



# Stinkier than a Wet Dog

**BLUE LINES MATTER:** Way back in 2007—when we still thought we had some innocence left to lose—a social anthropologist named **Bruce Caron** got the brilliant, if wacky, idea to **paint a light blue line** throughout much of downtown Santa Barbara, illustrating just how far and high the **ocean would intrude into the city** if all of **Greenland's ice sheets were to melt**.

Pushing the idea was then-City Council member **Helene Schneider**. I thought it was an inspired idea, and even the professional fuddy-duddies on the **Historical Landmarks Commission** thought so, too. But **the Real Estate Interests**—as they shall henceforth be known—didn't. In fact, they went positively berserk.

They threatened to sue City Hall on the febrile grounds that the **Light Blue Line might depress their property values**. Forget about the dire realities of a changing climate. Then-Mayor **Marty Blum** quietly intervened and soon-to-be mayor Schneider soon backed off; the now-infamous Blue Line would be consigned to the **dustbin of good ideas** whose time would never come.

I dredge this up because a few weeks ago, downtown commercial real-estate mega-mogul **Jim Knell** of the SIMA Corp hired political consultant **John Davies** to conduct a poll that purported to show the majority of respondents believe that **City Hall does not have "a substantial role in addressing" climate change**.

In person, Knell is thoughtful and insightful, but in his emails—with which he **regularly car-**

**pet-bombs City Hall**—he's inclined to scream and shout. Knell—which, incidentally, is what bells do after someone dies—**thinks there are too many homeless people** on State Street and wants City Hall to do more about it.

Last week, Knell released the poll. In it, Davies, one of Santa Barbara's right-wing wizards of Oz, describes the city in **breathlessly alarmist adjectives** such as its "out-of-control homelessness," and its "growing **sense of lawlessness**" that "signals a **city in decline**."

The funny thing is that I've never seen more **young moms** pushing more baby carriages and walking more Labradoodles downtown than I see now. In fact, I've **never seen more people**. And that's in **35 years**.

In Knell's avalanche of angry emails, he almost always mentions **human poop** on sidewalks, left on doorsteps, and deposited in back alleyways. I agree. It's a burden shop-owners should not have to shoulder. I have suggested **more porta-potties**, but to little avail.

What, you may ask, does this have to do with the **Light Blue Line** and **climate change**?

Only everything.

Let's start with the poop. Based on City Hall's best projections, the city's sewage treatment system will become **seriously impacted by a sea-level rise of only eight inches**. At that point, our coastal high tides and tidal surges will begin **inundating the gravity-fed sewage pipes** that run along Cabrillo Boulevard. When seawater starts getting into these pipes via manholes and private sewer laterals, we can expect eruptions

of effluent to ensue with disturbing regularity.

It won't be a good look for our tourists. It will smell even worse. And when the **tourists stop visiting our beaches**, they sure won't be shopping on State Street.

And that's just the start. When **sea-level rise hits 2.5 feet** and ultimately six feet, "projected" to occur in 2060 and 2200, respectively, you can kiss our El Estero sewage treatment plant goodbye. Right now, that sewage plant—its name has been officially changed from "wastewater treatment" to "**resource recovery**"—processes about **six million gallons a day** of our effluent soup.

The real genius of the **Roman Empire** was its **sanitary engineering**. When it gets down to the nuts and bolts of running a city, there's nothing more basic.

Yet Wizard Davies would have us believe otherwise. "Climate change is local," he says, "but not a local issue." What?

For all of City Hall's many faults, the council deserves credit for **passing meaningful measures**—not just purity posturing and virtue signaling—designed to **address climate change**. Much of it's wonky and defies simple sound-bite summation.

One example is its **vote-prohibiting natural-gas hookups** in most new developments—much to the chagrin of energy companies. Natural gas contains greenhouse-gas emissions **86 times more destructive** than carbon dioxide. When the council voted, **only one member of the public** spoke against it. So much for climate change not being a local issue.

Then there's the council adoption of the **Clean Energy Initiative**, in which our City Hall joins with other city halls up and down the coast to form partnerships to **buy less polluting energy** for our residents than what **SoCal Edison** would otherwise be selling. In this deal, Edison will be tasked with getting this energy from its source to our homes. If there's any surplus generated by these transactions, the proceeds can be used to, among other things, help create new **locally based energy supplies**. The hope is that this program will **cut carbon emissions** from electricity consumed by city residents by **20 percent**.

That's not a local issue?

While the rest of us were sleeping, the same City Hall that's reviled for doing nothing quietly created a new **Department of Sustainability & Resilience**. Running this show is **Alelia Parienteau**, a wonderfully named badass who, as a young City Hall intern years ago, **spent six months riding on the back of trash trucks** to track what happens to our recycled wastes.

Not to be crassly obvious, but even the **skeptics and deniers** have been forced to admit that the occasional drought, wildfire, and flood have now been **insanely fueled by climate change**. How many of those "we-are-heroes" **gummy bracelets** must future debris-flow victims have to wear?

Not a local issue?

If not us, then who?

Bring back the Light Blue Line.

—**Nick Welsh**