



## **San Leandro Creek Hazardous Tree Community Workshop**

Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District

Wednesday, August 25, 2010 Community Workshop Summary

### **Introduction/Overview**

The Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (District) held a community workshop at the San Leandro Public Library on Wednesday, Aug. 25, to present and discuss the revised hazardous tree management plans, which are based upon the District's thorough evaluation of the trees at the Huff Avenue, Cary Drive and St. Mary Avenue sites.

Approximately 30 members of the community attended the workshop, as well as several local dignitaries.

This summary of the Aug. 25 workshop highlights questions and concerns raised by community members in attendance, as well as key points made during the District's presentation. This summary is not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript of the workshop.

To see the PowerPoint presentation from the Aug.25 workshop, please go to:

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

### **District Presentation Highlights**

After introducing District staff members present at the workshop, Flood Control Program Manager Hank Ackerman explained that the Aug. 25 workshop was the fourth in a series of community workshops focused on reducing the risk of hazardous trees at three sites along San Leandro Creek. The previous three workshops, held in June and July, discussed the evaluation of trees at the Huff Avenue site, Cary Drive site and St. Mary Avenue site. The purpose of the fourth workshop was to present the management actions planned for the three sites based upon the District's thorough evaluation of the trees on District property at those sites.

John Leffingwell, arborist with HortScience, gave an overview of the tree assessment methodology that was used at each of the sites that was presented at the previous community workshops. He then explained the 12-point tree risk rating system, a numeric system for assessing the risk that a tree might cause harm or damage to nearby people or property. Mr. Leffingwell also discussed tree management actions that are considered professionally acceptable and unacceptable.

**(For a complete overview of the 12-point risk rating system that HortScience used in developing risk evaluations, please refer to the District's presentation:**

<http://www.acgov.org/pwa/Presentation%20June%2029%20Cary%20Dr.pdf>)

Jim Browne, the project manager with the District, presented the tree corrective action matrix. Mr. Browne explained that the proposed corrective actions were based upon the District's tree risk evaluations. Of the 69 trees assessed and evaluated by the District for their risk of failure, Mr. Browne explained that the District identified 41 trees requiring corrective action to reduce risk including seven to be pruned, 32 to be removed, and two to be copped. (These numbers may be subject to revision by the District.)

Mr. Browne walked through the details of the tree management actions matrix. He discussed the District's corrective action plan, which includes the pruning, copping (a management technique whereby the tree is cut to its base and allowed to grow new shoots), and removal of trees. He then explained the risk assessment and corrective action for several example trees from each of the three sites.

Finally, Mr. Browne explained that the District's next step was to develop a project description, which will include access routes and removal methods, details on erosion control and slope stability, and restoration opportunities. Mr. Browne said that addressing environmental considerations would be an important component of developing the project, and would be covered in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process.

## **Public Comment and Questions**

Charles Gardiner, principal at CirclePoint, facilitated the community discussion. Mr. Browne, Mr. Ackerman, and Mr. Leffingwell answered questions posed by the community. Questions and comments touched upon environmental issues, such as use of herbicides and impacts to bird nesting; project timeline questions, such as project duration and opportunities for additional community input; and comments related to the hazardous tree management actions matrix. The majority of community comments were related to clarification of the tree risk assessment methods and options, such as pruning, and for mitigating the risk presented by hazardous trees.

### **Project History and Background**

A few of the meeting participants asked for more background information about the project. The community also mentioned that they would like to be able to identify trees more easily, both on site and at meetings. Specific questions are listed below:

- ***What prompted the District to begin the process of evaluating trees?***
  - A tree fell and damaged a home near the creek, highlighting the risk to people and property and liability for the District.
- ***Has the tree evaluation and assessment system employed by the District been used elsewhere?***
  - Yes, the system used here is a standard approach used around the world to assess risk.
- ***Community members would like a map to see where trees have failed in the past.***
  - The District will make the information available on the District's website (see above).
- ***Have the trees been tagged and/or identified for removal, so that the community can view them on site?***

- Yes, there is a small silver tag affixed to each tree that lists the number that corresponds to the tree numbers on the tree management actions matrix.
- ***Community members would like a map of the San Leandro Creek sites to help them identify the number of trees and the location of trees for which they have particular interest.***
  - Maps are available on the District's website (see above).

### **Project Timeline**

Community members requested more details and timely notification regarding the commencement of project work. Some community members that do not live near the three current evaluation sites would like to know when the District would evaluate trees near their homes. Overall, community members have found the workshops to be helpful in keeping them informed about project plans. Specific questions are listed below:

- ***What is the timeline for approval of the project? When will the actual work begin?***
  - Work would begin in spring or summer 2011, following the environmental review, and will be timed to not interfere with nesting birds.
- ***Will the community be notified before any trees are removed?***
  - Yes, the District will notify residents and hold a community meeting before removal.
- ***When will the remaining trees be evaluated along the creek?***
  - The District intends to complete a long-term tree management plan for the rest of the creek, but the schedule has not yet been developed.
- ***When will the trees near Lee Avenue be evaluated?***
  - Those trees will be evaluated as part of the long-term tree management plan
- ***When will there be additional opportunities for public input?***
  - The District will hold the next meeting to review the project before the end of the year. The public will also have an opportunity to comment on the environmental review document when it is prepared.

### **Tree Risk Assessment and Evaluation**

A few community members wanted more information regarding the tree risk assessment system, developed by HortScience. Some community members thought that because the rating system is subjective, the District should seek a second opinion regarding the risk rating of the trees. Specific questions are listed below

- ***Why were some trees rated six and seven selected for corrective action by the District?***
  - The District found that some trees rated six and seven had special circumstances (e.g. proximity to private property or high likelihood of failure) that required them to examine the tree more closely.
- ***Define the terms "failure potential," "size of part" and "target rating."***
  - "Failure potential" is the likelihood that a part of or a whole tree will fail. "Size of part" is how large or small the part of the tree is that may fail. "Target rating" is the value of the area that could be impacted if a tree limb or entire tree failed.
- ***Has the District received a second opinion on the risk assessment of the trees?***

- The District has not sought a second opinion for the tree risk assessment. HortScience is widely considered the premier tree risk-assessment team because they developed the 12-point tree risk assessment system currently being used, and widely used around the world.

### **Hazardous Tree Management Actions Matrix**

Meeting participants felt that some trees identified for removal could be saved. Community members were concerned that the District was opting to remove trees instead of maintaining them, because it is less expensive. Specific questions and comments are listed below:

- ***Plenty of trees have withstood storms, wind, and the test of time. Why would the District have to remove these trees?***
  - Historically these trees may have withstood storms, but that is not a guarantee against future failures. The trees are growing and changing. As the District evaluates trees, it must consider the risk assessment process and take measures to reduce the risk of many of these trees.
- ***The District appears to want to remove trees instead of maintain them; they want the "easy way out."***
  - The District will be developing a long-term management plan for all trees on District property in San Leandro Creek.
- ***Many community members would be willing to save some of the trees identified for removal on the matrix by providing some of the resources necessary for maintaining the trees.***
  - This is not possible for legal and liability reasons.

### **Environmental Review Process**

Community members asked for clarification about the environmental review /process and specifically, the District's decision to prepare a Negative Declaration, which is the next step up from the Categorically Exempt status used the last time.

#### General

- ***Explain CEQA.***
  - California Environmental Quality Act is a statute that requires state and local agencies to identify the significant environmental impacts of their actions and to avoid or mitigate those impacts to a less than significant level, if feasible.
- ***What is the environmental process that must be conducted?***
  - The District must identify the significant environmental impacts of the proposed actions and avoid or mitigate those impacts, if feasible.
- ***What is a Negative Declaration?***
  - After the District completes the environmental review process, the District may find that the proposed project does not have a significant effect on the environment and would prepare a Negative Declaration.

- ***How does the District know that they will use a Negative Declaration or Mitigated Negative Declaration before the CEQA process has even begun?***
  - An Initial Study will be prepared that responds to the concerns expressed during the workshops. Although it is likely that a Negative Declaration will result from that study, the District does not know for sure what will be the outcome.
- ***Has the District considered the aesthetic impact of tree removal? Has the District done any visual modeling to project the aesthetic impacts?***
  - The aesthetic impact of tree removal will be considered during the environmental review process.

#### Wildlife and Creek Restoration

- ***Has the District studied other alternatives (to herbicides) for dealing with the stumps left after removal?***
  - The District will analyze alternatives as part of the environmental review process.
- ***Will the District consider nesting seasons before beginning construction?***
  - Yes, the District will work around nesting seasons.
- ***When will the restoration plan be developed? What is the restoration plan in areas where many trees have been removed?***
  - The District will develop a restoration plan as part of the environmental review process.
- ***What is the typical life expectancy of a eucalyptus?***
  - Since the eucalyptus is a non-native species and relatively new to California, there have not been any long-term studies that have determined an average life expectancy for eucalyptus in California.

#### Neighborhood Impact

- ***How will the tree removal process look? How would the removal of a 250-foot tree near St. Mary look?***
  - The tallest tree examined thus far is approximately 145 feet tall. The details about the tree removal process will be developed next and discussed at the next community meeting.
- ***Some community members will be impacted for the next two or three years because they live close to the access points.***
  - The tree work will take place in one season. Other work such as watering and maintaining new trees would be of minimal impact.
- ***Some members of the community are concerned that they will have to wait up to two or three years before trees near their homes will be evaluated and managed, even though they may have a high-risk tree nearby.***
  - As the District proceeds with an overall plan, the District will look at the highest risk trees on a case-by-case basis. In general, implementation of the overall plan is several years away.

### **Other Comments**

Several meeting participants were passionate about keeping as many trees along the creek as possible. Some community members were concerned that community meetings have not led to a major change in the District's plan. Specific comments are listed below:

- ***The District has not listened well to the community; community meetings have not led to a major change in the District's plan.***
  - As a result of this community process the District will be removing approx one-third less trees than first planned
- ***There should be an option for homeowners to sign a waiver to indemnify the District.***
  - After discussing this option with District lawyers and the risk management team, the District has determined that this option is not viable because the District cannot legally transfer its liability to others.

### **Key Outcomes**

The District will review all public comments collected at the Aug. 25 community workshop. The next community workshop is planned for October or November to discuss the environmental review process and the full description of the project, including access and removal, erosion control, restoration plans, and other project activities. More information will be sent out prior to the next workshop and posted to the Public Works Agency's website at <http://www.acgov.org/pwa/>.