



## POLICY WATCH – December 2017



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As we come to the close of 2017, we can all heave a sigh of relief. This has been a year of drama and angst that few will forget. The legacy of the fires will be with us the rest of our lives. The choices we make today will forever color tomorrow. This issue looks at some of those choices. What has happened and how we respond to it, should be used as a way to make us better.

This issue continues to focus on housing as the critical issue that needs our collective response. And we delve into some retrospection as we look at who we are as a community and all that there is, even now, to be grateful for in our lives.

Highway 37 is one of worst commuter corridors. Please take the brief survey to help guide the transportation agencies in planning how to improve it.

Wishing you the brightest of holidays and best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year!

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia Murray".

Cynthia

### Community Makes Us Strong

There are so many lessons to learn from the fires but one of the key ones is the importance of community and the relationships that form a community. It was remarkable to hear how many people didn't know their neighbors, but thank them now for saving their lives. People rose to the occasion of helping others – the community wrapped around all in need. People opened their homes to refugees, opened their wallets to the fire relief funds, and opened their hearts to all who lost loved ones and property.

We need each other. We depended on each other to get through the disaster and we need each other now to get through the recovery. We are in this together. We will get to be a better community if we continue to feel connected and responsible for each other. It is a great lesson that while we lead busy lives and spend more time on our phones and watching TV, when help was needed, it was our neighbors who were there for us. Facebook may make us feel connected, but nothing beats a person who wakes us up to escape a fire, gives a hug or wipes away a tear. We are social animals who need proximity to other

people. We rely on knowing that there are people nearby we can count on. When the fires hit, we came together as a community – nothing is better than that.



Already we can sense that people are starting to lose some of that close knit feeling we felt. Why is that? Is there a way we can sustain feeling connected? That we all belong to something bigger than ourselves? Yes, there are ways to build community that strengthen the sense of belonging. But first let's understand what forces are making that harder to do.

In today's world, it is not unusual that neighbors don't know each other. According to Joshua Foust, in [\*\*Americans don't know their neighbors anymore—and that's bad for the future of democracy\*\*](#) ([Link](#)) "In 2000, Harvard public policy professor Robert Putnam published *Bowling Alone*, a study of the decline of trust in American communities. Putnam documented how, since World War II, Americans have slowly become more and more disconnected from the traditional civic institutions of American life—things like local government meetings, church services, voter participation, and union membership. Putnam argued that technology, namely, television and the (still early) World Wide Web, was "individualizing" leisure time, thus cracking the traditional social bonds that held society together."

Foust says, "Indeed, Pew surveys over the last decade suggest that every year Americans know less and less about their neighbors—a large change from 30 years ago, when most people in most communities at least knew the names of those who lived nearby."

In [\*\*Why Won't You Be My Neighbor?\*\*](#) by Linda Poon (CityLab, [Link](#)) the author says "few Americans today say they know their neighbors' names, and far fewer report interacting with them on a daily basis. Pulling data from the [General Social Survey](#), economist Joe Cortright wrote in a recent [City Observatory report](#) that only about 20 percent of Americans spent time regularly with the people living next to them. A third said they've never interacted with their neighbors. That's a significant decline from four decades ago, when a third of Americans hung out with their neighbors at least twice a week, and only a quarter reported no interaction at all."

Poon says, "In a separate [2010 survey](#) by the Pew Research Center, researchers found that 43 percent of Americans know most or all of their neighbors. But nearly a third said they know none by name. 'There used to be this necessity to reach out and build bonds with people who lived nearby,' says Marc Dunkelman, a public policy fellow at Brown University who studied the shift in American communities for his 2014 book [The Vanishing Neighbor](#). That was particularly true in the 1920s through the 1960s, when social tension ran high due to issues like the Great Depression and the Cuban Missile Crisis. 'There was this sort of cohort effect, in which people ... were more inclined in many cases to find security that existed in neighborhoods,' he says. 'They depended on one another much more.'"

We know from our experience from the fires, we are dependent on each other. This is a wakeup call to build relationships with those neighbors, to become more engaged in our neighborhoods and towns. To become resilient, we must first understand that this is only possible if we do it together.

## Housing and Friendship

One reason for this weakening of the community fabric is the way we live now. In Vox's [How our housing choices make adult friendships more difficult](#) (Link), author David Roberts describes how our housing choices are changing our lifestyles.

He found that the loss of spontaneous encounters was the culprit in making it more difficult to make friends. Roberts said, "The researchers believed that physical space was the key to friendship formation; that 'friendships are likely to develop on the basis of brief and passive contacts made going to and from home or walking about the neighborhood.' In their view, it wasn't so much that people with similar attitudes became friends, but rather that people who passed each other during the day tended to become friends and later adopted similar attitudes."

Robert said, "As external conditions change, it becomes tougher to meet the three conditions that sociologists since the 1950s have considered crucial to making close friends: proximity; repeated, unplanned interactions; and a setting that encourages people to let their guard down and confide in each other, said Rebecca G. Adams, a professor of sociology and gerontology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. This is why so many people meet their lifelong friends in college, she added."



Many if not most neighborhoods these days "are made for cars, not kids. So kids stay inside playing Xbox, and families don't leave except to drive somewhere. Thus, seeing friends, even friends within 'striking distance,' requires planning. 'We should really get together!' We say it, but we know it means calls and emails, finding an evening free of work, possibly babysitters. We know it would be fun. But it's very easy just to settle in for a little TV." Or time on Facebook or Instagram.

Roberts says, "... alternatives — walkable communities and co-housing — sound exotic to American ears. Thanks to [shifting baselines](#), most Americans only know single-family dwellings and auto-dependent land use. They cannot even articulate what they are missing and often misidentify the solution as more or different private consumption. We shouldn't just accept a way of living that makes interactions with neighbors and friends a burden that requires special planning."

"We should," says Roberts, "recognize that by shrinking our network of strong social ties to our immediate families, we lose something important to our health and social identities, with the predictable result that we are ridden with [anxiety](#) and [loneliness](#). We are meant to have tribes, to be among people who know us and care about us."

Roberts notes that "To some extent, economic and employment trends have made us rootless. We move around much more and remain in jobs for less time (or work in the "gig economy"). We don't stay in one

place the way our parents and grandparents did. Those trends, which have brought good along with bad, are likely irreversible.”

He urges, “But we can do something about the places where we live. We can make them more conducive to community and spontaneous social mixing. We know how to do it — it's just a matter of agreeing that we need it and changing policy accordingly.”

As we look at rebuilding our lost housing, we should consider how we can make that housing be more aligned with our dependency on each other. We should encourage more places for people to congregate and build relationships. More public spaces, more co-housing, less cars and gated communities. And we should plan on the near future where there are autonomous vehicles which mean we don't need wide streets with parking or parking lots.

Roberts says, “One way is living in a real place, a walkable area with lots of shared public spaces, around which one can move relatively safely and effectively without a car. It seems like a simple thing, but such places are rare even in the cities where they exist. A robust walkshed is an area in which a community of people regularly mingles doing errands, walking their dogs, playing in the parks, going to school and work, etc. Ideally, cities would be composed of clusters of such walksheds, connected by reliable public transit.”

Roberts also suggests, “The second way, even more rare, is some form of co-housing. There are many kinds of co-housing, too many to get into in this post, but my favorite, a common model in Germany, is baugruppen, or building groups. I wrote an enthusiastic post about baugruppen here:”

“The basic idea is that a group of people comes together to work directly with architects and designers, bypassing developers, to build a shared dwelling that they own collectively (a co-op, basically). Taking developers out of the picture saves money — 25 to 30 percent in Berlin, where baugruppen are common — and opens up space for much more ambitious, innovative, and sustainable architecture. It also fosters cooperation and community among members of the collective.”

“In practice, baugruppen are basically like condos, but with much more robust shared spaces and collective ownership rather than developer ownership. (If you want to know much more about them, passivhaus designer Mike Eliason has a seven-part series. He summarizes it as “private owners collaboratively building affordable multifamily projects.”) The idea behind baugruppen, and co-housing generally, is that it's nice to live in an extended community, to have people to rely on beyond family. It's nice to have bustling shared spaces where you can run into people you know without planning it beforehand. It's nice to have nearby friends for your kids, places where they can play safely, and other adults who can share kid-tending duties.”

Now is the time to think about how we go forward and to envision a better way that strengthens community and our relationship to each other so when the next disaster hits, we know who to count on.

## **Leadership in Action: Overcoming Conflict to Create a Sense of Community in the Workplace**

*By Mark Wood, Mark Wood Consulting*



It has been inspiring to watch the North Bay rally together in the wake of the recent fires. As a community, we are bound together by a shared goal to help the region recover, and a common spirit of rooting for our neighbors to thrive. It is a lesson we can just as powerfully apply to our own organizations.

Employers of all types face a universal challenge: overcoming inevitable internal conflicts. People are more likely to experience competition and conflict with co-workers in the office down the hall than with actual competitors in the marketplace. Conflicts can occur when personalities clash, when resources are scarce, when future conditions are uncertain, and when people have competing interests. These factors often feel like they are beyond our control, so it's tempting to allow conflict to pull us into its downward spiral, or to avoid dealing with it entirely.

To break through the cycle of conflict, it's important to find common ground with the other party. Try to find shared goals, i.e., goals that you can both agree on. What is it that you are both striving to achieve? For example, if there is a conflict between the sales department and the IT department, instead of focusing on the separate (and sometimes seemingly incompatible) goals of each department, focus on goals that both departments can agree on, such as growing the bottom line and having a great work environment. Both parties can then express their sides of the issue in the context of the shared goals, and negotiate a resolution which unites the two parties toward the common goals. The result is neither a "win/win" nor a "win/lose", but simply a "win".

A second ingredient in breaking the cycle of conflict is to establish mutual respect between the two parties. Rather than thinking about "respect" as a feeling or concept, think about it as a set of behaviors. What does respect look like? It probably means that parties acknowledge each other's roles and priorities, both parties' words and actions are free from hurtful or harmful intent, and each party genuinely wants the other to succeed. In a cycle of conflict it can be awfully hard to rise above the fray, but without looking in the mirror and challenging yourself to find respect for the other party, it is unreasonable to expect that the other party will suddenly come to respect you. Without mutual respect, lasting resolution will be nearly impossible.

I think we all know that the North Bay will ultimately be just fine despite the fires, because we can all feel the shared goals and mutual respect which have pulled the community together in this critical moment. It is a valuable lesson we can apply to creating community in our workplaces.

## Some Things Are Getting Better!

The North Bay is going through a tough time and we are not alone in that. There have been many natural disasters this year, and many people are reeling from the changes in the new federal administration. In all this bad news, it's easy to forget that the world is generally getting better.

In **[This Thanksgiving, be thankful for these 6 ways the world is getting better](#)** by German Lopez, Vox, ([Link](#)), we learn "people around the world are living better, healthier, happier lives. That doesn't mean everything is perfect, but at least it's not worse than it used to be." Lopez gives six examples of how a lot of things really are improving.

### 1) People are living longer than ever

For much of human existence, life was miserable — full of laborious work, only to end relatively quickly. It's only recently that this has changed across the world, with global life expectancy rapidly increasing from below age 30 prior to the 1870s to more than 71 in 2015. There are a lot of reasons for this shift, including shrinking poverty, fewer big wars, and enormous medical advances that have exterminated killer diseases. But it's a welcome sign of all the progress we've made in recent years.

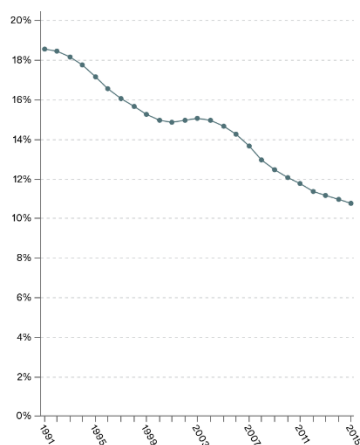
## 2) Global poverty has plummeted

As people are living longer, they're also much less likely to live in poverty. In 1990, about 37 percent of the world lived in extreme poverty, meaning they made less than \$1.90 a day (in inflation-adjusted terms). In 2015, less than 10 percent did. This has been driven by the incredible economic growth the world has seen in the past few decades, particularly in giant countries like China and India. As my colleague Dylan Matthews pointed out, there's still a lot of work left to get that number down further, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. But the global gains are still remarkable.

## 3) Fewer people are going hungry

### World hunger

Prevalence of undernourishment, by percent of population



Source: World Bank

Wax

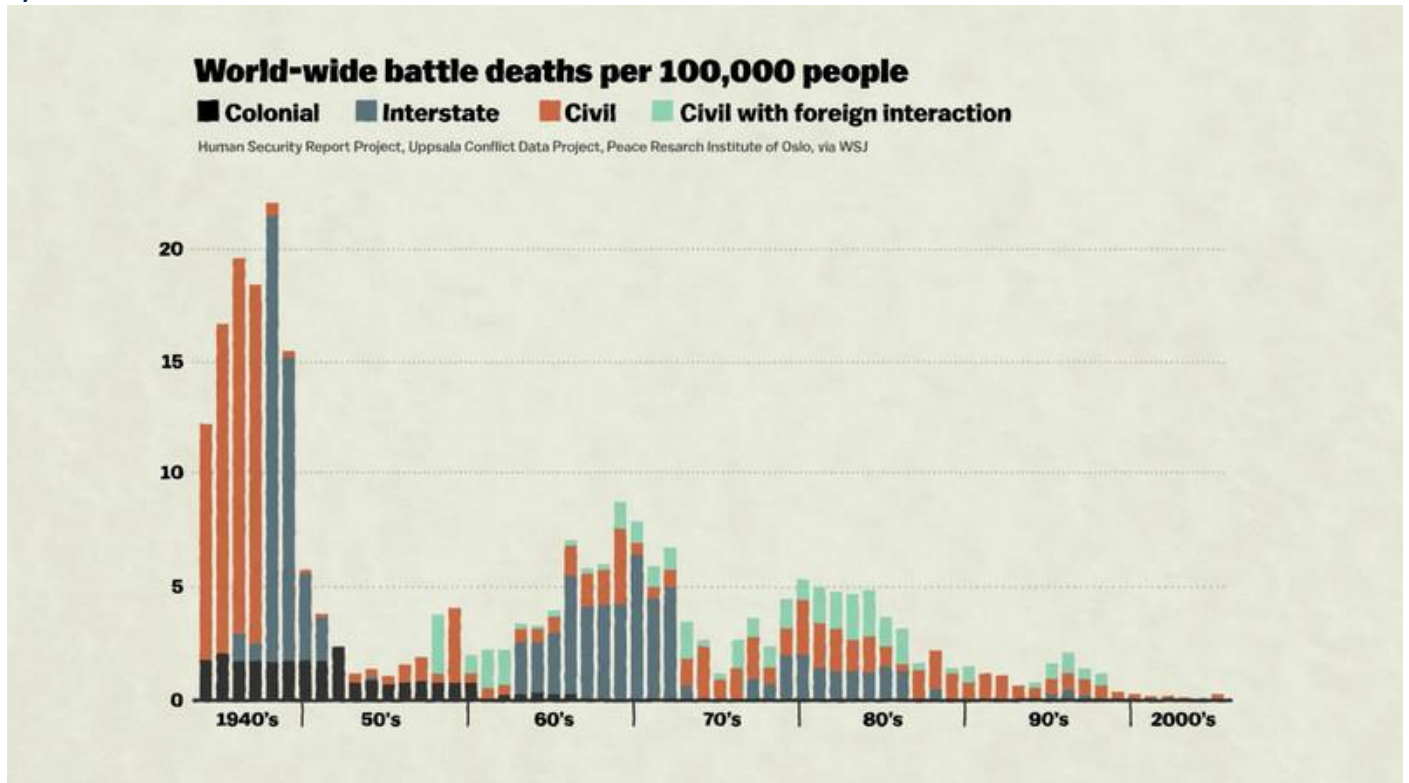
The number of people going hungry has also dramatically fallen since the 1990s. In 1991, the global undernourishment prevalence rate was 18.6 percent, according to the World Bank. In 2015, it was 10.8 percent. So while this is far from a resolved issue, it's at least an issue we're making progress in.

## 4) Polio is close to extinction — and other diseases have been nearly eliminated as well

Another reason people are living longer: Many deadly diseases are slowly going extinct. This is in large part thanks to the advent of vaccines, which gave us a much-needed way to fight previously untreatable or hard-to-treat diseases. Polio is one example, with no new cases of polio occurring over the past few years in all but a handful of countries. But it's not just polio; vaccines also helped entirely wipe out smallpox and rinderpest around the world and nearly eradicated diphtheria, measles, mumps, rubella,

and tetanus, among others, in the US. It's not something you think about every day, but vaccines could be the reason you're still alive today.

## 5) War is on the decline



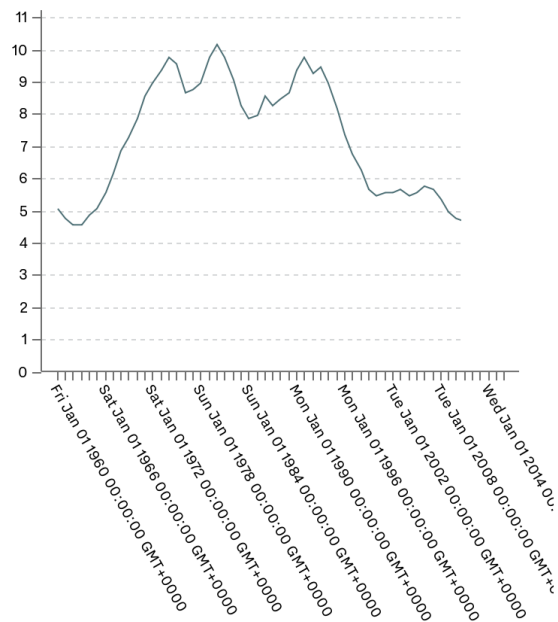
Joe Posner/Vox

Much of the world used to be filled with the constant threat of war, from the Roman conquests to the Mongol invasions to the world wars. Today those kinds of threats are vanishingly rare. As my colleague Zack Beauchamp [explained](#), much of that has to do with the spread of democracy, nuclear weapons creating deterrents to conventional war, and increased respect for nations' sovereignty discouraging wars of conquest:

Whatever the explanation, the result is people are no longer anywhere near as likely to die in war. Events that once crippled entire generations are now thankfully rare.

## 6) US crime is near historic lows

### The US murder rate per 100,000 people



Source: [FBI Uniform Crime Reports](#)

**Vox**

Meanwhile, crime in America and many other wealthy nations has plummeted over the past couple of decades. The strange thing is criminologists aren't really sure why this happened — although there are theories (ranging from “tough on crime” policies deterring more crime to less lead in gasoline making people less violent), there is no single explanation that experts have come around to. One caveat is the FBI found that murder rates — and violent crime, albeit less so — ticked up in 2015 and 2016, although no one is quite sure why this is the case either. Still, the result is all the same: Crime is near historic lows.

Again, all of these statistics don't mean the world is perfect. There's still plenty of work to do in several of these areas, there's still a lot of inequality in the gains we've seen (particularly based on geography, nationality, ethnicity, race, and gender), and there are other threats that we should remain wary of, from terrorism to global warming.

But these broad measures show the world is generally getting better. We are not only living longer, but our lives are less likely to be hampered by poverty, hunger, disease, war, and crime than before.



## Take the Highway 37 Survey - What Improvements do you want?

[Take the survey](#)

We need your feedback!

To help us improve your safety and experience on SR 37, please take a few minutes to [complete a survey](#).

Enter to win a \$25 gift card.

When you have completed the survey you can enter a drawing to win a \$25 gift card.



Help us spread the word!

Please share the SR 37 survey with your friends and neighbors.



## Members in the News

### Marin's 'housing crisis on steroids' focus of San Rafael forum

Former county supervisor Cynthia Murray kicked off a discussion on housing affordability in Marin with one question.

### SolarCraft Names Solar Industry Leader Ted Walsh as CEO

Novato and Sonoma-based SolarCraft, a leader in solar and clean energy system design and installation, has appointed Ted Walsh to serve as Chief Executive Officer.

### Sonoma Raceway's Laps of Appreciation Raised More than \$70,000 for Fire Relief

Hundreds of community members enjoyed a special evening of fundraising and sharing gratitude at Sonoma Raceway on Tuesday evening at the raceway's Laps of Appreciation event.

Read more online at [www.northbayleadership.org/news](http://www.northbayleadership.org/news)



### Who We Are

Over twenty five years ago, business leaders founded the North Bay Leadership Council on a simple premise: We can accomplish more by working together. Today, the Council includes 54 leading employers in the North Bay. Our members represent a wide variety of businesses, non-profits and educational institutions, with a workforce in excess of 25,000. As business and civic leaders, our goal is to promote sound public policy, innovation and sustainability to make our region a better place to live and work. For more information: Call

707.283.0028 / E-mail [info@northbayleadership.org](mailto:info@northbayleadership.org)

[www.northbayleadership.org](http://www.northbayleadership.org)