

WEEKLY ReCAP

DECEMBER 11, 2020

A sampling of news and views from around the county,
the country, and the world.



P.O. Box 935, San Andreas, CA, 95249 • (209) 772-1463

*Protecting our rural environment by promoting citizen participation
in sustainable land use planning since 2006*

The Community Action Project administers the Calaveras Planning Coalition, which is comprised of regional and local organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals who promote public participation in land use and resource planning to ensure a healthy human, natural, and economic environment now and in the future. Learn more at www.calaverascap.com.

NEXT CALAVERAS PLANNING COALITION MEETING:
January 4, 2021, 3:00 P.M. TO 5:00 P.M. VIA ZOOM

NEW MEMBERS WELCOME AT CPC MEETINGS

Organizations, groups, and individuals may join the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC). Prospective members may attend two consecutive meetings before making a final decision on membership in the Coalition. The membership form is a pledge to support and advocate for the Coalition's eleven Land Use and Development Principles, which you will find on our website: www.calaverascap.com. There is no membership fee. However, members are encouraged to donate to the Community Action Project/Calaveras Planning Coalition. Visitors and prospective members will, by necessity, be excluded from attorney/client privileged discussions. If you are interested in membership, please email CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino, tomi@volcano.net, to receive a membership form, agenda, and the Zoom meeting connection.

To help prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our county, all CAP/CPC meetings will be held online via Zoom until restrictions are lifted by the Public Health Department.

FYI All,

To view the **proposed rezoning map** (GPU Implementation), visit the Planning Department web page: <https://planning.calaverasgov.us/>, then click on **"Zoning Map Update"**... Or, just click here directly:
<https://gisportal.co.calaveras.ca.us/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=ebdd24eb70db4b5494fbdce6427454bc>

The map and zoning layers are a bit tricky to use. For **Directions**, see the top right of the Planning page under **Zoning>Zoning Map Help**. Or just click here directly for directions:

https://planning.calaverasgov.us/Portals/Planning/Documents/General%20Plan%201996/Zoning%20Help.pdf?ver=Qa2gInCvLb_bIyIq0e1Dfw%3d%3d

There are approx. 5,000 parcels that have been changed to new zones. Most are in the "interim" (U) zone; the rest are in "inconsistent" zones.

Colleen
MyValleySprings.com

Next BOS meeting December 15 – agenda not yet available

Proposed zoning map update ready for public review

The Valley Springs News, Wednesday, December 9, 2020

The Calaveras County Planning Department has released the proposed zoning map update to bring the county wide zoning into compliance with the General Plan.

The purpose of the map changes are to rezone parcels zoned with the interim zones of Unclassified and Highway Service to a zone compatible with the General Plan land use designations. This affects approximately 5,000 parcels in the county. In addition, another 1,100 parcels are proposed for rezoning to make them consistent with the land use designations.

The zoning code and zoning map are the primary tools for implementing the General Plan. In November, 2019, after thirteen years of work, the Board of Supervisors adopted the new General Plan. In January of 2020, the Board provided direction that the zoning map and ordinance were high priorities and Planning Department staff have begun the process of implementing that new plan.

To review the proposed changes, go to the Planning Department's website at <https://planning.calaverasgov.us/> and select the zoning tab from the menu bar at the top. Directions for accessing the map information are available by clicking [HERE](#).

Questions or comments regarding the proposed zoning amendment should be directed to Peter Maurer at (209) 743-6394 or by email to pmaurer@co.calaveras.ca.us. The zoning map amendment is expected to be reviewed by the Planning Commission in January.

Comments should be received by the Planning Department no later than January 8, 2021.

Exodus continues of Calaveras department heads

By Nick Baptists / The Valley Springs News / December 9, 2020

Two more Calaveras County department heads are departing.

Planning Director Peter Maurer and Health and Human Services Agency Director Kristin Stranger are joining Public Works Director Joshua Pack in an exodus from the Government Center in San Andreas.

Maurer, architect of the recently adopted Calaveras County General Plan update, is retiring in March, while Stranger, who has guided the county through the COVID-19 outbreak, is leaving to accept a job with Los Angeles County. As reported in The News last week, Pack has accepted the public works director's position in Butte County.

"It is with mixed emotions that I am letting you know that I intend to retire at the end of March," Maurer said in his Nov. 30 notice to the county Board of Supervisors. "I am providing this notice at this time so that the County has sufficient time to recruit for my replacement and not leave too much of a gap between my leaving and my successor's arrival."

Maurer has been the county's planning director the past seven years.

"There have been a number of unanticipated twists and turns along the way that have made it interesting to say the least," Maurer said in his notice to supervisors. "The County management team has been superb to work with, and we have weathered many challenges these past few years. I have enjoyed working with each of you as Board members, and I hope that I have executed my duties in accordance with your directions."

He anticipates his last day working in the office will be Feb. 26 and he will use accrued vacation during March with his last official day of employment being March 26.

"I am proud of the Planning Department staff," Maurer said in his notice. "They are hard-working professional, committed to making Calaveras County a better place to live, and to providing the best public service possible. I believe that my tenure here has improved the perception as well as the actual conduct of the department, that we are a solution-oriented organization, working within the constraints of local and state laws and regulations to improve the economic, social, and environmental health of the community."

In her resignation letter, Stranger said she is looking forward to living closer to family in Los Angeles County.

"Thank you for the opportunity to serve this wonderful community under your committed leadership. I have enjoyed every minute working side-by-side with the talented and professional HHSA team," her letter reads. "Every day they made the mission of this agency of being dedicated to engaging and strengthening the community. They do this in collaboration with fantastic fellow county departments and community partners. I have nothing but positive feedback to share about my career here in Calaveras County and the utmost faith that the HHSA team will continue to deliver high-quality services, as they always do."

Stranger has been at her job for the past four years and she is leaving later this month.

"I will cherish the many memories I have from serving the residents of Calaveras County and am grateful for all I have learned," she wrote.

Public Health reports 32 new COVID-19 cases in Calaveras County

· Dec 9, 2020 /The Calaveras Enterprise

The following press release was issued by Calaveras County Public Health.

On Tuesday, December 8, 2020, Calaveras Public Health confirmed 32 additional cases of COVID-19 in Calaveras County. To date, Calaveras Public Health reports a total of 588 confirmed cases of COVID-19. Of those cases, 455 cases have since recovered while 111 cases remain active. There have been a total of 22 confirmed deaths related to COVID-19 reported in Calaveras County.

As of December 6, 2020 at 11:59 pm, the Regional Stay at Home Order went into effect. The state released a map of the 5 regions being measured. When a region falls below 15% Intensive Care Unit (ICU) bed capacity, the Regional Stay at Home Order goes into effect. Calaveras County is grouped with 11 other counties which include: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, San Benito, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare, Tuolumne. Calaveras is currently subject to the requirements of the Regional Stay at Home Order given regional ICU bed capacity is below 15%.

The Regional Stay at Home Order will be in effect for 3 weeks and urges Californians to stay at home as much as possible to limit the mixing with other households that can lead to COVID-19 spread. It allows access to (and travel for) critical services and allows outdoor

activities to preserve Californians' physical and mental health. This limited closure will help stop the surge and prevent overwhelming regional ICU capacity.

Everyone is at risk for COVID-19 and should take precautions to avoid getting exposed to the virus. Older adults and people with underlying medical conditions are at increased risk for severe illness and death from COVID-19. This means that they may be hospitalized, require a ventilator to help them breathe, or may even be fatal. COVID-19 can be very serious and Calaveras Public Health asks that you follow the safety guidelines.

During the holidays, Calaveras Public Health urges the public to remain cautious. The safest way to gather during the holidays is to spend time with people in the same household and gather virtually with family and friends who aren't from your household. Traveling to see friends and family during the holidays could increase your risk of infection and further the spread of COVID-19 in your community. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) strongly recommends:

- Californians stay home or in their region and avoid non-essential travel
 - Anyone arriving into California should voluntarily self-quarantine for 14 days.
- For complete details and requirements, read CDPH's Travel Advisory.

No-cost testing for COVID-19 is available at the OptumServe COVID-19 testing site in Sonoma. The site is located at the Mother Lode Fairgrounds, Blake Elliot Building (Creekside), 220 Southgate Drive, Sonoma, CA 95370. The OptumServe site is now open 7 days a week. If you would like to be tested for COVID-19 please register at www.lhi.care/covidtesting or call (888) 634-1123. Additional COVID-19 test sites can be found on the Calaveras County COVID-19 website.

Testing for COVID-19 is advised, especially:

- People who have symptoms of COVID-19
- People who have had close contact with someone that is confirmed to have COVID-19
- People who have been asked or referred to get tested by their healthcare provider

Public Health staff continue to investigate new cases to determine any possible persons who may have had close personal contact with the positive individuals. Close contacts may be contacted by the health department and monitored for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 illness.

Protect yourself and others from COVID-19. The virus is spreading in the community. Stay safe by taking some simple precautions. The best ways to avoid exposure to COVID-19 are to:

- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth in public places and anywhere you will be around people who do not live with you, including close friends and family.
- Wash your hands often. Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from other people.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid crowds

Symptoms can appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. The symptoms of COVID 19 include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

A person who has tested positive with COVID-19 may not have all or any of these symptoms. A person who has tested positive but does not have any symptoms is considered asymptomatic and can still pass on the virus to others while they are infectious.

Look for emergency warning signs for COVID-19. If someone is showing signs, seek emergency care immediately:

- Trouble breathing
- New confusion or weakness
- Bluish lips or face
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- Inability to wake or stay awake

Calaveras Public Health asks the public to be aware of scams. A contact tracer will never ask for your social security number, bank account number, or credit card information. Our contact tracers work for Calaveras Public Health. Contact tracers help contact people who have COVID-19 to track symptoms and make sure to keep our community safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Calaveras Public Health encourages that all people 6 months and older get their yearly flu vaccine. While getting the flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, it is shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization, and death. Please speak with your local medical provider or pharmacist for flu vaccine.

To receive information and resources related to COVID-19 visit the Calaveras County COVID-19 website.

Agricultural production in Calaveras fell by 5.3% last year

County's annual crop report shows downturn in some commodities; winegrapes, walnuts, bees see increases

· [By Noah Berner](#) / The Calaveras Enterprise / December 10, 2020

The annual Calaveras County Department of Agriculture's crop report shows a decline in many of the region's ag commodities, though some, like wine grapes and walnuts, saw upticks in year-over-year values from 2018 to 2019.

The Calaveras County Department of Agriculture's recently released 2019 Crop Report shows a 5.3% decrease in agricultural production in the county in 2019.

The leading farm commodities, in order of value, were cattle and calves, timber, wine grapes, poultry, walnuts, nursery products, apiary products, almonds and miscellaneous livestock.

Cattle and calves decreased in value from \$7.8 million in 2018 to \$7.2 million in 2019, and timber decreased from \$8.9 million to \$6.4 million.

"Timber decreased in value by 28% and cattle decreased in value by 7.9% in 2019," the report reads.

The value of wine grapes rose from \$3.3 million in 2018 to \$4.5 million in 2019, which includes 522 acres of red grapes and 189 acres of white grapes.

"Winegrapes continue to increase in value as the price stayed steady and production increased," the report reads.

Poultry, which includes chickens, turkeys, game birds, etc., decreased from \$3.3 million to \$3.1 million, though poultry prices increased by 7.7%. Walnuts increased from \$1.3 million to \$1.7 million, and almonds increased from \$218,400 to \$261,000.

"Walnuts and almonds increased in both tonnage and value to help lessen the overall decrease in agricultural values," the report reads.

Nursery products increased from \$263,000 to \$285,000, and apiary products increased from \$230,000 to \$273,900.

"Local beekeepers saw a 19% increase in value, as the demand for pollination services in the valley remained strong," the report reads.

In addition, miscellaneous livestock and poultry, which includes goats, llamas, emus, fish, etc., decreased from \$242,000 to \$155,000.

"There was a 35% reduction in the miscellaneous category of livestock and poultry," the report reads. "The cause of the reduction was the lack of demand for goats for human consumption during the COVID-19 outbreak and the lack of fish production in the county."

The total production value of agricultural products in the county declined from \$30.1 million in 2018 to \$28.5 million in 2019.

"Overall, agricultural production in the county fell by 5.3%," the report reads. "The effects of COVID-19 outbreak and normal market cycle triggered this reduction."

Appeals seek to overturn Highway 120 resort approvals

Alex MacLean Dec 7, 2020

https://www.uniondemocrat.com/news/article_38febb66-38fe-11eb-8a7d-6f5bd604f394.html

Appeals seeking to overturn the approval of both the Yosemite Under Canvas and Terra Vi Lodge resort projects on Highway 120 between Groveland and Yosemite National Park have been filed and will be considered by the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors at back-to-back public meetings later this month.

The Yosemite Under Canvas appeal is slated to be heard by the board at 2 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 17, while the Terra Vi Lodge appeal is scheduled for 2 p.m. Friday, Dec. 18. Both projects were approved by the Tuolumne County Planning Commission at recent meetings that lasted about five hours each due to the number of people who spoke in opposition to them.

Under Canvas, a Montana-based company that bills itself "nation's premier upscale camping experience provider" is seeking to develop a luxury campground with 99 safari-style tents at Hardin Flat Road and Highway 120 that would be open seasonally from spring through fall.

The Hansji Corp., an Anaheim-based company that has developed 2 million square feet of office, retail and hotel space over the past 40-plus years in business, wants to build the Terra Vi Lodge on a portion of a 64-acre property at Sawmill Mountain Road and Highway 120, less than a half-mile from the Under Canvas campground

Terra Vi would operate year-round and feature a public market, general lodge with 100 guest rooms, 26 cabin guest rooms in seven buildings, and five apartments for employees with four units each. There would also be an on-site septic system and a helicopter landing pad for emergency uses only.

Both properties are owned by the family of the late Tim Manly, a former self-made logger who bought the property in the 1980s and got it rezoned for commercial development because he envisioned them as prime locations for future hotels.

The projects were each proposed more than two years ago and have faced vehement opposition from dozens of neighboring property owners, South County residents, owners of other hotels and resorts on Highway 120, and local environmental advocacy groups.

Nearly 30 people spoke in opposition to the Under Canvas project and one person voiced support at the planning commission's meeting on Nov. 18, while 40 people spoke in opposition and four in support of the Terra Vi Lodge project at the commission's meeting on Tuesday.

Appeals must be filed within 10 days of the commission's decision, and a public hearing for the board to consider an appeal must be scheduled at least 14 days after one is filed. The cost to file an appeal is \$1,000, which was raised from \$164 in 2018 to better cover the cost of county staff time to process them.

The appeal of the Under Canvas project's approval was filed on Nov. 25 by attorney Ellison Folk of Shute, Mihaly, and Weinberger, LLP, a San Francisco-based law firm that specializes in land use and environmental law, on behalf of the citizens' group known as Save Sawmill Mountain.

Folk wrote in the appeal letter that the project doesn't comply with the county's General Plan with regard to fire safety standards and that the final environmental impact report does not adequately analyze and mitigate impacts related to wildfire, noise, water, public service, housing and traffic.

An appeal of the Terra Vi Lodge's approval was filed by a woman named Clare Cosovich on Thursday, less than 48 hours after the commission's decision.

In an email posted publicly on the county's website, Cosovich stated she is a lifelong Tuolumne County resident and wants to appeal the project's approval because she doesn't believe there's a sufficient amount of water at the building site

Cosovich could not be reached for comment on Friday.

Opponents of the projects have aired grievances with the county's permitting process that they feel has purposely been designed to limit public participation and "fast-tracked" so that the appeals would be decided by outgoing county supervisors Sherri Brennan, Karl Rodefer, and John Gray before they leave office in January.

John Buckley, executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center in Twain Harte, has expressed opposition to the projects and called them examples of "leapfrog developments" in high-severity fire zones. Such developments have come under more scrutiny in California due to the increasing frequency of massive wildfires.

Buckley estimated the projects, which are located nearly 20 miles east of Groveland and roughly six miles west of the entrance to Yosemite National Park, and others in development — like the reconstruction and expansion of the Berkeley Tuolumne Camp that burned in the 2013 Rim Fire — could generate as many as 600 to 800 guests combined per day on the Highway 120 corridor during the peak season.

"It's a classic example of not learning from the lessons that have been so dramatically revealed by these catastrophic fires of these last few years," he said. "If you ask the board of supervisors of Paradise if they should have allowed these developments in high fire-risk areas where so many people died, I would hope they would say that 'we didn't do the right thing.'"

Environmental impact reports for both projects listed Groveland Community Services District as the main provider of fire protection, but GCSD officials say they are located outside of its boundaries and that the district is ill-equipped to respond to calls for service with only one fire engine and two full-time firefighters on staff at any given time.

Buckley also took issue with the process for approving the projects, which he described as most biased and unfair he's seen in the 30 years that his center has been involved with all planning in the county.

"Planning staff, as well as a majority of the board of supervisors have obviously come to agreement to rush this forward without fair due process for interested members of the public," he said. "To provide more than 2,000 pages of an environmental impact report and then expect the public to comment on that a few days later, is disrespectful of the public, but that's what Tuolumne County has done in this process."

People who have voiced support for the project say there's a need for more guest accommodations along the Highway 120 corridor and that many of the issues raised by the opponents have been appropriately mitigated through the environmental analysis.

The supporters also argue that the projects would provide a boon for the local economy and much-needed tax revenue for the county, with the Terra Vi Lodge project alone expected to generate about \$650,000 in Transient Occupancy Tax revenues annually.

Contact Alex MacLean at amaclean@uniondemocrat.net or (209) 768-5175.

RCRC (Rural County Representatives of California) – The Barbed Wire – December 4, 2020

2021-22 Legislative Session Convenes

On Monday, December 7th, the Legislature will convene the 2021-22 Legislative Session by swearing-in new Senators and Assembly Members and introducing legislative measures (bills, resolutions, constitutional amendments, etc.). The Organizational Session, which traditionally lasts about four days, allows both houses to adopt legislative rules and introduce key legislation before the winter holiday. In an unprecedented move due to COVID-19, the Assembly will hold its swearing-in/organization meeting at the Golden 1 Center, home of the National Basketball Association's Sacramento Kings. The Senate will convene in its traditional chambers.

The Legislature is slated to reconvene on January 4, 2021. The 2021 tentative legislative calendar for the Senate can be accessed [here](#); the Assembly can be accessed [here](#).

As legislative measures are introduced, RCRC's Government Affairs staff will review the bills to assess their impact on RCRC member counties. During the 2021 Legislative Session, RCRC member counties are encouraged to share letters addressed to state and federal representatives and regulatory bodies with RCRC staff. For more information regarding state legislative activities, please contact the RCRC Governmental Affairs staff at (916) 447-4806.

RCRC Participates in Press Event on Broadband Deployment with Senator Lena Gonzalez

On Thursday, Alpine County Supervisor David Griffith participated in a virtual press conference to unveil a new broadband measure by Senator Lena A. Gonzalez (D-Long Beach). The "Broadband for All" legislative proposal outlines needed changes to the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) and will be introduced Monday, December 7th for the 2020-2021

Legislative Session. Senator Gonzalez's proposal provides continued funding for the CASF program, the state's broadband infrastructure funding program, as well as provisions that will empower local governments to leverage state funding to create municipal broadband systems in communities that have been historically denied access to high-quality broadband connectivity.

Senator Gonzalez's proposal will receive a bill number upon introduction next week, and will begin to move through the legislative process early next year. For more information, please contact Tracy Rhine at TRhine@rcrcnet.org.

Insurance Commissioner Again Exercises Emergency One-Year Nonrenewal Moratorium After Wildfires

Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara announced on Thursday additional communities that will be protected under Senate Bill 824 from residential insurance cancellations and nonrenewals for one year in wildfire-impacted areas. Commissioner Lara authored SB 824 in 2018 while he was still a member of the California State Senate. Under SB 824, the Commissioner may prohibit insurers from canceling or nonrenewing homeowners policies for a full calendar year in areas that have had a state of emergency declared due to a high severity wildfire. Due to the catastrophic nature of 2020's wildfire season, large portions of California have been severely impacted by wildfires and can be offered protection from policy nonrenewals under SB 824. This week's moratorium is in addition to a number of communities protected under SB 824 in early November. The Commissioner's Bulletin which contains all of the zip codes protected under the moratorium can be viewed on the Department of Insurance's website [here](#).

RCRC Helps Coordinate Coalition Urging CalEPA to Address Concerns with New Standards for Management of Treated Wood Waste

On Tuesday, a broad coalition of more than 60 local government and solid waste organizations, including RCRC, sent a [letter](#) to the Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) outlining concerns about new standards for treated wood waste (TWW) that go into effect on January 1, 2021.

The existing standards for managing TWW, including authorizing landfill disposal, have been in place since 2004, but will expire on December 31, 2020 as a result of Governor Newsom's recent veto of Senate Bill 68 (Galgiani). This means that all TWW, including fence posts, sill plates, landscape timbers, pilings, guardrails, and decking, will have to be managed as hazardous waste, hauled by a registered hazardous waste transporter, and disposed in hazardous waste landfills beginning January 1, 2021. These changes will exponentially increase management and disposal costs and could lead to a significant increase in illegal dumping of TWW.

The veto of SB 68 leaves the solid waste industry, the business community, and local governments with significant management challenges, exorbitant costs, and exponentially increased risk of illegal TWW disposal.

The coalition is urging CalEPA, Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), and the Governor's Office to consider several options, including issuance of variances, that would allow TWW to be managed under the current standards for collection and disposal. The variances would be temporary, providing the coalition time to either 1) develop legislation that can be supported, quickly passed, and signed into law, or (2) in the event legislation is not feasible or successful, develop plans and a procedure in accordance with the necessary requirements by July 1, 2021.

To better assist rural communities and solid waste enterprises, the coalition adopted RCRC's suggestion that DTSC create a standard template for issuing TWW-related variances, thereby reducing the workload for DTSC's review of the applications and the burden placed on each individual applicant.

Nevada County Participates in Legislative Committee Hearing on Emergency Response

On Monday, the Joint Committee on Emergency Management held an informational hearing on emergency response to disasters and the ongoing efficacy concerns with local government emergency alert and notification systems. RCRC was represented by Nevada County Office of Emergency Services Program Manager Paul Cummings, who was joined by several other local representatives from cities, counties and emergency response.

The hearing, held at the State Capitol, centered around the California Office of Emergency Services alert and warning [guidelines](#) that set forth local government best practices in emergency alert and notification. Despite recent statutory changes making resident contact information more accessible, local warning systems continue to be undersubscribed, putting many vulnerable community members at risk during a disaster.

Legislative materials on the hearing can be found [here](#). For more information, please contact Tracy Rhine at thine@rcrcnet.org.

RCRC Comments on Draft U.S. EPA National Recycling Strategy

On Thursday, RCRC submitted comments (along with CSAC and the League of California Cities) on the United States Environmental Protection Agency's [Draft National Recycling Strategy](#). The National Recycling Strategy seeks to identify "strategic objectives and actions needed to create a stronger, more resilient U.S. municipal solid waste recycling system." RCRC noted that local governments are the backbone of solid waste management and recycling efforts in California and are charged with diverting 50% of solid waste from landfills through source reduction, recycling, and composting. Furthermore, RCRC highlighted the fact that local governments and the solid waste industry have no control over which products will be introduced into the marketplace and for which they will ultimately be responsible for disposal. At the same time, the solid waste industry is generally good at "mining" the waste stream to find and extract materials of value when there are entities interested in purchasing those materials.

Noting that U.S. EPA is uniquely positioned to facilitate national and global cooperation among manufacturers in a way that individual states and local governments are not, RCRC urged focusing on encouraging manufacturers to design products that are readily recyclable (not just theoretically recyclable) and for which there are end markets.

Equally important, RCRC also urged U.S. EPA to improve markets for recyclable materials. With the decline of foreign markets, there is a vital need to develop domestic and local markets for recycled materials. In addition to environmental benefits, creation of domestic markets will also in job creation and economic development.

RCRC Urges Public Utilities Commission to Improve Public Safety Power Shutoff Guidelines

On Wednesday, RCRC submitted [comments](#) to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) urging them to refine and improve the guidelines governing how electrical utilities conduct Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events. Adopted in June 2019, the PSPS Guidelines were modified in June 2020 based on experiences from the 2019 events. While utilities have made significant improvements and 2020 PSPS events have been reduced in terms of their size and scope, these events still have an impact on many rural communities, residents, and businesses. While RCRC does not underestimate the risk of wildfire danger and appreciates the role that well-tailored PSPS events play in avoiding catastrophic wildfires, this option should only be used as a last resort and that utilities should make infrastructure improvements to provide local energy resiliency.

In its comments, RCRC suggested the CPUC act to:

- Regularly review whether utilities' decisions to deenergize and the conduct of PSPS events were reasonable
- Require utilities to identify areas at greatest risk of PSPS events and harden infrastructure and improve resiliency of those circuits
- Require utilities to work with communications providers and the Commission to identify communities served predominantly or exclusively by landline phone service and prioritize strategies to reduce the risk of power loss to those communities
- Place a stronger emphasis on mitigating PSPS impacts for medically sensitive residents rather than merely providing notifications to those individuals
- Prohibit utilities from directing customers to first responders for PSPS mitigation and transportation assistance.
- Develop a standard template and refine content required in utility post-event reports
- Clarify notification expectations
- Add county elections offices and food banks to the list of critical facilities for which utilities must provide
- Require regular reconciliation between utility and local government lists of critical facilities and infrastructure

Coronavirus Relief Negotiations Continue

On December 1st, a bipartisan group of lawmakers unveiled a \$908 billion coronavirus (COVID-19) relief [proposal](#). The proposal would provide \$160 billion for states and local governments "of all sizes," \$180 billion for unemployment insurance, and \$288 billion for more small business assistance through the Paycheck Protection Program. The unemployment benefits would break down to \$300 a week for 18 weeks, retroactive to December 1st. It also includes assistance for transportation-related industries, \$16 billion for vaccine development and distribution and more money for schools, childcare and the U.S. Postal Service. The proposal would also provide a short-term liability protection from COVID-19-related lawsuits until states could come up with their own protections.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) also circulated a new coronavirus relief proposal on December 1st that he claims could garner support from the White House and Senate Republicans. Senator McConnell noted that he has been speaking with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows about what President Trump would be willing to sign. Senator McConnell has twice previously offered a roughly \$500 billion COVID-19 relief bill that was rejected by Democrats. The price tag for this newest proposal looks to be around the same amount, but Senator McConnell has yet to provide details of any substantive differences between that and the new bill.

In a joint statement on Wednesday, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-New York) said the \$908 billion bipartisan COVID-19 relief proposal offered on Tuesday should serve as a basis for immediate negotiations. "We and others will offer improvements, but the need to act is immediate and we believe that with good faith negotiations we could come to an agreement," the pair stated.

Congressional Funding - Looming Federal Government Shutdown

Negotiators are making progress on the Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations bills, with several of the 12 bills being close to finished. Adoption of these spending bills would provide a blueprint for federal spending for the remainder of the 2021 Fiscal Year. The biggest sticking points in talks remain how to classify funding for veterans medical care and whether to allocate the money for southern border wall construction that President Trump requested. Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard Shelby (R-Alabama) stated that if appropriators have not reached a deal on December 9th, then lawmakers will need to pass another continuing resolution (CR) to give them more time to try and broker a deal. The current CR expires on December 11th and absence a deal or CR, there would be a federal government shutdown. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) also noted that tax extenders probably will not make it into the final package due to opposition from Democrats and Republican Members on the House Ways & Means Committee.

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Race

On Tuesday, the House Democratic Steering Committee finalized its recommendations for contested committee chairmanships. Subsequently, Democratic members of the House of Representatives ratified those recommendations. Of importance to RCRC, Representative David Scott (D-Georgia) will serve as the Chair of the House Agriculture Committee, thus defeating Representative Jim Costa (D-Fresno) who had also campaigned for this position. For the 117th Congress, the chair of the House Agriculture Committee will have great influence in conducting the preliminary work on the next all-important Farm Bill, which expires in 2023.

