

From: [Carol DOLCINI](#)
To: [Board Comment](#)
Subject: Board Retreat: Comments from a Community Member
Date: Tuesday, March 12, 2024 1:41:59 PM

3/12/2024

Re: Annual Work Plan for 2024

Dear Directors and Staff Members,

I write as a member of the West Marin rural community which borders on a MMWD reservoir.

As you discuss and plan for 2024 and beyond, I would like to contribute 2 thoughts to your process:

1. First, as I attend and listen to the discussions around plans to improve Marin's water situation, I am grateful to the Board and to staff for the efforts made to be thorough and fair and transparent as you work toward a more resilient water supply for Marin Water customers. Outcomes from your eventual decisions will have far-reaching consequences, some of them beneficial, some of them quite detrimental. I urge you to continue to keep all Marin communities in mind as you move forward.
2. As you work to solve these problems of water supply, you might find this quote useful. It is from an essay [on Design Thinking](#), and comes from Horst Rittel, a German post-WWII Designer. It addresses how to approach problem-solving by trying to understand the problem in as many dimensions as possible. When I read it, I thought about how it might apply to downstream consequences to reservoir enlargement, a "wicked problem":

"Any solution implemented would leave "traces" that couldn't be undone. "One cannot build a freeway to see how it works, and then easily correct it after unsatisfactory performance," they wrote. "Large public works are effectively irreversible, and the consequences they generate have long half-lives." The designer had no "right to be wrong," because these problems mattered. Human lives, or the quality of human lives, were on the line.

Rittel called them "wicked problems." They were "wicked" not because they were unethical or evil, but because they were malignant and incorrigible and hard.

For Rittel, design problems' wickedness meant that they could never be subject to a single process of resolution. There could be no one "method." Textbooks tended to break down, say, engineering work into "phases": "gather information," "synthesize information and wait for the creative leap," et cetera. But for wicked problems, Rittel wrote, "this type of scheme does not work." Understanding the problem required understanding its context. It wasn't possible to gather full information before starting to formulate solutions. Nothing was linear or consistent; designers didn't, couldn't, think that way. If there was any describing the design process, it was as an argument. Design was a multiplicity of critical voices batting a problem around unknown terrain until it formed itself, or not, into some kind of resolution."

May you continue to have fruitful arguments at your retreat!

Respectfully submitted,

Carol

Carol Dolcini
1054 Hicks Valley Road
Soulajule neighbor.

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