San Leandro Creek Hazardous Tree Community Workshop – Huff Avenue

June 22, 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 22 to discuss hazardous trees located on County-owned property along San Leandro Creek near Huff Avenue in San Leandro.

Approximately two dozen members of the community attended the workshop, including San Leandro Mayor Tony Santos 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; Daniel Woldesenbet, Alameda County Public Works Director; Joanne Christianson, Alameda County Environmental Health Department.

Below is a summary of the June 22 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 22 workshop, please click here:

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

Presentation

Hank Ackerman, Flood Program Manager, emphasized that the Flood Control District had heard and understood that the community wanted to be kept informed about plans related to hazardous trees at the May 19 meeting, and had been collecting more extensive data to rate all trees six inches in diameter or larger at the Huff Avenue site. The purpose of the June 22 workshop was to explain the data and analysis of trees at the Huff site and to hear community concerns and questions specific to those trees. Analyses of trees at Cary Drive and St. Mary Avenue would be provided at subsequent workshops in late June and July, when participants would be able to ask questions specific to trees at those sites. The County would develop a hazardous tree management plan for the three sites following those workshops, and would return to the community with a plan that was developed based upon the analyses and input received in mid-August.

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 22 PowerPoint presentation. The link to the presentation is provided above.)

Ms. Matheny provided a walk-through of her evaluations of several of the 15 individual trees that she had conducted at the Huff Avenue site, in order to explain how to interpret the risk profiles. The complete set of risk profiles for all of the 15 trees at the Huff Avenue site was available in Tree Survey binders available at the workshop. The Tree Survey is also posted on the District's website: **http://www.acgov.org/pwa/**

Before going to a break, Ms. Matheny showed a graph of the risk ratings for the 15 trees , which illustrated that most of the trees on the Huff site have a risk rating between '6' 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 the 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.

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.

***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 and Process

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.

What is the timeline of the project? When is the District making its major decisions?

The current process includes three workshops, one for each of the sites under consideration along San Leandro Creek: Huff Avenue, Cary Drive and St. Mary Avenue. The community workshop process will take another month, at which point we must look at the feedback we have received and develop a plan. In August, we will present the plan that we have developed to the community.

Eventually we must consider analyzing all of the other trees on District property along the creek, but that phase is lengthy and may not happen until next year.

We will also create a project timeline to post on the District website.

Tree Risk Assessment

Did the assessment process consider prevailing winds and storm conditions when developing target areas at the Huff Avenue site?

Yes, the northwesterly and southwesterly prevailing winds were considered during the assessment process. However, when a tree is leaning, the direction of the lean is a more important factor in the direction of its fall than the prevailing wind. For trees on steep slopes that are not leaning, trees generally fall downslope, and in this case, into the creek.

The presentation showed a chart with the risk assessment of the trees at the Huff Avenue site. How will you decide which trees are too risky?

The risk level at which we draw the line is referred to as the risk threshold. This decision depends on a variety of factors, including available funding. With this site, we are only dealing with [relatively] few trees and so the budget is adequate. The District will have to decide on the appropriate threshold level. Nelda Matheny will make recommendations on how to reduce the risk.

Typically, agencies draw the risk threshold around eight or nine (out of a potential 12).

Ivy Removal

How will the ivy growing in 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 into 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.

Tree Management

If the size of a tree's canopy can increase the overall risk of a tree, why can't the District reduce the size of the canopy to reduce the risk of the tree?

Options for reducing risk depend on the structural condition of each tree. The District can sometimes prune branches to reduce weight and potential for failure. In some cases pruning may reduce risk to an acceptable level. Some trees do have reasonable options for pruning, however. An example is very tall, leaning trees with all the branches concentrated near the top. Tree removal is the only treatment that eliminates risk.

There is a tree that was "topped" 25 years ago, and it seems to be only becoming a problem now. Why doesn't the District "top" trees to reduce the risk?

The District is considering all possible treatments and will look at multiple ways to reduce risk. Treatment options to reduce risk have to be considered on a tree-by-tree basis. Topping is a practice that is damaging to the tree. It reduces risk in the short term, but increases it in subsequent years. Branches that grow after topping are weakly attached and tend to fail. Trees that are topped require regular pruning for the rest of their lives to manage risk and avoid branch failure.

Huff Avenue Site-Specific Concerns

Of all trees surveyed at the Huff Avenue site, did any of them have diseases?

One sycamore at the site had anthracnose disease that caused it to lose all foliage. Powdery mildew, which infects foliage, was present on boxelder trees. Six trees had signs of wood decay caused by fungi. The fungi remain unidentified, because the fruiting bodies (mushrooms, conks) that allow identification were not present at the time of our inspection.

Additional Comments

Public Information

- Be more transparent with future actions. Post timelines, information, and events to your website
- Inform the public of District plans so that you don't lose our trust
- Clarify why the original RFP states 500 to 1,000 trees slated for removal
- Address the trees near Glen Drive
- Include more information on habitat restoration, plant/vegetation removal, and potential species and sizes under consideration for replanting

Tree Replanting

- Replanting species that grow quickly is not preferable to retaining adult trees
- Replant with native trees

Tree Removal

- Trees provide beauty and privacy
- Outright tree removal is objectionable
- Consider other tree management techniques over the removal of trees
- Clear-cutting behind houses is not advised
- Property is often appraised based on existing trees; removing trees can hurt the price of a home
- Slope exposure is objectionable

Other

- The San Leandro Creek is a precious resource

Key Outcomes

The District will hold additional workshops to discuss the Cary Drive and St. Mary Avenue sites. The next community workshop will be held at Bancroft Middle School in San Leandro on Tuesday, June 29 from 7 to 9 p.m.