

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM
City of Belvedere

Report Title: Electrifying Marin's Buildings: A Countywide Approach

Report Date: June 6, 2022

Public Release: September 12, 2022

Response By: Sally Wilkinson, Mayor of City of Belvedere,
& Irene Borba, Belvedere Director of Planning & Building

FINDINGS:

We agree with the findings numbered **F2, F4-F5**

We disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered **F1, F3, F6**

(See Attachment A)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Recommendations numbered _____ have been implemented.
- Recommendations numbered _____ have not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.
- Recommendations numbered **R1, R2 and R3** require further analysis. (Attachment A)
- Recommendations numbered _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not feasible.

Date: 10/12/2022

Signed: 
Sally Wilkinson, Mayor

Date: 10/12/2022

Signed: 
Irene Borba, Director of Planning & Building

Number of pages attached: 4

Attachment A: Response of the City of Belvedere to Grand Jury Report "Electrifying Marin's Buildings: A Countywide Approach"

Findings and Responses

F1. With the building sector accounting for approximately 34 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Marin County, it will be necessary to substantially reduce emissions from that sector if the county and its cities and towns are to meet their 2030 greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Response: Partially Disagree

It is reasonable to believe that the City of Belvedere is on pace to meet its energy goals, as defined in the City's Climate Action Plan and by the State of California Energy Commission, that all new residential and commercial construction be zero net energy by 2030. The City, and other neighboring Marin County municipalities met or exceeded their 2020 energy goals and are on pace to do the same with their 2030 goals. The State Building Codes continue to increase energy efficiency and Green Building requirements each Code cycle with an intent to meet this goal.

The grand jury targeted the building industry which accounts for 34% of GHG emissions, with 27% of GHG emissions produced by natural gas. However, the report ignores the transportation industry which accounts for 52%. Unfortunately, this is a missed opportunity as the combined sectors make up 86% of GHG emissions. There are also several shared building elements or public improvements that will be necessary to reduce transportation related GHG emissions. A reduction to the 27% level of GHG emission from natural gas in the building sector will only have an incremental effect on GHG overall and should not be thought of as the sole solution.

Additionally, the report utilizes information for residential gas usage, produced in a 2007 study. Since that time, the State Building Code and the California Energy Commission have implemented a number of new codes and regulations aimed at reducing GHG emissions.

F2. Reducing or eliminating natural gas as a fuel source in buildings will dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from Marin County's building sector.

Response: Agree

The grand jury's proposed elimination of natural gas will reduce GHG emissions. While this may be true, it will also cause the public to look for other alternatives. As an example, when the PG&E public safety power shutoffs (PSPS) were implemented to reduce the risk of wildfires, the public turned to alternatives like portable generators or permanent generators. When this happened, many jurisdictions and their associated noise ordinances reduced the possibility for installing generator in many locations. This led to numerous installations of generators without permits. With the elimination of natural gas, having the flexibility to find cost-effective energy solutions becomes

more difficult, as options become more limited. This creates an imbalance in finding equitable solutions.

This approach needs to be evaluated further to understand some of the unintended consequences that will need mitigation to effectively implement natural gas restrictions. It is also important to note that the cost of an equivalent unit of gas and electric charge plays into these issues as consumers often look toward the most cost-effective solution. However, due to electricity being treated as a commodity, industries are looking for ways to maintain profitability, which is why companies like PG&E will still rely on natural gas to produce electric power which is 7% of the GHG emissions associated with the building sector.

F3. The use of natural gas in buildings gives rise to health and safety risks, including adverse health effects attributed to exposure to natural gas, and safety risks posed by pipeline leaks, ruptures, and explosions. These health and safety risks serve as additional reasons to eliminate natural gas as a fuel source in new and existing buildings.

Response: Partially Disagree

Indoor air quality continues to be an ongoing problem in the building industry. As buildings have become more efficient, they have lost communication with the exterior environment. This has led to respiratory and other health issues. Fossil fuel burning such as gas stoves, particularly when unvented, can be a primary source of indoor air pollution. For this reason, building code now requires whole home fans and mandatory venting requirements for all fossil fuel burning appliances. While natural gas can be hazardous if improperly installed, the same is true of all power sources. Alternative fuel appliances for cooking can also be dangerous. As an example, induction cooking cannot be used by people with pacemakers as the electromagnetic field (EMF) produced by induction cooking can cause interference with the operation of pacemakers. In addition, induction cooking ranges are also subject to labeling as cancer causing because of EMFs. While induction cooking can be seen as producing fewer overall GHG emissions, it is not a solution that can be uniformly applied. This further supports the need to study alternatives to eliminating natural gas specifically for cooking.

Furthermore, the report speaks of safety risks posed by gas pipeline leaks, ruptures, and explosions. The report omits the risks caused by poorly maintained, or not maintained, electrical infrastructure. It is believed that PG&E electrical infrastructure has had a hand in over 1000 California wildfires in just the last eight years—these include the wildfires that destroyed neighborhoods in Napa/Sonoma County, and the nearly complete destruction of the City of Paradise, in Butte County California.

F4. The timely reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from Marin County's building sector will require in-depth, comprehensive, and coordinated planning. A countywide planning process, coordinated by Marin Climate and Energy Partnership or the county's Sustainability Team, would be an effective and efficient means of sustaining focus and leveraging the resources needed for developing a Countywide Building Electrification Plan.

Response: Agree

F5. Underserved communities and lower income households have greater vulnerability to rising energy costs and will likely require extra financial support to mitigate those costs and reduce household greenhouse gas emissions through measures that require significant up-front investment.

Response: Agree

However, some of the proposals in the report are not cost-effective and may impact consumers negatively; the report recommendations need to be tied to housing affordability. The costs to transition to all-electric energy solutions have been studied by the California Energy Commission

F6. The timely electrification of existing buildings will likely require one or more mandatory measures, supported where necessary by financial subsidies and rebates.

Response: Partially Disagree

The City of Belvedere agrees that the near-term electrification of existing buildings will likely require one of more mandatory measures. However, financial subsidies cannot always not be seen as a mitigation, as often those programs do not uniformly incentivize the public and can be exhausted of funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES:

R1. On or before January 1, 2023, Marin County and each of its cities and towns that have not already done so should adopt a reach code banning natural gas connections in newly constructed buildings.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis.

Although the City of Belvedere agrees that all-electric buildings are critically important to a holistic response to climate change, the adoption date of January 1, 2023, leaves too little time for jurisdictions to implement the needed policies, procedures, and staff training. The City, along with several other Marin jurisdictions and the Marin County Code Advisory Board (MCCCAB) are actively meeting to analyze reach codes related to electrification. Further research is needed at the statewide level to determine how best to assist the utility providers in offering more affordable, dependable, electric power and options for cost-efficient methods of electrifying new homes.

- R2. On or before January 1, 2023, Marin County and each of its cities and towns that have not already done so should adopt a reach code requiring energy efficiency measures in connection with renovations of existing residential buildings. The reach code should specify the size of the renovation that will trigger the requirement and provide flexibility by allowing the applicant to choose from a list of energy efficiency measures, including electrification of gas appliances.**

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis.

This topic has been discussed in numerous County-wide working groups. It has been difficult to reach a consensus regarding the size of the project that would trigger reach codes and a consistent list of energy efficiency measures to be taken by the applicant. Each jurisdiction has unique factors concerning which method(s) of energy efficiency would best fit their municipality. Similar to Recommendation R1, a deadline of January 1, 2023, leaves insufficient time to engage those stakeholders.

- R3. Marin County and each of its cities and towns, collaborating through the Marin Climate and Energy Partnership or otherwise, should develop a comprehensive Countywide Building Electrification Plan to be completed on or before January 1, 2024. The Plan should identify those strategies, programs, and concrete actions necessary to bring about an equitable, prompt, and material acceleration of building electrification throughout the county.**

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis.

This must be a County-wide response. To achieve this recommendation, representatives from each County jurisdiction will need to conduct meetings in order to come to a mutual and comprehensive County-wide plan that best fits the needs of all Marin County municipalities. Further research and collaboration are needed to ensure a comprehensive plan is generated to address the needs of all Marin County jurisdictions. The City will participate in these efforts prior to pursuing recommendations one and two.