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EDITORIAL: Progressive policy

The environmental movement in Sonoma County has gained tremendous political momentum during the past decade and has grown into a formidable force in helping to shape the county's future.

Part of the growth and maturation within the environmental community has been the ability to broaden its outlook and refine the approach that community activists take in addressing critical social, environmental and economic problems.

A case in point is the Leadership Institute for Ecology & the Economy, which was formed a few years ago to train leaders in shaping public policy that is environmentally friendly, socially just, economically sound and sustainable. By providing elected and appointed officials and future leaders with a wide array of information, the Leadership Institute provides potential policy makers with the tools they need in solving such complex issues as land use, water rights, affordable housing, smart and sustainable growth, economic vitality and a healthy environment.

Members of the institute's leadership training have come from all around Sonoma County. Members of the city planning commissions from Santa Rosa, Cloverdale and Sebastopol have participated, or are participating in the program. Numerous community activists from West County communities have taken advantage of the leadership training.

They have taken what they learned during the nine-month training program and brought it back to their communities to affect change. In Cloverdale, two members of the planning commission helped shape the county's most progressive inclusionary zoning ordinance, a policy that requires the inclusion of affordable housing in new residential developments. Other members of the training participated in the formation of Citizens for a Better Sonoma County, a new broad-based coalition formed to elect candidates to local government who share their progressive platform.

Among the rosters of the institute's leadership classes, the West County has been and is currently well represented. The current class includes two Sebastopol planning commissioners, a member of the City Council and the director the Sebastopol Community Center.

Sound public policy is shaped by informed and educated leaders and the Leadership Institute for Ecology & the Economy provides just that kind of training. We encourage West County leaders, and potential leaders, to take advantage of this opportunity to take an active role in shaping a sustainable and environmentally sound future. More information is available at www.ecoleader.org.

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