

Marin County Community Development Agency



Photo courtesy of Marin County Community Development Agency



Marin County Community Development Agency is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advancing healthy, safe, and equitable communities.

The Community Development Agency has a successful history of bringing people together and collaborating with local stakeholders throughout the unincorporated areas of Marin.

Their main programs include:

- Environmental Health Services
- Building and Safety
- Sustainability
- Planning
- Environmental Review
- Housing
- Federal Grants
- Mapping
- Code Enforcement



Project Description

Marin County Community Development Agency initiated separate community engagement projects in Dillon Beach Village and Point Reyes Station to discuss water-related assets, needs, concerns, and potential next steps. Topics included water supply, onsite wastewater treatment, sea level rise, water quality, flooding, and other related issues.

Background on Dillon Beach Village and Point Reyes Station

Demographics

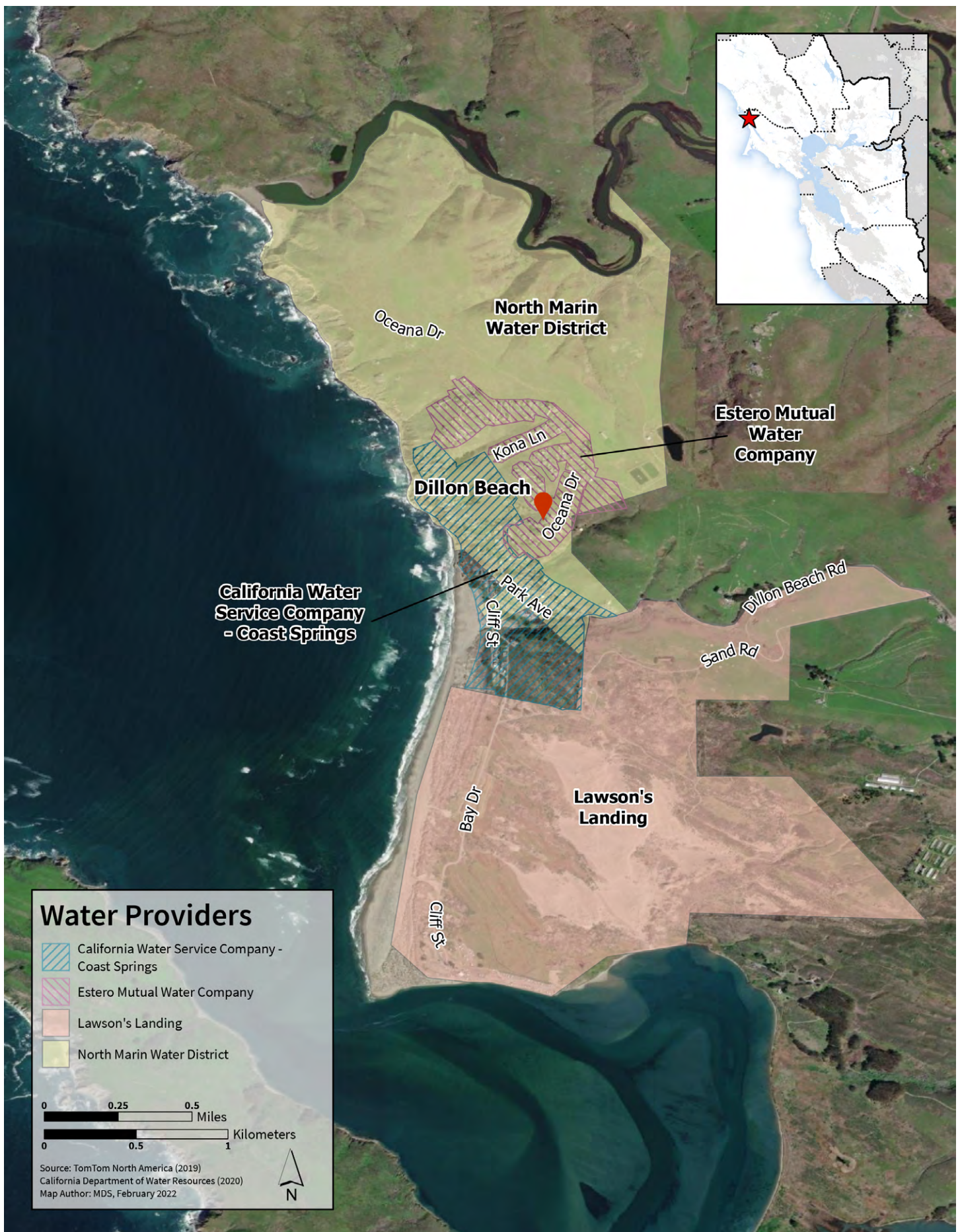
Dillon Beach is a small unincorporated community in northern Marin County with approximately 150 residences characterized by small lots with older homes originally intended for seasonal use. The area is approximately 8.7 acres (0.01 square miles.) The old and aging infrastructure was not designed for current year-round use. Demographics for Dillon Beach Village are difficult to obtain since it is part of the larger Dillon Beach census block that includes Oceana Marin, which is characterized by newer homes on large bluff lots overlooking the ocean.

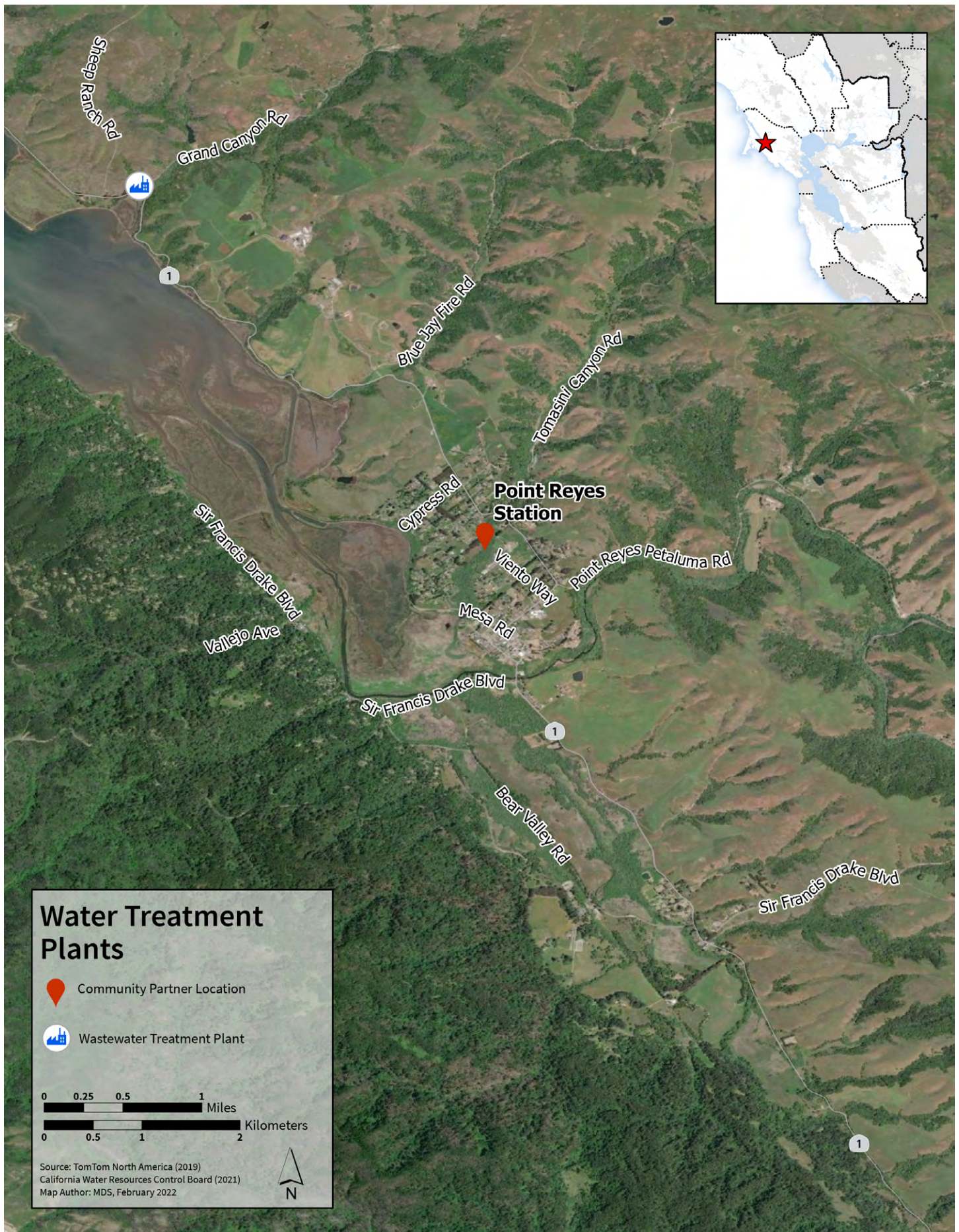
For Point Reyes Station, the planning area in their community plan was designated as the project study area. It entails 1,500 acres (2.3 square miles) and in 2017 had a population of approximately 443 residents with a median household income of \$31,250. There are approximately 360 developed parcels in Point Reyes Station. The median age is 61. Approximately 72% of the residents speak English and 20% speak Spanish (MCCDA, 2022).

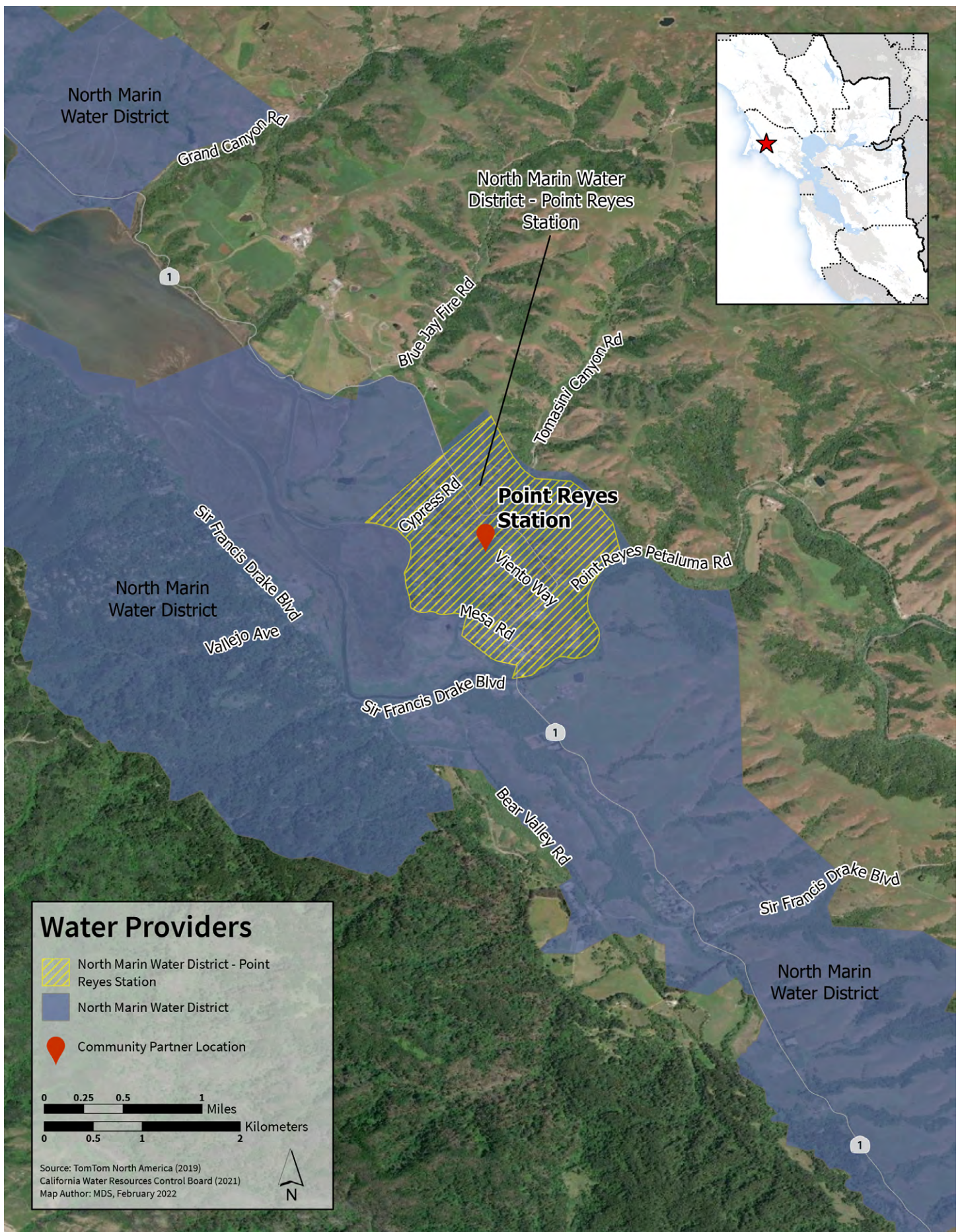
History of Environmental Injustice and Inequity in Dillon Beach Village and Point Reyes Station

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) DAC mapping tool identified Point Reyes Station as a Severely Disadvantaged Community and the Dillon Beach area as a Disadvantaged Community. Both unincorporated areas are served by a private domestic water system. Households and businesses in each community are served by individual onsite wastewater treatment (septic) systems.

Dillon Beach is in the Coast Springs water system within the Redwood Valley District of the California Water Service, or Cal Water (California Water Service, 2016). Cal Water's 2019 Water Quality Report found that the Coast Springs system had moderately hard water (at 88 parts per million or ppm) and was not in compliance with the Manganese Secondary Maximum Contaminant Level (Cal Water, 2019). Some residents reported water that was brown, tasted like chlorine, and left rust stains (Mathew, 2018).







Point Reyes Station: The county identified three water-related issues particular to the town:

1. Shortage of publicly accessible bathrooms
2. Current septic restrictions regarding building accessory and junior accessory dwelling units
3. Sea level rise, such as rising groundwater leading to increased salinity

Wastewater has been a controversial subject in Point Reyes Station for over 30 years. Despite new information, historical concerns remain that improving wastewater management in Point Reyes Station could open the door to more development and more tourism that would change the community character. While there are other ways to limit development, some strongly prefer to limit growth by limiting the ability of businesses to provide adequate restrooms onsite. Currently, some businesses cannot upgrade their septic systems because of site constraints and in turn redirect their patrons to the public restrooms, which creates a heavier demand on public facilities. Some in the community prefer to provide more public restrooms rather than risk businesses' opportunity to expand.

In one of the community meetings, a member of the Shoreline Unified School District School Board found it totally unacceptable that children in the area had missed eight days of school due largely to flooding. She further added that West Marin School has neither the water supply nor the septic capacity to handle a crowd in case of emergency in Point Reyes Station (Mathew, 2018).

North Marin Water District supplies the water for Point Reyes Station through three wells. The water is vulnerable to iron and manganese contamination, but the North Marin Water District treats and filters the water while adding chlorine as a disinfectant. Point Reyes Station's water is also vulnerable to saltwater intrusion (NMWD, 2019). Residents describe the water as undrinkable because of the high salt content. The water is cloudy, salty, and can cause nausea. The North Marin Water District plans to build a new well further away from salt intrusion to mitigate this issue (Bra, 2020).

Community-Identified Strengths and Assets

Over the past several years, as part of the Marin County Local Coastal Program, the Marin County Community Development Agency (CDA) conducted numerous workshops to hear community members, environmental groups, and the agricultural community identify their environmental concerns. Communities were supportive of the project, collaborated on developing needs, and prioritized the resources to solve complex environmental issues.

Dillon Beach: Dillon Beach Village is a small, strong, and tight-knit community. It is a historical vacation beach village where multiple generations of people live. The community wants to preserve the character of the village and is interested in designating it as a national historic district. While the community wants to limit development in the village, they are interested in improvements.

Point Reyes Station: The community character at the Pt. Reyes Station is rural and historic. There was strong community involvement in the needs assessment, i.e., 59% of the participants were present in the community involvement meetings (n= 105 responses). There was a huge emphasis on resilience to climate change.

Summary of Outreach and Education Efforts

The first step for each community was to gather background data on water and wastewater resources and conditions. This included separate searches into the County Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data for hydrology, wetlands, sensitive habitats, water services providers, and land use policies. Marin County Environmental Health Services (EHS) septic records were examined for the age and extent of permitted repairs. Sea level rise scenarios were compiled from Marin County's Sea-Level Adaptation Response Team; this included identifying vulnerable assets. Each Community Plan was consulted to see what historic problems were identified and remain unresolved. Draft water stories/needs assessments were prepared as a starting point to initiate conversations in each community.

Community outreach was initiated through the office of District Supervisor Dennis Rodoni, Marin County Board of Supervisors (BOS). The project was introduced during the supervisor's office hours for each community. The press was notified of the engagement process through the BOS approval of the grant application and contract. Lists of stakeholders were created that included residents, property owners, utilities, businesses, and interested parties.

In Dillon Beach Village, since there were no existing community groups, email addresses were first collected from Supervisor Rodoni's office and from responses to newspaper articles. Each meeting was also included in the weekly events calendar of the local West Marin newspaper, **The Point Reyes Light**. Meeting fliers were distributed door-to-door by a neighborhood volunteer and posted in the local post office. After the first meeting, informational materials including a draft water story, letters, and surveys were mailed to all property owners in Dillon Beach Village. Surveys were also handed out to residents who weren't property owners or didn't have internet access. With each meeting, the email distribution list grew.

In Point Reyes Station, Marin County Community Development Agency worked with several community groups to distribute meeting notices, agendas and surveys. These groups included the Point Reyes Station Village Association, West Marin School, Main Street Moms, Community Land Trust Association of West Marin, local members of the West Marin Chamber of Commerce, local affordable housing organizations, among others. After the first meeting, a website was set up for the project: <https://tinyurl.com/PRSWaterStory>. Letters were mailed to all property owners in Point Reyes Station providing the link to the draft water story and online survey. County staff was interviewed on the local radio station KWMR to encourage community participation. Again, with each meeting, the email distribution list grew.

A total of three meetings were held in each community. While the nature of the issues and responses varied in each community, the general format was similar.

At the first meeting, county staff introduced the project and key stakeholders such as water district staff and regulators of onsite wastewater systems. Staff presented an overview of each community's drinking water system, how wastewater is treated, problems identified in each community plan, local results of recreational water quality monitoring, and local mapping of sea level rise scenarios. Next, attendees broke into small groups to discuss the following:

1. What does the community do well?
2. What are your water-related concerns or issues (e.g., water supply, drinking water quality, condition of septic systems, sewage contamination, flooding, water quality of beach and local creek, sea level rise)? and
3. Share stories about these concerns.

After 30 minutes of small group discussions, each group presented their comments, which were recorded on large post-it pads. After all groups made presentations, Marin County Community Development Agency asked everyone to begin prioritizing issues. Participants were given three differently colored dots to mark their first, second, and third priorities.

Based on the responses from the first meeting, a survey and draft water story were prepared for each community. A group of three to five volunteers from the first meeting provided additional input and review of the survey.

In Dillon Beach Village, the draft water story and survey were mailed to all property owners, emailed to the growing list of residents, and hand delivered by volunteers to folks who were renters.



Downtown Point Reyes Station is a popular summer destination for tourists. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Bourn of Inspired Imperfections

In Point Reyes Station, a website was created for residents to review the draft water story and complete the survey online. A letter was sent to 402 property owners explaining the project and providing the weblink. Contact information was provided for anyone who wanted a hard copy of the water story and survey. Hard copies of the survey were also available in the Point Reyes Station library in both English and Spanish, and computers were available for anyone to fill out the survey.

At the second meeting in each community, the draft water story and preliminary survey results were presented. Representatives from utilities and government agencies were at the meetings to answer questions and concerns raised at the first meeting. For instance, in both communities, Marin County Community Development Agency had fire department representatives available to answer concerns about adequate water to fight fires. Representatives from the water districts answered questions about the quality of water and adequacy of the supply. In Point Reyes Station, a County park ranger talked about the community's heightened concerns about the lack of public restrooms for visitors. In both communities, these meetings were particularly constructive for addressing many of the community concerns and highlighting challenges and problems that need to be addressed further.

At the third meeting in each community, the final survey results were presented. Both communities discussed alternative ways to address identified issues and what next steps they want to take, if any. In Dillon Beach Village, since this was the first set of community meetings held for just the Village, they also discussed setting up a more formal neighborhood group to provide an ongoing forum for community conversation.

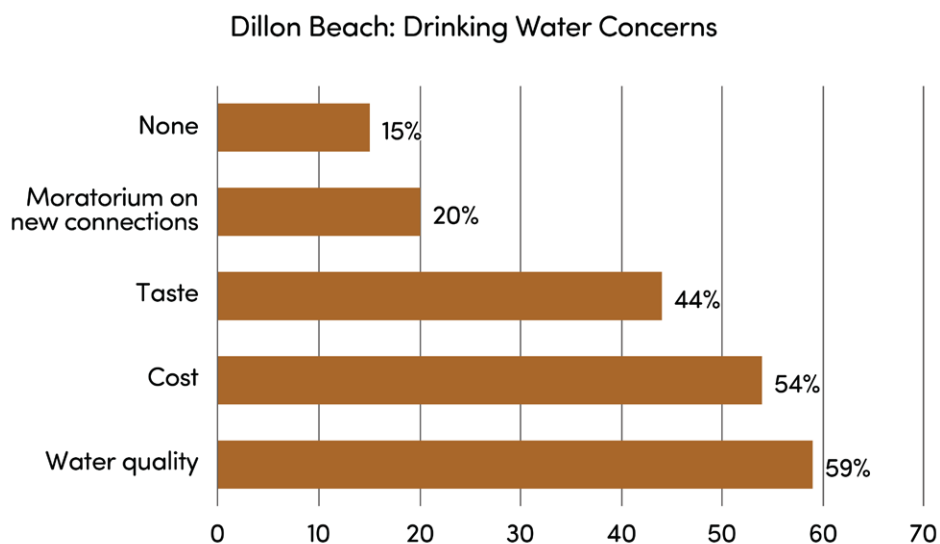
Needs Assessment Findings

A. Dillon Beach Quick Stats

1. Community members contacted: Marin County Community Development Agency estimates they reached over 200 people. That includes 160 letters and surveys mailed to property owners on December 13, 2018, 80 email addresses from meetings and survey responses (which may have duplicated mailing addresses), and fliers delivered to residents without email addresses.
2. Completed surveys: 62; approximately 42% of 149 developed parcels.
3. Community meetings:
 - November 13, 2018 – 44 attendees
 - January 29, 2019 – 38 attendees
 - April 30, 2019 – approximately 30 attendees

Issues Identified

Issues identified during brainstorming at the first workshop were consolidated into the following categories and topics for the survey. Final survey results are presented below as percentage of respondents:



1. Drinking Water concerns:

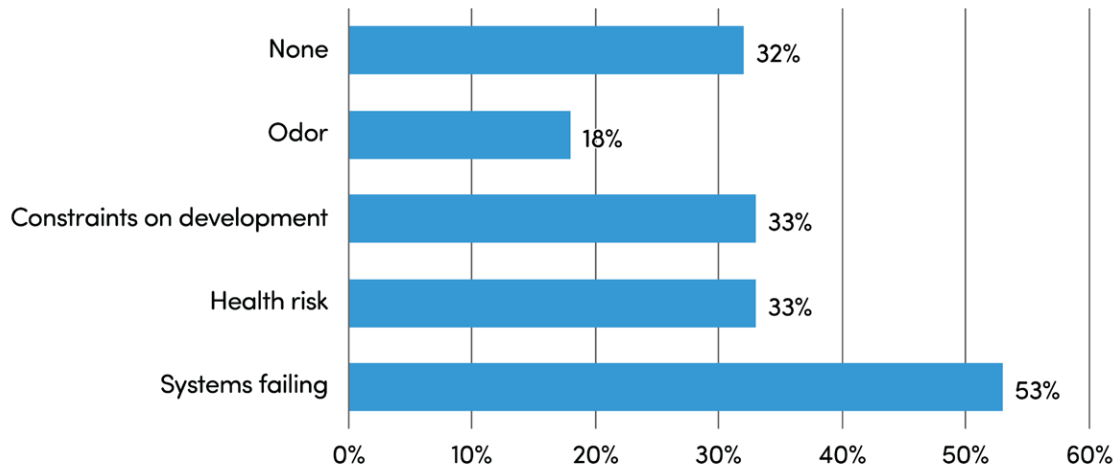
- Water quality (59%)
- Cost (54%)
- Taste (44%)
- Moratorium on new connections (20%)
- None (15%)



2. Concern about surface runoff contaminated with wastewater:

- Yes (7%)
- Unsure (46%)
- No (48%)

Dillon Beach: Concern About Onsite Wastewater Systems



3. Concern about onsite wastewater systems throughout Dillon Beach Village:

- Systems failing (53%)
- Health risk (33%)
- Constraints on development (33%)
- Odor (18%)
- None (32%)



4. Sea level rise concerns:

- Cliff erosion (58%)
- Vulnerability of utilities along Cliff Street (29%)
- Drinking water wells subject to flooding (27%)
- Storm surge flooding (17%)
- None (34%)

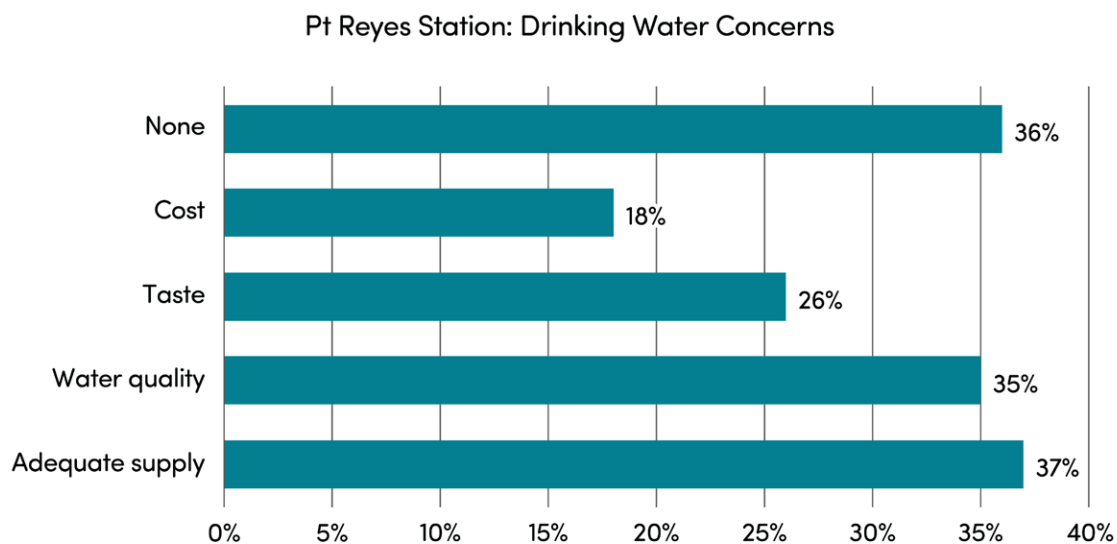
These issues were further discussed throughout the second and third meetings. Water utility representatives answered questions about cost, water quality, moratorium, repairs, etc. Since there had previously never been a forum for residents to speak directly with their water company representative from CalWater, there was some initial sense of mistrust. Once questions were answered, some concerns were eased. This is reflected in responses prioritizing concerns.

B. Point Reyes Station Quick Stats

1. Community members contacted: Marin County Community Development Agency estimates that they reached nearly 500 people: That includes 402 letters mailed to property owners on April 18, 2019, 80 email addresses from meetings and survey responses (which may have duplicated mailing addresses), as well as fliers delivered to businesses, residents, and library.
2. Completed surveys: 105; approximately 26% of 404 developed parcels.
3. Community meetings:
 - March 25, 2019 - 30 attendees
 - June 5, 2019 - 18 attendees
 - October 3, 2019 - 27 attendees

Issues Identified

Issues identified during brainstorming at the first workshop were consolidated into the following categories and topics for the survey. Final survey results are presented below as percentage of respondents:





1. Drinking water concerns:

- Adequate supply (37%)
- Water quality (35%)
- Taste (26%)
- Cost (18%)
- None (36%)

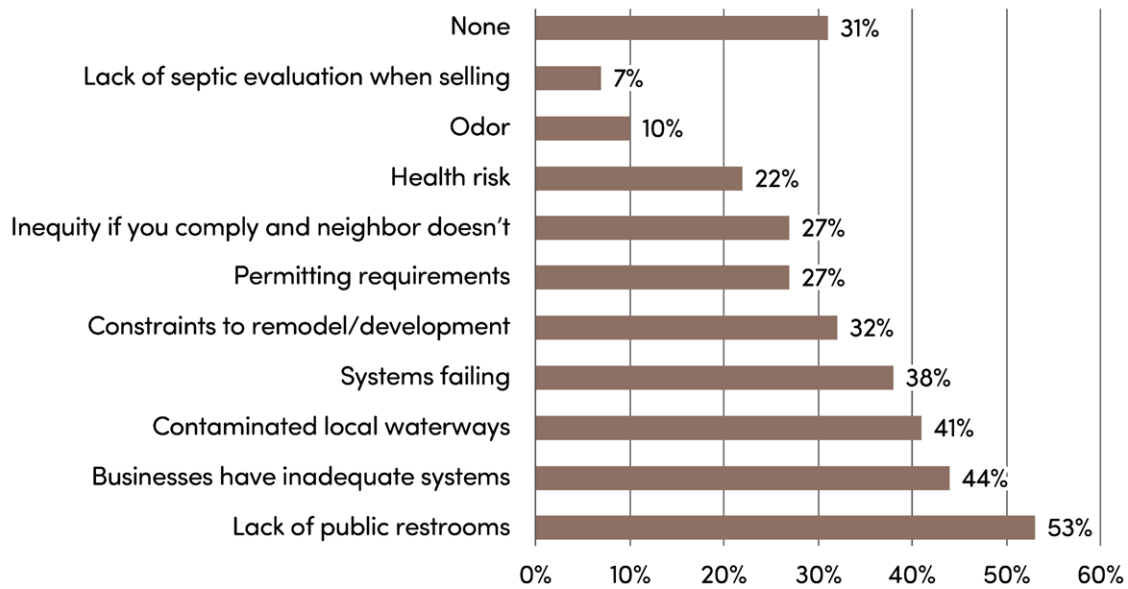
2. Concern about water quality in local waterways:

- Need to protect fish and wildlife (40%)
- Pathogens and nutrients in Tomales Bay (32%)
- Pathogens and nutrients in Lagunitas Creek (14%)
- Pathogens and nutrients in Lagunitas Creek and Tomales Bay (14%)
- None (30%)

3. Concern about onsite wastewater systems throughout the community:

- Lack of public restrooms (53%)
- Businesses have inadequate systems (44%)
- Contaminated local waterways (41%)
- Systems failing (38%)
- Constraints to remodel/development (32%)
- Permitting requirements (27%)
- Inequity if you comply and neighbor doesn't (27%)
- Health risk (22%)
- Odor (10%)
- Lack of septic evaluation when selling (7%)
- None (31%)

Pt Reyes Station: Concern About Onsite Wastewater Systems



4. Concern about flooding:

- Roadway flooding outside Point Reyes Station interfering with access in/out of town (64%)
- Roadway flooding within Point Reyes Station (56%)
- Flooding homes along creeks (40%)
- None (16%)



5. Sea level rise concerns:

- Roadway flooding (64%)
- Wells subject to saltwater intrusion (48%)
- More failures septic systems (42%)
- Flooding homes (36%)
- None (11%)

These issues were further discussed at the second and third meetings. The General Manager of North Marin Water District answered questions about cost, water quality, adequacy of supply, the amount of water available to fight fires, emergency operations, and saltwater intrusion. The local fire captain answered questions and underscored their collaboration with the water district. Representatives of Marin County Parks discussed efforts to upgrade existing public restrooms in Point Reyes Station. The County Department of Public Works was contacted about culvert maintenance during the wet season. Roadway flooding issues are primarily on State Route 1 and will be pursued directly through ongoing discussions with Caltrans.

A. Dillon Beach

Some of the community's concerns about water lend themselves to direct action with the county, water district, and other agencies. Others require further in-depth study. The survey asked, **"If you had a fixed budget to address Village needs related to water, how would you want to spend it?"**

Participants were asked to rate the importance of their support for the following community-identified next steps:

Study the feasibility of creating a not-for-profit water district (45% rated this as very important to essential)

1. Essential (12%)

- Very important (33%)
- Somewhat important (30%)
- Not important (26%)

2. Conduct a feasibility study of alternatives for a community wastewater system (53% rated this as very important to essential)

- Essential (23%)
- Very important (30%)
- Somewhat important (21%)
- Not important (25%)

3. Conduct more water quality testing (Marin County currently monitors Dillon Beach weekly from April 1 through Oct 31)

a. Winter beach monitoring (37% rated this as very important to essential)

- Essential (11%)
- Very important (26%)
- Somewhat important (50%)
- Not important (13%)

b. Winter surface runoff (35% rated this as very important to essential)

- Essential (11%)
- Very important (24%)
- Somewhat important (40%)
- Not important (26%)

c. Sophisticated water analysis to identify sources of contamination (microbial source tracking) (37% rated this as very important to essential)

- Essential (14%)
- Very important (23%)
- Somewhat important (40%)
- Not important (23%)

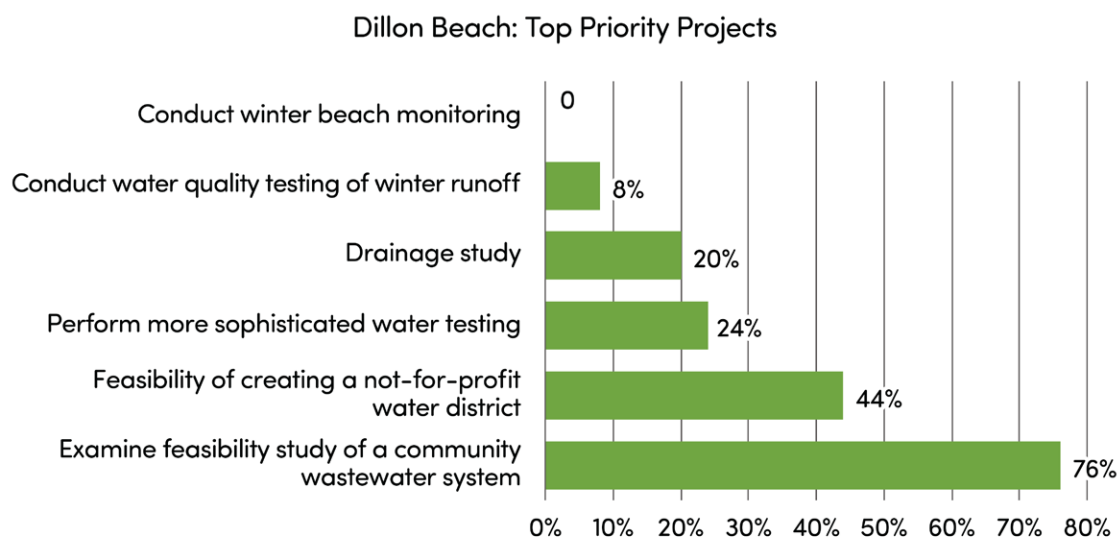
4. Conduct a study of the Village's drainage system (28% rated this as very important to essential)

- Essential (7%)
- Very important (21%)
- Somewhat important (43%)
- Not important (29%)

Top Priority for Next Steps

Survey respondents were asked to then identify their top one or two priority projects:

1. Examine feasibility study of a community wastewater system (76%)
2. Feasibility of creating a not-for-profit water district (44%)
3. Perform more sophisticated water testing (24%)
4. Drainage study (20%)
5. Conduct water quality testing of winter runoff (8%)
6. Conduct winter beach monitoring (0%)



These survey results were discussed at the third meeting. It was recognized that while the community explored buying the current water system in 1996 when it was for sale, the system is currently not for sale. Therefore, that project alternative was not viable at this time. By the third meeting, the community commented that water rates came down in recent years and discussed that it would be better served building on improved communication with CalWater.



Residents in Dillon Beach discuss priority issues. Photo courtesy of Maddie Duda

Dillon Beach: Outcome of Last Meeting

1. A discussion was led about what a feasibility study could entail. One element of a feasibility study would further clarify the extent of septic system failures and resulting water contamination. Additional water sampling would help identify the problem. This would include winter sampling of surface runoff in the neighborhood to see if there is surfacing effluent from onsite septic systems. This could entail microbial source tracking analysis to identify sources of contamination of surface water, the local creek, and beach. After a lively discussion, attendees initiated a vote and with a unanimous show of hands supported conducting a feasibility study of alternatives for a community wastewater system. A sign-up sheet was circulated and an initial committee of 12 residents was formed to help develop a grant request for this project.
2. Capacity building: At the last meeting, the community discussed forming a new group to continue conversations about all topics of concerns, such as parking, traffic, fire services, drainage, drinking water, and new development at the nearby Dillon Beach Resort. A signup sheet was circulated for people who wanted to be part of this new group. The office of Supervisor Rodoni helped facilitate the formation of this group. The Dillon Beach Neighborhood Group was formed last summer and has met several times. While the group decided among themselves to include the adjacent community of Oceana Marin, Village residents now feel they have an important forum to express their concerns. This new group is one of the ongoing successes of this community engagement process.
3. Additional local action: As a result of these meetings, a winter beach monitoring program at Dillon Beach is being initiated by the Marin Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. This organization has a local training program in the county where they work with local high schools to collect water samples and teach the students to run laboratory bacteriological analysis. The Surfriders are initiating a winter water sampling program for Dillon Beach that will be conducted by students at nearby Tomales High School.

Dillon Beach: Follow-up on Needs Assessment Findings

Since the last meeting in Dillon Beach Village, Marin County Environmental Health has moved forward with a Wastewater Feasibility Study.

The study effort began with comprehensive research of historical soils and septic system records on file with Marin County Environmental Health covering about 70 percent of the study area. This provided a valuable baseline to assess conformance with modern standards as well as the viability for continued long-term use and management of onsite wastewater treatment systems. A cumulative water balance and wastewater-nitrate loading analysis was conducted to evaluate the current and potential impacts of the high density of septic effluent discharges on local groundwater resources and surface waters of Dillon Creek, important to the local water supply as well as biological resources and recreation. A homeowner questionnaire survey was conducted to solicit and evaluate community concerns about existing septic systems, both from a user standpoint and in regard to perceived impacts on local runoff, public health, water supplies and beach water quality. The survey also obtained input on preferences, support and need for alternative long-term wastewater management solutions that are being evaluated for the community, which include: (a) status quo; (b) upgrading and improved management of septic systems; (b) community sewerage and connection to the neighboring wastewater system serving Oceana Marin; and (d) a hybrid approach, providing sewer connection for those portions of the study area with the greatest need and supporting continued, improved management of onsite wastewater systems where viable and appropriate.

For more information about the study effort, including the final report, and other updates, visit:

<https://www.marincounty.org/depts/cd/divisions/environmental-health-services/dillon-beach-study>

B. Point Reyes Station

Some of the community's concerns about water lend themselves to direct action with the county, water district, and other agencies. Others require further in-depth study. The survey asked, **"If you had a fixed budget to address Village needs related to water, how would you want to spend it?"**

Potential Projects: Participants were asked to rate the importance of their support for the following community suggested next steps:

1. **Conduct feasibility study for additional public restrooms (71% rated this as important to essential)**
 - Essential 36%
 - Very important 20%
 - Important 15%
 - Somewhat important 17%
 - Not important 12%
2. **Conduct feasibility study of alternative for a community wastewater system (47% rated this as important to essential)**
 - Essential 19%
 - Very important 17%
 - Important 11%
 - Somewhat important 9%
 - Not important 44%

3. Install public water bottle refill stations (41% rated this as important to essential)

- Essential 10%
- Very important 11%
- Important 20%
- Somewhat important 23%
- Not important 36%

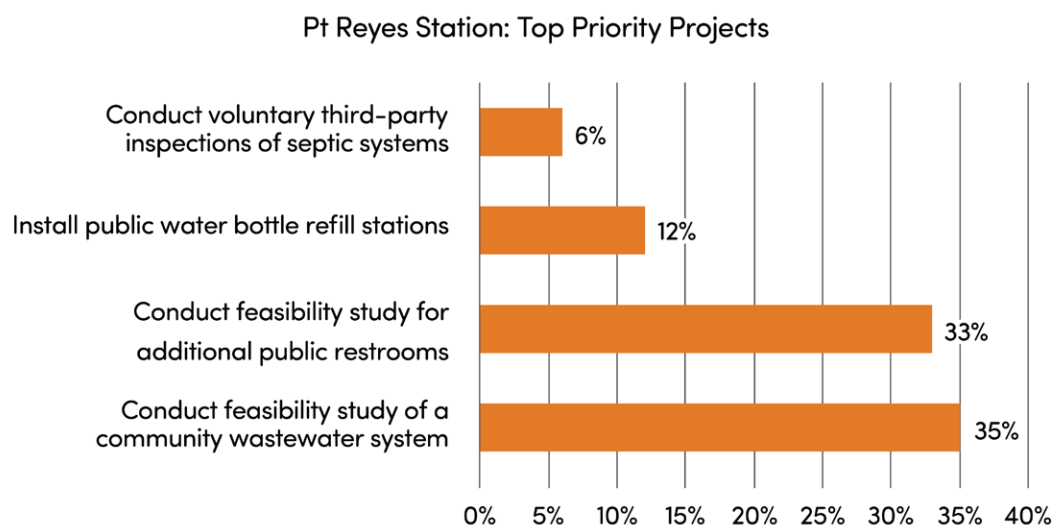
4. Conduct voluntary third-party inspections of septic systems (31% rated this as important to essential)

- Essential 4%
- Very important 6%
- Important 21%
- Somewhat important 28%
- Not important 40%

Top Priority for Next Steps

Survey respondents were then asked to identify their top one or two priority projects:

1. Conduct feasibility study of a community wastewater system (35%)
2. Conduct feasibility study for additional public restrooms (33%)
3. Install public water bottle refill stations (12%)
4. Conduct voluntary third-party inspections of septic systems (6%)



These survey results were discussed at the third meeting. While there was support for conducting feasibility studies for a community wastewater system and additional public restrooms, there was no consensus to move forward with a single project. Attendees felt there was not enough information on the scope of problems related to seasonally failing septic systems.



Dillon beach resident meeting. Photo courtesy of Maddie Duda

Point Reyes Station: Outcome of Last Meeting

1. Expanding public restrooms and community-wide septic system upgrades: Supervisor Dennis Rodoni and State Senator Mike McGuire have been working for about four years with West Marin communities on key topics from tourism to infrastructure. The current community engagement in Point Reyes Station provided valuable feedback to this effort. Two working groups have been formed in Point Reyes Station to follow-up on the DACTI Program community engagement process to discuss 1) expanding public restrooms for visitors and 2) approaches for community-wide upgrades to septic systems.
2. Additional data collection: Further study is needed to better determine the extent of seasonal groundwater contamination from old and failing septic systems. Next steps could entail winter monitoring of groundwater levels throughout the historic downtown and along local creeks to clarify whether there is seasonal groundwater contamination.
3. Additional local action: In response to the community comments and survey responses, Marin County Parks is planning to install public water bottle refill stations at the public restroom in town. Other sites for additional refill stations are being considered by community groups.

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