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**California City Solutions: Napa Transforms Economic Development Through Flood Protection Project**

*This story is part of an ongoing series featuring Helen Putnam Award entries. The 2014 entries are available on the League's website as a resource for cities in a searchable database called [California City Solutions](#). Napa's Downtown Riverfront Improvement Integrated with Flood Protection project was submitted in 2014 for the Community Services and Economic Development award category.*

The Napa River is a significant estuary system, delivering fresh water from Mt. St. Helena down to the San Pablo Bay and eventually on to the San Francisco Bay. Six miles of the lower river meander through the city of Napa, flowing right through the edge of its downtown district and many residential areas. After experiencing many devastating floods and attempts at flood control, the voters approved a local flood tax. With this funding, and more than a decade of planning, the [Napa River-Napa Creek Flood Protection Project](#) took root and began transitioning a floodplain while increasing economic development for the city. *For more, see Page 2.*



**Upcoming Legislative Hearings of Interest Feb. 23-April 16**

The Legislature will host a number of oversight and informational hearings on a variety of policy areas of interest to cities in the coming weeks. Following the fast approaching Feb. 27 bill introduction deadline, expect to see a decrease in informational hearings as the Legislature prepares for hearings on the FY 2015-16 budget and specific legislation. *For more, see Page 3.*

Since 1862, Napa has suffered through more than 21 major floods that brought extensive damage to commercial and residential areas within miles of the river's natural flow, with the most costly impacts seen in its downtown area. The perpetual flood risk left the city with a health-and-safety issue and property damage concerns. Flood damage negatively impacted the economy, environment and overall quality of life for Napa County residents.

Since 1998, the city of Napa has been engaged in a comprehensive, ongoing program to enhance community services and economic development by integrating riverfront improvements into the Napa River-Napa Creek Flood Protection Project. These efforts have resulted in vast enhancements to public space and river access and a spectacular downtown renaissance that continues to gather momentum.

One of the most memorable floods for current residents took place in 1986. That flood came unexpectedly one February night after a week of rain that dumped 12 inches, took three lives, and destroyed more than 250 homes, resulting in an estimated \$100 million in damages. After storms dumped 12 inches of rain on the community, the river jumped its banks to devastating effect. Three people died, 250 homes were destroyed and the damage totaled about \$100 million. Many thought it was the flood of the century, however floods equivalent to the one in '86 were statistically expected to occur about three times every 100 years.

While having an attainable river running through the center of the city could be seen as a benefit, many riverfront properties remained neglected or underused due to the constant flood hazard. The city's riverfront had become an assortment of businesses that could stay afloat financially in the flood-threatened area and that didn't require vast improvements if a flood impeded their properties.

Makeshift efforts to contain floodwaters by raising the banks with fill material had done nothing to stop serious floods but degraded the riparian and riverine habitats. Many native plant and animal species had been diminished by changes made to the floodplain and marsh areas over many decades. Environmentally degraded zones along the river included a large area contaminated with petroleum products.

The river was being viewed as a liability instead of a community asset. It had few community access points, which were difficult to use. Public space adjacent to the river was minimal, with no trails, only one park area and a city dock that floods often washed away.

After two failed attempts to get voter approval for a flood control measure in the 1970s, the severe flood of '86 motivated officials to find a solution. The city joined ad hoc Community Coalition formed in the 1990s to re-work a flood control plan. The coalition comprises 400 individuals representing more than 25 diverse groups and interests, among them Friends of the Napa River, Napa Valley Economic Development Corporation, Napa County Resource Conservation District, Napa Chamber of Commerce, California Department of Fish and Game, Sierra Club, Napa Downtown Merchants, and the Flood Plain Business Coalition.

The group returned to the drawing board several times to edit flood plans before voters approved a half-cent flood sales tax in March 1998. It provided funding for local property acquisition, the construction of new bridges and the relocation of utilities.

A "living river" concept was adopted developing three fundamental goals:

- Protection from flooding on the Napa River and Napa Creek;
- Environmental restoration of the river and its adjacent lands; and
- Appropriate development along the river that would increase community access and enjoyment of the river while fostering economic development.

Construction began in 2000 in the undeveloped areas south of the city. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers used new techniques to create flood protection, reconnect the river to its natural floodplain while restoring or recreating more than 900 acres of historic wetlands. As work moved upstream, toward the downtown area, the city took the lead. It managed the design and

construction of four major bridge replacements, provided necessary environmental cleanup and positioned riverside properties for future development.

The project preserved historic and low-income housing on the west side of the river, while cleaning up contamination and expanding the floodplain to the east. The city advocated for riverside trails to be incorporated into the project design ensuring that areas such as Veterans Memorial Park and the Oxbow Bypass were designed and funded as usable public space amenities rather than simply water conveyance or detention areas. The city contributed funding for projects that were not covered by federal components and private sector developments.

After six years of construction, the city started seeing results. The damage from a New Year's Day Flood in 2006 was far less than it would have been if a number of project components had not been completed. Dozens of species of fish, birds and mammals began to repopulate areas where they had not been seen in decades. Contemporary hotels, offices, retail and housing replaced blighted and underused properties along the river's edge, increasing economic development for the city.

The Great Recession hindered the pace of the project, but the city used the slowdown to develop a Downtown Specific Plan. It specified public improvements, a public art ordinance, creating a permanent funding source for public art, and a Tourism Improvement District, establishing a dependable funding source for destination marketing. Investors have renewed private development efforts, new businesses are filling once-vacant spaces, and businesses that weathered the recession are now prospering.

As of mid-2014, the city was experiencing a strong economic rebound, which was accelerating the completion of river trails and its third pocket park on the riverfront. The crucial Oxbow Bypass is on the verge of construction – the next major milestone in providing flood protection with space for a public park.

The total public and private investment (real estate transactions and construction) in the riverfront/ downtown area since 1996 now tops \$1.16 billion, with just under \$1 billion of this amount from private investment.

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**'Upcoming Hearings' Continued from Page 1...**

Here are a number of upcoming hearings of interest to cities:

**Feb. 23**

- **Assembly Transportation Committee**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 4202
  - Information Hearing: The Basics of Transportation Funding
- **Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 126
  - Information Hearing: The Administration of California's State Taxes

**Feb. 24**

- **Joint Hearing of the Senate Transportation and Housing and Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 2 on Resources, Environmental Protection, Energy and Transportation**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 4203
  - Informational Hearing: Funding the Transportation Maintenance Backlog
- **Assembly Privacy and Consumer Protection**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 444
  - Informational Hearing: The State of Privacy in California

**Feb. 25**

- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3 on Resources and Transportation**, 9 a.m., State Capitol, Room 447
  - Hearing items include the State Transportation Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency
- **Joint Hearing of the Senate Governance and Finance and Natural Resources and Water Committees**, Upon adjournment of Senate Governance and Finance Committee, State Capitol, Room 3191

- Information Hearing: Strategies and Innovations in Financing Local Storm Water and Dry Season Runoff Improvements

### March 3

- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 4 on State Administration**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 447
  - Hearing will cover a number of items including the Governor's Dissolution of Redevelopment Process Proposal and the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development
    - **NOTE:** The League urges members to send a representative to this hearing, contact their League regional manager to join various upcoming in-district legislative meetings they may be coordinating and call legislators to inform them about your city's concerns. More information about the Governor's proposal is available on the [Department of Finance's website](#).

### March 4

- **Joint Hearing of the Assembly Public Employees, Retirement and Social Security and Senate Public Employees and Retirement Committees**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 3191
  - Informational Hearing: Orientation and Report of the California Actuarial Advisory Panel
- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3 on Resources and Transportation**
  - Hearing will cover the State Water Resources Control Board and Department of Water Resources
- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5 on Public Safety**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 437
  - Hearing will cover a number of items including Proposition 47, realignment under AB 109 and City Law Enforcement Grants

### March 10

- **Joint Hearing of Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Quality Committees**, 9:30 a.m., State Capitol, Room 112
  - Oversight Hearing: Ensuring Groundwater Protection: Is the Underground Injection Control Well Program Working?
- **Joint Hearing of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 4 on State Administration and Revenue and Taxation Committee**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 126
  - Hearing will cover the State Board of Equalization

### March 11

- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3 on Resources and Transportation**, 9:00 a.m., State Capitol, Room 447
  - Hearing will cover the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery and the Department of Toxic Substances Control
- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5 on Public Safety**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 444
  - Hearing will cover the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, including the new trends, deficiencies and the Assembly's budget priorities on this topic

### March 12

- **Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 4 on State Administration and General Government**, 9:30 a.m., State Capitol, Room 2040
  - Hearing will cover the Department of Housing and Community Development

### March 13

- **Senate Transportation and Housing Committee**, 1:30 p.m., Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, METRO Board Room, 3rd Floor, One Gateway Plaza, Los Angeles
  - Informational Hearing: Transportation Funding

#### March 17

- **Joint Hearing of the Senate Transportation and Housing and Environmental Quality Committees**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 4203
  - Oversight Hearing: The Road to 2020 and Beyond: The Role of the Transportation Sector in Meeting California's Climate Goals

#### March 18

- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5 on Public Safety**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 437
  - Hearing will cover a number of items including Body Cameras
- **Joint Hearing Assembly Local Government Committee and Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 4202
  - Information Hearing: Transient Occupancy Taxes and the Home-Sharing Phenomenon

#### March 19

- **Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 2 on Resources, Environmental, Protection, Energy and Transportation**, 9:30 a.m., State Capitol, Room 112
  - Hearing will cover the Department of Water Resource, Delta Stewardship Council and State Water Resources Control Board
- **Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 4 on State Administration and General Government**, 9:30 a.m., State Capitol, Room 2040
  - Hearing will cover State Finances, including the Department of Finance, State Board of Equalization and the Franchise Tax Board

#### March 24

- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 4 on State Administration**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 447
  - Hearing will cover a number of items including Commission on State Mandates and Public Employees' Retirement System

#### March 25

- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3 on Resources and Transportation**, 9 a.m., State Capitol, Room 447
  - Hearing will cover a number of items including Department of Transportation and the California Transportation Commission

#### March 26

- **Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 2 on Resources, Environmental Protection, Energy and Transportation**, 9:30 a.m., State Capitol, Room 112
  - Hearing will cover a number of items including Cap-and-Trade, the Strategic Growth Council and High-Speed Rail Authority
- **Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 5 on Corrections, Public Safety and the Judiciary**, 9:30 a.m., State Capitol, Room 113
  - Hearing will cover Realignment

#### April 9

- **Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 4 on State Administration and General Government**, 9:30 a.m., Room 2040
  - Hearing will cover a number of items related to Local Government and Economic Development including Redevelopment Agencies Dissolution Status and Issues, the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development and the Commission on State Mandates

#### April 14

- **Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 4 on State Administration**, 1:30 p.m., State Capitol, Room 447
  - Hearing will cover the State Controller's Office and Secretary of State

**April 16**

- **Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 2 on Resources, Environmental Protection, Energy and Transportation**, 9:30 a.m., State Capitol, Room 112
    - Hearing will cover the LAO's Overview of the Transportation Budget, the California Transportation Commission and the Department of Transportation
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