

May 16, 2011

Chairman Jack Gibson and Members of the Board
Marin Municipal Water District
220 Nellen Avenue
Corte Madera, CA 94925

Dear Members of the Board:

Over the past nine months, the public has been given several opportunities to review and comment on the Friends of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed as a concept and as a detailed business plan. We appreciate the effort that was made to meet with groups like ours with long-standing interest in the conservation of Mt. Tamalpais, and to listen to our concerns and suggestions.

The Friends' business plan is now in final draft form (March 2011). Before it becomes final, and before you hold the public workshop scheduled for June 2, we would like to submit the following questions and comments on behalf of our organizations: Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed, Marin Audubon Society and Marin Conservation League.

1. The funds remaining in the "Friends of the Watershed" fund at the Marin Community Foundation should not be used to launch the proposed new non-profit corporation. The description of this fund, and assumption under which monies have been donated to it, are stated on every water bill the District sends out and reads thus: "A Marin Community Foundation fund for habitat and stream restoration on the Mt. Tamalpais watershed." Use of the funds for purposes other than actual restoration could be interpreted by donors as a misuse of the funds.
2. The goals are presented as having equal value. It is our contention that the goal of natural resource management is far more important than the others. Furthermore, the draft Business Plan frequently conflates natural resource management with facilities management. We suggest having one major goal of enhanced natural resource management, with education, facilities management, collaboration, and all other goals in a supporting role. This would be consistent with the District's mission statement.
3. Under "Goals, programs and activities" (page 11), the first of several references to possible future expansion of the scope of the "Friends" group is suggested. Although collaboration among these agencies certainly is essential for effective management of Mt. Tamalpais' complex resources and "Friends" might convene programs to foster collaboration, each of these agencies is governed by its own enabling laws, regulations, and procedures, and each of them is already supported by comparable NGOs and/or volunteer programs of long standing. We believe this idea oversteps the appropriate role of the "Friends" group and should be removed from the business plan.
4. Under "Benefits to the district" and in subsequent descriptions of staffing, it is not clear who would carry out actual program work. For example, who would teach school programs? Would it be interns? Volunteers? District staff? The executive director, it appears, will focus almost exclusively on finding sources of revenue – grants, sponsors, members, etc. There should be a description of additional staffing that would be needed.

5. In numerous references, the business plan describes various uses for a Watershed Education Center: classroom(s), visitor center, "Friends" concession site, meeting facilities, interpretive center, a headquarters for the "Friends," and so on. Since Prop. 84 funding for the Center is off the table at this time, the text should be revised to indicate which of these functions are critical to success. Several revenue assumptions (e.g., earned income) are based on the existence of the Center. These should be modified.

It is our view is that the District's education programs and volunteer programs can be very successful with limited or no capital improvements: an outdoor classroom perhaps and some enhancements to the existing Sky Oaks Ranger Station (volunteer direction, maps, interpretive materials, etc.) The District can use the watershed as a classroom.

6. We have a number of questions about categories of membership. In particular, "affiliate" membership would appear to cover people who are current members of NGOs defined as "founding members." A few examples are given on page 25. It is not clear what organizations would be included, and how that would be determined. Since there are already many overlapping members in the so-called "founding members" organizations, where would the pool of "regular members" come from? We suggest eliminating the discussion of affiliates and founding members.
7. That raises a related question: How much time would District staff be expected to spend in the first few years to help the "Friends" to launch? That time does not appear in the projected operating budgets. It is also not clear that it will be appropriate for the "Friends" to build awareness and solicit financial support by placing materials in the District's monthly bills, as suggested on page 30.
8. We would like a clearer understanding of how the proposed operating budgets distribute management and fund-raising expense, vs. program/project expense. It appears that in both optimistic and conservative projections, the ratio is roughly 55 percent or more for the former, and roughly 45 percent or less for the latter. This ratio of administration/ fund-raising to program expense would be viewed as unacceptable by most non-profits, and therefore should be clarified.
9. Given the emphasis on fund raising of large amounts of money, is it possible that donors of significant funds might expect to influence policy?

Finally, we have some editorial comments:

1. A few suggested revisions to Figure 2: "Overview of the NGO landscape in Marin": the discussion should also include Richardson Bay Audubon Center, which has extensive children's environmental education programs and is located in the District's service area. Audubon Canyon Ranch (Martin Griffin Preserve) also conducts programs for children, primarily conducted outside the District's service area. Both of these could be checked under Environmental Education and General Conservation. Marin Audubon Society does limited children's programs, uses District lands for bird counts and field trips and conservation/advocacy so could be checked under General Conservation, Environmental Education and User Group.

2. "Host *semi-annual* Mt. Tamalpais Science symposium" appears twice on pages 12 and 15. This should be corrected, on the assumption that the symposia would be bi-annual, not twice a year.
3. Under "Primary strategies" on page 15 is the item: "Promote recognition of the watershed's boundaries and natural assets. . ." We suggest that somewhere in the document should be a brief explanation that four main watersheds drain Mt. Tamalpais, all partially within MMWD boundaries: Lagunitas, Corte Madera, and Redwood creeks, and Arroyo Corte Madera del Presidio.
4. The Plan twice lists Marin Open Space Trust (MOST) as comparable to Golden Gate Parks Conservancy and Point Reyes National Seashore Association (pages 16 and 17). MOST is a non-profit that raises funds for land acquisition in coordination with the Marin County Open Space District, but it does not currently support the Marin County Open Space Preserves in a manner comparable to the others listed.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. We hold in high regard the Marin Municipal Water District's dedication to the well-being of the Mt. Tamalpais ecosystem, and the excellent work of staff in educating the public about its habitat and maintaining order among user groups.

Yours truly,

Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed
Marin Audubon Society
Marin Conservation League



Priscilla Bull



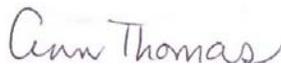
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