



THE

Highlander

Mar./April 2021

The Rural Bonny Doon Association Newsletter

Anybody out there?

Grassroots Communication Solutions Needed to Prepare for the Next Emergency

RBDA Virtual Public Meeting

Wednesday, March 31, 7:30 p.m.

Zoom Video Conference Meeting



The next RBDA public meeting will facilitate a discussion about what you and your neighbors can do to prepare for the next emergency given the distressing lack of cell phone and internet coverage when the power goes out in Bonny Doon. As the RBDA lobbies the carriers and our government officials for better telecommunications infrastructure, it is also working to support the organization and implementation of grassroots radio-based communications systems.

Come to the meeting and learn how to organize your neighborhood and to select the right radio tools so that you can communicate with your neighbors, other Bonny Doon neighborhoods and emergency services outside Bonny Doon during a power outage.

You'll hear from Dooners from different areas that have already used these techniques to communicate with neighbors when trouble arises and others who are preparing to do so. Share the systems you and your neighbors are creating, and bring your ideas to help us build a whole from all the parts.

Dawn Mackey will present a plan to distribute radios to neighbors and unite the groups who have already organized grassroots communications systems. Mackey is a 48 year resident of Bonny Doon, and over the years has been an active participant and leader in a number of organizations including the Bonny Doon Volunteer Fire Team, the Bonny Doon Preschool, 4H, and currently serves on the Bonny Doon Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and as the volunteer coordinator for the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve. She is also a member of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) where she participates in regular radio nets and other activities.

Please join us for this discussion. It's important that all of Bonny Doon gets on the same page to build the most effective emergency communication network so that no one is left isolated and in the dark during a crisis.

Telecommunication Infrastructure News

Working with members of the community and our government representatives, the RBDA continues to advocate for improved cell phone and broadband coverage and availability in Bonny Doon. Here's a brief update on what's happening:

- AT&T, partnering with CTI, has selected a site (unnamed for now) for a new cell tower. The formal application has not yet been submitted, but the companies are scheduled to meet this week to update the status of the application. We'll contact AT&T for more details and an update on their progress.

- The PUC has postponed of the Emergency Backup Regulation requiring Carriers have 72 hours of power backup until the fall of 2022.

- The RBDA Board met with State Senator John Laird, Assemblyman Mark Stone and Ryan Coonerty. Our strategy coming out of those meetings is to create more political pressure on the carriers and legislators and identify incentives for Carriers to invest in services. To do this we are planning to:

- Conduct a petition drive to collect signatures that will be presented to both the carriers and legislators. We will be reaching out to you soon with instructions on how to participate. Please add your name to the petition when you are contacted.

- Create a survey to understand potential for new business for the Carrier that provides Bonny Doon with the best coverage. Please participate when we publish the survey.

- We are connecting with the Central Coast Broadband Consortium and Rural Counties Representatives of California (RCRC) to leverage their lobbying activities and information sharing.

We will continue our outreach to carriers, but please contact us with comments, suggestions and questions.

Virtual Meeting Participation

Zoom (zoom.us) is a video conferencing platform that is free to use through either a web browser or application, and audio participation is possible through a dial-up connection on your phone. For this meeting, we will be utilizing all the available security features, including password-protection and waiting rooms managed by the host. Please send your e-mail address to meetings@rbda.us to receive the meeting credentials and password. Your email will not be used for any other communication and will not be shared.

Undergrounding Power Lines on Empire Grade Scheduled to Commence

In a forward-looking policy change, the Planning Department for Santa Cruz County has begun the process of working with PG&E to underground utility services in fire prone rural areas. Our own Empire Grade is on the list of rural county roads that will say good-bye to the fire hazard of power poles. There is both the funding and the will to bury utility wires for two miles of Empire Grade, between Pine Flat and Alba Road.

Undergrounding utilities is expensive business, costing about \$2.6 million dollars per mile.

Funding for this project comes from the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) Rule 20A program — these are funds PG&E is required by the CPUC to set aside for undergrounding utilities. Undergrounding power lines was originally conceived as a way to develop commercial areas, while freeing city streets from the aesthetic blight of power poles, wires and transformers. In the ashy shadow of recent fires, however, Santa Cruz County decided that preventing massive power-line-caused wildfires outweighs the charms and economic

impact of tidier streets in town. Matt Machado, Deputy CEO of Public Works explains, “Traditionally the Rule 20 funds were used for commercial corridors to encourage economic development. Here in Santa Cruz, we see more value in investing in high fire areas.”

Although the cost is high for undergrounding rural utilities, the cost of keeping the status quo is arguably much higher. Exposed wires hung between poles in a forest require constant tree work and as we know also require PG&E to shut off power during high winds to prevent falling poles from sparking wildfires. Above ground power lines have caused more than 1,500 wildfires in California between 2014 and 2017 alone, according to a January 13, 2019 article in *The Wall Street Journal*. Undergrounding rural power lines in forested parts of California is a worthy if expensive investment.

Machado confirmed undergrounding utilities in rural areas is estimated to be less costly than in urban areas due to the smaller number of service boxes. Rural work also presents new challenges. For

example, what happens to the service lateral between PG&E’s undergrounded utility wires and private homes down long rural driveways is still to be determined. Also, the funds Santa Cruz County receives from Rule 20A replenish at a rate of \$500,000 a year, which is in no way sufficient to underground the miles of rural power lines in the county in a timely manner (it would take several generations at this rate). More funding will have to be found. Public funding that essentially builds infrastructure for PG&E is a difficult sell to taxpayers. In an effort to meet this need, the utility is asking for an immense rate hike, totaling \$1.4 billion, to fund fire prevention.

The project is not cheap, nor is the work quick. The eight miles of rural wires that the county can afford to underground is estimated to be completed “within the decade” according to Machado. All the same, the longest journey starts with a single step and it is a rare bit of good news that the journey to undergrounding forest power lines in Santa Cruz County will begin with two miles of upper Empire Grade.

UCSC’s New Growth Plan Reveals Major Impacts on Bonny Doon

On January 7 UCSC revealed its Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) that detailed plans for growth over the next 20 years, with a target 2040 enrollment of 28,000 students, an increase of about 10,000 from this year’s total. On that day it also published the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR), analyzing what the impacts of that growth would be and how it planned to mitigate them. It is important to understand that according to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), even in a scenario where the environmental impacts can’t be mitigated to a substantial degree, the University can proceed under the rubric that the value of higher education supersedes any deterioration of the environment, including air and water quality, negative effects on plants, wildlife, housing, traffic, water, public safety or its neighbors’ quality of life.

The comment period for the DEIR closed on March 8. CEQA requires the University to address all the comments submitted and

issue a final EIR, make any changes it sees fit, and submit it for certification by the UC Regents. It is practically unheard of for the Regents to decline to certify it, being that they are the ones who directed UC to grow.

Therefore, certification is likely to



happen sometime towards the end of 2021. The only option for people opposed to the growth plan is through legal challenges, which happened most recently when the 2005 LRDP final EIR was approved.

There already is a lawsuit in the courts

that could have a key bearing on UCSC’s growth, much of which is planned for the North Campus, which is situated outside the City of Santa Cruz and includes parts of Bonny Doon. In an attempt to get around the state law that requires an expansion of water service beyond its existing boundary to be approved by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), UC has sued the City of Santa Cruz on the grounds that back in the ‘60s, as UCSC was being planned, the city agreed to supply water to the campus without specifying that this would be restricted to only the portion of the campus’s 2,000 acres that are within city limits.

The impacts of the growth plan will greatly affect Bonny Doon. First, the siting of dormitories and teaching facilities on the North Campus will require the cutting back of the redwood forest in an area adjacent to the Cave Gulch neighborhood. The plan includes building a new campus entrance at the top of Cave

UCSC LDRP and DEIR

continued from page 2

Gulch, and construction of employee housing nearby on the west side of Empire Grade. This means there will be a traffic light there, increasing commute times for Dooners.

Perhaps more importantly, development of the North Campus will increase fire risk, which, as we know all too well, is already very high. Furthermore, the new entrance road will serve as an evacuation route, meaning that Dooners fleeing a wildfire will encounter hundreds of students, faculty and other employees trying to get out onto Empire Grade.

The increased number of students and faculty will also create increased competition for housing in Bonny Doon (and Santa Cruz), which will spur increases in housing costs, already among the highest in the nation.

The realistic increase in the student population will likely be closer to 11,000 or 12,000, not 10,000, because UCSC calculates enrollment on "average full-time students" over the academic year. Many students take less than a full load of classes so are not counted as "full time." UC also plans to hire 2,000 more faculty, who often have families, and hundreds more employees.

To serve all these students the University is planning to add nearly 6 million square feet of buildings. To envision that, think the equivalent of 39 new structures the size of the local Costco warehouse. However, nothing requires UCSC to actually construct these dormitories, labs and classrooms. The cost would be enormous, and the state is facing budget deficits because of Covid related shortfalls in revenues. While construction costs have jumped considerably and building materials are at an all-time high, UC's costs, for various reasons, are even higher

than for the rest of us. It could easily cost \$6 billion dollars to build out the campus under the growth plan. Where will it find the money? The short answer: it won't. The University has failed to construct much of the planned buildings under the last several LRDPs, particularly the last one.

The city, county and community critics have demanded that UCSC house all its additional students on campus, as well as some of its additional faculty and other employees. UCSC has agreed to make that a goal but hasn't agreed to limit enrollment if it can't meet it. State rules which require UC housing to pay for itself mean that it is much cheaper to live in the community than on campus, and many upper class (sophomore, junior, senior and post-graduate) students prefer living off-campus for various reasons. The result is that the campus only houses a little more than half of its students, and that is unlikely to change, especially if, as is almost certain, the state continues its policy of requiring housing to be self-sustaining.

The University is still a valuable teaching and cultural resource, a leading research institution in several areas (particularly genomics, astronomy and marine biology) and a major economic engine for our area, however, it has outgrown the ability of Santa Cruz's resources to keep up. The state has to meet the crucial goal of providing a college education to its growing student population and continuing to make demonstrable progress in supporting students from underrepresented communities, but UC needs to find alternatives to enormous UCSC growth that overburdens and impacts our local communities and damages our environment.

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RBDA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yearly dues are \$20/pp or \$15/pp for multiple members at same address.

Memberships expire on Jan. 31 of the next year. *

Number of Members _____ Number of years you are joining or renewing for _____

Multiply years times number of memberships. Checks only, please, made out to RBDA.

Amount enclosed for dues: \$ _____

I also wish to support the RBDA with an additional contribution of \$ _____

Total amount of enclosed check \$ _____

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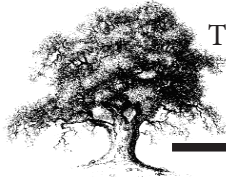
I certify that I (we) live or own property in the Bonny Doon Planning District.

Clip out and mail to RBDA, P.O. Box 551, Felton, CA 95018.

Dues mostly go for printing and mailing **The Highlander**, your voice for keeping Bonny Doon rural and natural.

Additional contributions are gladly accepted and greatly appreciated!

*Dues paid after Nov. 30 count toward the next year.



THE Highlander

Keeping Bonny Doon Rural and Natural since 1957

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Bonny Doon's voice in preserving our special quality of life, The Highlander, is mailed free 6 times a year. RBDA Public Meetings are usually held the second Wednesdays of January, March, May, September and November. We encourage you to participate. Send correspondence to The Highlander at the above address.

Access the RBDA on the Internet at:

www.rbda.us

E-mail us at:

board@rbda.us

Facebook (RBDA Members Only):

RBDA, Rural Bonny Doon Association

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**Bonny Doon Resident
Santa Cruz, CA 95060**

March 31 Virtual Public Meeting: Home-grown Communication Solutions?

Looking for Working Group Members to Track Legislation with Potential to Impact Rebuilding

Many community members are focused on the myriad of logistics and challenges facing a timely rebuild of their homes after the wildfire. While we are still in the early stages of recovering from this disaster, there are several concerning state bills (e.g. SB55) and changes to the Board of Forestry fire safety regulations being drafted that, if successful, may prevent fire victims from rebuilding. The RBDA board has been in communication with the offices of Third District Supervisor Ryan Coonery and District 17 State Senator John Laird about these issues, and both representatives are advocating for fire victims. But, we need help and are looking for volunteers to join a working group tasked with tracking these developments. This will greatly support our efforts to lobby local representatives and protect fire victims' ability to rebuild. Please e-mail us at board@rbda.us to learn more.

Call to Action: Neighborhood Groups Fighting Felton Quarry Permit Application to Increase Nighttime Operations

This is an invited contribution to The Highlander from Kenneth Coale, President of the Cave Gulch Neighborhood Association.

Neighbors on Empire Grade, High and Bay Streets have experienced constant day-time heavy truck traffic since September following the CZU Lightning Complex Fire and will continue to bear the burden of reconstruction for many years. This is necessary. However, Granite Construction, the operator of the Felton Quarry, has applied for a permit that would allow an additional 80 more off-hour operations per year, in addition to their currently permitted 20. No Environmental Impact Report has been performed and a negative declaration has been approved for this increased activity.

Each operation could result in 100 heavy truck trips per night, or four months of constant heavy truck traffic,

and increased air and noise pollution. This is discretionary and the Quarry operators say they are unlikely to ever need these additional operations!

In two recent electronic public forums, one before the Planning Commission on January 27, and one with Granite Construction on March 4, all the participating residents along the truck routes of San Lorenzo Avenue, Empire Grade and Bay Street stated their strong opposition to this permit change.

For more information and to sign our petition please go to: www.change.org/OpposeFeltonQuarryExpansion. Also, please consider attending the next virtual hearing regarding their application before the Planning Commission on April 14, 9:30 a.m., in a show of support that Quarry neighbors oppose this action. See sccoplanning.com for the final schedule and meeting access.