



Working together February 03, 2015 • [The Napa Valley Register Editorial Board](#)

The problems that confront Napa County today are in large part the problems of success.

Tourists want to visit here. Employees want to work here. Consumers want to buy the products we make here. Would-be residents want to live here.

Nice problems to have, but even nice problems are still problems.

Napa's success story brings with it many challenges: more traffic, limited housing supply, strain on our water supplies and civil infrastructure. All of them are real problems, and none have simple answers.

The Napa Valley Register Editorial Board sat down last week with the county's five mayors and the chairwoman of the Board of Supervisors to discuss how these problems are playing out in all corners of the county.

We found that, while the issues play out somewhat differently in each town, the problems we face are, in the broad sense, the same from the northernmost tip touching Lake County to the southernmost border with Vallejo. All local governments, for example, are struggling with maintaining their roads in the face of growing traffic congestion. All are concerned about their water supply, particularly in the face of our dreadful drought. All are exploring ways to keep residential neighborhoods stable in the face of a growing demand for vacation rentals and second homes, whose owners are often absent.

Fortunately, we found that our elected officials seem to have a refreshing commitment to working together to tackle issues that concern us all. They spoke of trying to institutionalize cooperation, perhaps through in the forum of a revitalized Napa County League of Governments. Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Diane Dillon spoke of future joint sessions with city leaders after the board's March 10 session to examine growth issues in the unincorporated county.

And the mere fact that all six officials agreed to meet with the Editorial Board last week and share their stories suggests an encouraging willingness to collaborate.

The mayors all admitted that this has not always been the case. Traditional rivalries have prevented cooperation and saddled cities with expensive services — particularly water, sewer, police and fire departments — that reason suggests should be shared between cities. Development has often been haphazard, with little regard to the effect it may have on other parts of the county.

To this day, there are cultural and legal barriers to cooperation. The state-mandated General Plans, for example, are specific to each jurisdiction, so there is no simple legal mechanism to harmonize the vision and planning of the county and five incorporated towns and cities.

Yet there have been successes. The mayors mentioned the 1998 flood control project, known as Measure A, as an early model for countywide cooperation that has enduring promise for the future. The sales tax measure helped fix Napa's stupendously expensive and dangerous flooding problem by guaranteeing voters in other parts of the county a slice of the revenue to fix their own localized problems. A new sales tax to maintain crumbling roads, known as Measure T, was modeled on the Measure A effort, guaranteeing funding to residents all over the county.

Also, the governments coordinated their efforts on the recently passed plastic bag ban ordinances, and earlier all passed a model "social host" ordinance, holding accountable any adult who hosts or enables an underage drinking party.

So it can be done. We hope these leaders live up to their promise to collaborate on the serious issues that confront us and that they display political courage in making the difficult decisions that will be necessary.

But we also hope that county residents will support them in this effort. Let go of historic geographic prejudices. Listen with an open mind to ideas that challenge the status quo or change the ways things have always been done. Hold your elected leaders accountable, but be patient as they work through the slow process of change: the issues that we face now were decades in the making and the fixes are unlikely to be rapid.

The problems that confront Napa County now require creative thinking and far-sightedness. More importantly, they require cooperation and mutual understanding. We have said before, and we will continue to say, we are all in this together.