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Published in the Press Democrat on May 1st, 2022:
Close to Home: CEQA is needed more than ever
by Noreen Evans

California has the biggest economy in the U.S. and its most stunning natural resources. Despite the state's strong environmental laws, our communities face serious problems: climate change, drought, wildfires, air pollution and loss of farmland and open space. One of California's most important tools to address these issues is the California Environmental Quality Act.

CEQA gives every Californian the right to know what our government is approving and how projects will affect our communities.

CEQA ensures transparency in government. CEQA requires the government to give you accurate information about exactly what is being approved — whether it's a giant warehouse, a freeway or a luxury home development.

CEQA requires the government to give you information on the environmental consequences of new projects.

CEQA gives you, your neighbors and community groups the right to express your opinions on projects and advocate for changes before the project is approved. CEQA requires the government to answer your questions about the proposal.

CEQA requires projects to include measures to protect public health and reduce environmental harm — measures like air filters, solar panels, industrial setbacks and conservation easements protecting farmland and wildlife habitat. CEQA requires the government to consider impacts such as increased noise and air pollution, and figure out how to reduce those impacts.

CEQA has benefited our region countless times. The city of Santa Rosa, for example, used to discharge its treated wastewater to the Russian River, which increased the water temperature, causing multiple environmental problems. Now the city pumps treated wastewater to The Geysers steamfields, providing renewable electricity for 100,000 North Bay households. This option came to the forefront because of the CEQA process, which gave our community a chance to consider the pros and cons of different alternatives.

More recently, Sonoma County approved a development agreement and sale of the former Community Hospital property on Chanate Road in Santa Rosa. Neighbors sued and the judge invalidated the sale. As a result of the CEQA process, the county agreed to permanently protect 10 acres of nature preserve with oak woodlands and seasonal creeks and wetlands.

In 2021, a comprehensive study showed that 98% of projects that undergo environmental review under CEQA move forward without legal challenge. The tiny percentage of projects that end up in court tend to be the most controversial and environmentally damaging.

Litigation is expensive and, for a neighborhood, bringing a CEQA challenge is an uphill battle. Community groups file suit only as a last resort. Where the courts have sent public agencies back to the drawing board, it is because the environmental review failed to take a hard look at important issues such as greenhouse gas emissions, water demand or cancer risks, or failed to adopt readily available measures to reduce a project's impacts.

The cost of CEQA compliance is minuscule compared to other development costs. And over the years, CEQA has been modified to eliminate or streamline environmental review for many types of housing, especially infill housing in urbanized areas. The Legislature has updated CEQA to ensure publicly beneficial projects, like transit, bike lanes and solar and recycled water projects, proceed quickly and efficiently.

Each year, land speculators and polluting industries seek to undermine California's most important environmental law. Don't be fooled by misinformation. CEQA protects you, the public. CEQA ensures you know how development will impact the air you breathe and the water you drink. It gives ordinary people the power to protect our families' health and the integrity of our neighborhoods.

As California wrestles with climate change, massive wildfires, environmental equity and sustainable growth, we need CEQA more than ever.



Noreen Evans, a former state senator, is an attorney in Santa Rosa.



May 1st was Law Day

The American Bar Association recognizes Law Day this year with the theme "Toward a More Perfect Union: The Constitution in Times of Change."

Law Day is an opportunity to reflect on the role of law in the establishment of the United States and to honor its importance in society.

Cinco de Mayo (the Fifth of May) celebrated Mexico's victory over the French Army during the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862

**Celebrating Mom
Mother's Day 2022**



Happy Mother's Day from the Charles M. Schulz Museum

Sunday, May 8th, 10:00 am–5:00 pm

Celebrating all moms! Mothers receive free admission on Mother's Day.



Mother's Day Chosen Spot Plant Expo & Sale at Luther Burbank Home & Gardens

Mother's Day – Sunday, May 8th, 10:00 am -4:00 pm

Cost: \$3:00, Children under 12 free

"Come enjoy the Spring Gardens, tour the Home, buy plants & bouquets, and enjoy the special activities."

National Nurses Week (May 6th - 12th) honors the medical professionals who sacrifice their own health for the health of society, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.



North Bay Science Discovery Day

Grace Pavilion at Sonoma County Fairgrounds

Sunday, May 15th, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

"Children, teenagers, and families are invited to attend the FREE science festival to spark wonder and curiosity about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics."

COVID-19 vaccination or negative COVID-19 test required

You Are Not Alone

Mental Health Awareness Month seeks to break stigmas surrounding mental health disorders and to foster positive attitudes about seeking help when we need it.

May is
MENTAL HEALTH
Awareness Month



Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

This month celebrates the cultural and historical contributions and influence of



Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States.

Memorial Day 2022

On May 30th, we honor and mourn the men and women who have fallen in combat while serving in the US armed forces.

Did You Know:
Memorial Day was originally called Decoration Day, and it began at the end of the Civil War. The Civil War took more lives than any other conflict in U.S. history and required the U.S. to establish its first national cemeteries.



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