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Marin Voice

San Rafael youth offer ideas to address sea-level rise

By Kim Mandujano, Gerardo Valencia, Genesis Perez and Janely Mendieta

We are fifth-grade students at Laurel Dell Elementary School in San Rafael. Since we were in fourth grade we have been working on projects about our city with architects from Youth in Arts and UC Berkeley's Y-PLAN (a learning project that stands for Youth – Plan, Learn, Act, Now).

We wrote this newspaper column so we could get people's attention, so they can listen to our ideas.

Last year our class made models and drawings showing our ideas about how to protect our community from flooding and sea-level rise. We got inspired when we studied cities like Amsterdam that are lower than sea level. We worked in teams on our proposals for San Rafael, and we shared them with members of the commu-

nity at the Flood Fair at Pickleweed Park.

This year we have been thinking about what San Rafael will be like in the year 2040 when we are 32 years old. The adults on the 2040 General Plan committee want to hear from us, and we are happy about that. We hope they take our advice, because we think our ideas are good for the world and will help people.

When we think about the next 20 years we are worried about sea-level rise and floods in our neighborhoods. We also worry about safety and being bullied. We care about people without homes and jobs. And we think about 80 percent of our community is plain, gray and boring, with not much to do.

Instead, we want to welcome people and animals to San Rafael. Different kinds of people will want to come if the city is a fun place with lots of opportunity for friendship. We

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also want our city to be a special place with lots of color, art and fun.

We want people to be happy, not mean. We want to be able to go into the streets and not be scared.

We studied places around the world that inspired us. Then we made a giant model of downtown San Rafael and the canal. Our model includes our ideas for the future. For example, we want Fourth Street and B Street to have walking and bike paths that will take you from downtown to Boyd Park. The streets should be very colorful with lots of trees. We also thought of ways to make the streets light up, such as strings

of colorful lights on all buildings and glow-in-the-dark pathways, so people feel safe at night.

We hope San Rafael is a place with lots of green open space and nature. For example, we proposed making Boyd Park and the surrounding area a more interesting park with large sculptures of native animals so people could learn about them, and with unusual tree houses for children to play in.

We think the transit hub should be in a place where there is room for businesses such as a "Krusty Krab" restaurant, a teen relaxation area, a park for children, and bike

paths and walkways nearby. We want better transportation, such as electric cars, so people don't waste gas.

Another idea is to have special housing for people who can't afford houses. Their homes would be on top of businesses, so people could get jobs and they would be close to work.

We want San Rafael to be the most beautiful and colorful city in the country – with parks, artistic buildings and safe, colorful streets.

In the year 2040 we think we will be leaders in the community, and can help make all our great ideas real. We hope adults in the community pay attention and help us.

Kim Mandujano, Gerardo Valencia, Genesis Perez and Janely Mendieta live in San Rafael, attend Laurel Dell Elementary School and are affiliated with the nonprofit Youth in Arts program.