lrrmac@gmail.com](mailto:mcnicholls.lrrmac@gmail.com)>, [tonythecraftsman@gmail.com](mailto:tonythecraftsman@gmail.com) <[tonythecraftsman@gmail.com](mailto:tonythecraftsman@gmail.com)>

Cc: Mala Gubuxani <[malag@cowpalace.com](mailto:malag@cowpalace.com)>

Dear Lower Russian River MAC Representatives,

Happy Holidays! I am writing to ask if you could please share about *Step Into the Light* with your constituents via your January newsletter, with Sonoma high school students and their parents/families in your district.

Here, below, is why *Step Into the Light* is important for our Bay Area youth! I'd be super grateful for your also sharing this with groups serving high schoolers in your networks, and local Arts Commissions.

Hope each of you are well! Thanks!

Best regards!

Rob Bennaton

*Dear Youth Leader,*

Bay Area High School students are invited to participate in the 3rd annual creative competition honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy called *Step into the Light*. As a youth arts competition created by the Cow Palace, *Step into the Light* has essay, poetry, art, and video categories. Art pieces may include photography, painting, sculpture and mixed media inspired by Dr. King's messages addressing injustices, which were stirring, and were always shared with a ray of hope. In fact, he spoke at the Cow Palace in 1964!

*Step Into the Light* is an opportunity for youth to share their creative talents as a way to call out injustices by shining a light on them and making a difference in our local communities. **The Grand Prize is an Apple Airpod Max Wireless Headphone Set, and the Best of Show Winners for each category win \$300! It's**

**also a great winter project, art can be therapeutic, and being recognized for youth artistic expression looks great on college and skilled trades' school applications.**

Please find the [attached press release and poster](#) to share widely with local youth in your communities. **Entries may be submitted at the Cow Palace's Administration Offices Mondays-Fridays, 9AM-6PM, or emailed by January 24<sup>th</sup> at 6PM.** For more information email the Cow Palace with questions at [SITL@cowpalace.com](mailto:SITL@cowpalace.com).

I'm writing to you as Community Outreach Coordinator at the Cow Palace regarding *Step Into the Light*. Please forward this email to any high school youth, youth leaders/mentors, after school educators, workforce aids who are in high school, or high school arts, graphic design or creative writing teachers/wellness coordinators you may know, add it to any social media that work for you or January newsletters if possible, and share the flyer/poster above.

We look forward to spotlighting the artistic and constructive ways youth voice matters that concern them and their communities.

Best regards,

Rob

**Rob Bennaton**  
**Community Outreach Coordinator**  
**Cow Palace Arena & Event Center**  
**2600 Geneva Ave., Daly City, CA 94014**  
[rbennaton@cowpalace.com](mailto:rbennaton@cowpalace.com) [www.cowpalace.com](http://www.cowpalace.com)

**Direct: 510-703-4119**

# COW PALACE

## Arena & Event Center

### \*\*\*NEWS RELEASE\*\*\*

**For Immediate Release:**

November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 9AM, Daly City, CA

**Contact:**

Rob Bennaton, Community Outreach Coordinator  
Direct: 510-703-4119

Mala Gurbuxani, Administrative Assistant  
Main Office: 415-404-4100



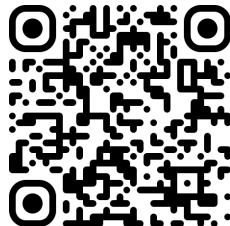
### **Calling All Bay Area High School Artists!**

**Participate in a creative arts competition that honors Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy!**

Bay Area High School students are invited to participate in the 3rd annual creative competition honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy called *Step Into the Light*. As a youth arts competition created by the Cow Palace, *Step Into the Light* has essay, poetry, art, and video categories. The Grand Prize is an **Apple Airpod Max Wireless Headphone Set**, and the Best of Show Winners for each category win **\$300!**

*Step Into the Light* is an opportunity for youth to share their creative talents as a way to call out injustices by shining a light on them and making a difference in our local communities. Submitted art pieces can express imaginative and resourceful ways to grow compassionate neighborly interaction and community service. Art pieces may include photography, fine art, sculpture and mixed media inspired by Dr. King's messages addressing injustices, which were stirring, and were always shared with a ray of hope.

Please share the poster on page 2 widely with local youth in your communities. Entries may be submitted at the Cow Palace's Administration Offices Mondays-Fridays, 9AM-6PM, or emailed by January 24<sup>th</sup> at 6PM. For more information on competition entry guidelines, please click on the QR Code below, or email the Cow Palace with questions at [SITL@cowpalace.com](mailto:SITL@cowpalace.com).

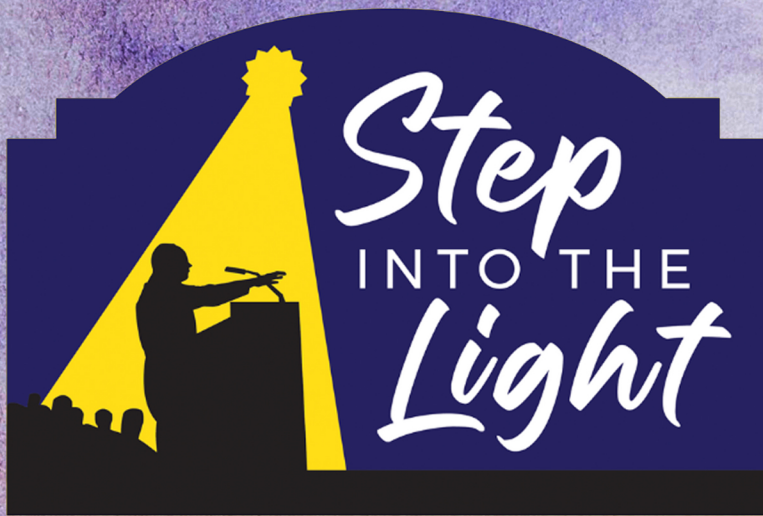


Entry Form



More Info

**2600 Geneva Ave. Daly City, CA 94014**  
**[www.cowpalace.com](http://www.cowpalace.com) • 415-404-4100**



**Grand Prize:**  
Apple Airpod Max  
Wireless Headphones

Best of Show Winners  
for each category win \$300

# CALLING ALL BAY AREA HIGH SCHOOL ARTISTS!

Participate in a creative competition that  
honors Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy!

**ESSAYS | POETRY | VIDEO | FINE ART**

**PHOTOGRAPHY, PAINTING, SCULPTURE, AND MIXED MEDIA**

**ENTRIES CLOSE JAN 24, 2025, 6PM**

Entry Form



More Info:

