



San Leandro Creek Hazardous Tree Community Workshop

Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District

Tuesday, June 29, 2010 Community Workshop Summary

Introduction/Overview

The Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District held a community meeting at the Bancroft Middle School in San Leandro on Tuesday evening, June 29 to discuss hazardous trees located on County-owned property along San Leandro Creek near Cary Drive in San Leandro.

Approximately 20 members of the community attended the workshop, including San Leandro Vice Mayor Ursula Reid, and City staff member Kathy Ornelas; San Leandro City Council Member Michael Gregory; Shawn Wilson, Chief of Staff for Alameda County Supervisor Alice Lai-Bitker (District 3); Meriam Reynosa from State Senator Ellen Corbett's office; and Joanne Christianson, Alameda County Environmental Health Department.

Below is a summary of the June 29 workshop, which includes questions and concerns raised by community members, as well as a summary of key points made during the District's presentation. The summary below is not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript of the workshop.

To see the PowerPoint presentation from the June 29 workshop, please click here:

<http://www.acgov.org/pwa/>

Open House & Presentation

The meeting began with a brief Open House, which allowed community members to review tree risk profiles for each of the 17 trees that were evaluated at the Cary Avenue site and to ask representatives from the County [questions](#) about the tree risk profiles.

Hank Ackerman, Flood Program Manager, emphasized that the Flood Control District was making a concerted effort to keep community members informed about the process of evaluating potentially hazardous trees at three sites along San Leandro Creek. These sites include Huff Avenue (see meeting notes posted from the June 22 community workshop at the link provided above); at Cary Drive (the focus of the Tuesday June 29 meeting) and at St Mary Avenue (which will be the focus of a meeting on Tuesday, July 13). He explained that the District had been collecting data to rate all trees six inches in diameter or larger at each of the three sites. The purpose of the June 29 workshop was to explain the data collected for trees at the Cary Drive site and to hear community concerns and questions specific to these trees.

The County will develop a hazardous tree plan for the three sites following the St. Mary Avenue workshop, and will bring a plan to the community at a fourth meeting in August. The hazardous tree plan will be based upon the analyses and input received at the three community workshops and upon the threshold of risk that the County can accept in order to minimize risk to nearby residents and property. Mr. Ackerman added that the County will also discuss construction plans at the fourth community meeting, if applicable.

Nelda Matheny, President of HortScience and Board-certified Master Arborist, provided a presentation about the methodology of a 12-point tree risk assessment – underlining the difference between “risk” and “hazard”:

Risk is the likelihood that a tree will fail and cause injury or damage; hazard is a tree that is likely to fail and the likelihood exceeds an acceptable level of risk. **(For a complete overview of the 12-point risk rating system and other factors that Ms. Matheny considered in her risk evaluations, please see the June 29 PowerPoint presentation. The link to the presentation is provided above.)**

Ms. Matheny provided a walk-through of the evaluations for several of the 17 individual trees at the Cary Drive site in order to explain how to interpret the risk profiles. The complete set of risk profiles for all of the 17 trees at the Cary Drive site was available in Tree Survey binders available at the workshop. The Tree Survey for Cary Drive is also posted on the District’s website: <http://www.acgov.org/pwa/>

Ms. Matheny showed a graph of the risk ratings for the 17 trees, which illustrated that all of the trees at the Cary Drive site have a risk rating between “5” and “11” (possible range is “3” to “12”). In her experience, it is common for public agencies to establish a threshold for action at ‘8’ or ‘9’. Trees above this threshold are defined as hazardous, and action should be taken to reduce the risk of harm. Trees below the threshold are within the range of acceptable risk.

Ms. Matheny showed a graph of the trees at the Cary Drive site, indicating that the trees’ risk ratings fall between 5 and 11. Many of the trees at this site are Bluegum, and the primary cause for their failure is wind throw (the uprooting of a tree by the wind).

Public Comment and Questions

Ms. Matheny, Mr. Ackerman, and James Browne, Project Manager with the Flood Control and Water Conservation District, answered community members’ questions. Some of the questions/comments were similar in nature to questions and comments provided at the June 22 Huff Avenue meeting – focusing on ratings of specific trees, the challenge that ivy poses, and questions related to the county’s decision making process. Because the tree evaluation process for the three sites focuses strictly on County-owned properties, some questions addressed property ownership.

Please note that the Questions/Comments below appear in bold/italicized typeface. The questions and answers have been categorized by topic, and therefore may not appear in chronological order.

Project Goals

What is the process to assess the risk of hazardous trees on private property? I am concerned about exposure to excessive risk.

At this point, tree risk assessment is limited to trees on District property. We selected the Huff Avenue, Cary Drive and St. Mary Avenue sites for initial assessment due to ease of access and recent tree failures at these points. We have a long-range plan for assessing all trees on District property along the creek.

Is restoring native vegetation a goal for this project?

We will probably not be able to achieve a total restoration of native species. We don't have a restoration plan at this point, although our policy is that every tree we remove must be replaced with a native species at a 3:1 ratio. The removal of non-native species allows native species, such as oaks, to thrive.

We are also committed to protecting the native environment when cutting and pruning trees.

Tree Risk Assessment

If one tree fails, is it possible to create a domino effect of many trees successively failing along the creek?

Yes. When a hazardous tree is removed, it leaves the remaining trees more vulnerable to wind and erosion.

Ivy Removal

How will the ivy growing at the site be addressed? How does the ivy affect the growth of the trees?

Ivy competes with the trees for light and soil nutrients. When the ivy grows around trees, it can be cut at the base of the tree; the ivy then dies. When new trees are planted, the ivy should be cleared away to enhance growth of the new tree. However, ivy does support slope stability on the creek banks. The District will conduct further study into ivy management approaches.

Tree Management (Primarily Private Property)

Is it possible for residents to sign a waiver assuming the liability of tree failure in order to keep trees as they are?

We've looked into this option, and the County is not able to avoid liability. The County is self-insured for first million dollars of damage, then covered by an insurance provider up to 10 million dollars. This applies to all County/municipal properties.

Is the County concerned about private property owners cutting down trees or removing ground cover?

In the case of private property, all that the County can do is refer the property owner to geotechnical engineers, geologists, and other specialists to help them evaluate the problem. If tree removal is involved [near the creek], then private property owners may be required to obtain a permit from the

California Department of Fish & Game (DFG). The Department would require private property owners to plant native trees to replace the trees that have been removed. The County is putting together info/guidelines on how to manage hazardous trees on private properties, with a list of appropriate agencies and resources.

The trees are beautiful and attract all sorts of wildlife to the area. Has the County considered the consequences of tree removal?

The County's primary concern is with public safety. We are going to look at each tree individually and see what we can do. For some of trees, we may simply be able to remove a branch to make them safer.

Is there a possibility that differing approaches to tree management by the District and private property owners could create a non-cohesive appearance of the creek banks?

This will not be a "scorched earth" approach to tree removal. We will evaluate the approach for tree removal/pruning on a tree-by-tree basis [so there should not be a dramatic difference between the trees on private property and on County property in terms of trees and vegetation).

Property Ownership

A number of questions were raised about property ownership that require further research by the County.

How are property lines defined for the purposes of this study? What property does the District own?

Does the County have easement rights all the way along the creek?

Who is responsible for tree management on properties with no parcel number or owner?

Cary Drive Site-Specific Concerns

Why was removal mentioned as the main means of risk management for the Huff Avenue site, while pruning and topping have been more heavily emphasized methods of dealing with tree risk at Cary Drive?

The trees at each site are very different. Huff trees are closer together and there is not a way to get to them to prune them, so it is less of an option. Also, the prevalence of ivy makes it challenging to evaluate branch stability. The trees at Cary have more space around them, and therefore more options for addressing risk.

How many tree failures have actually occurred between East 14th Street and MacArthur Boulevard in the last 10 years? Of these, is it possible identify where failures occurred; to distinguish between full tree failure and branch failure; and to indicate how many fell onto peoples' property, versus into the creek?

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We've been going through our maintenance records and response to calls regarding fallen trees and large branch failures. We have had approximately 28-30 in last 12 yrs. We have a map showing where the failures have occurred. More than half of the failures were full tree failures.

Other

Are you considering the effects of herbicide use and impacts to local wildlife, such as deer, raccoons, and other animals?

The County will develop a safety plan so to ensure that wildlife and pets are not adversely impacted by herbicide use.

Key Outcomes

The District will provide a process timeline at the next community workshop on July 13 and will provide an overview of the process moving forward in terms of developing a tree removal plan. The County will provide an update on a fourth community meeting.