San Leandro Creek Hazardous Tree Community Workshop

Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District

Tuesday, July 13, 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, July 13 to discuss issues related to the trees located on County-owned property along San Leandro Creek near St. Mary Avenue in San Leandro.

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

Below is a summary of the July 13 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 July 13 workshop, please click here:

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

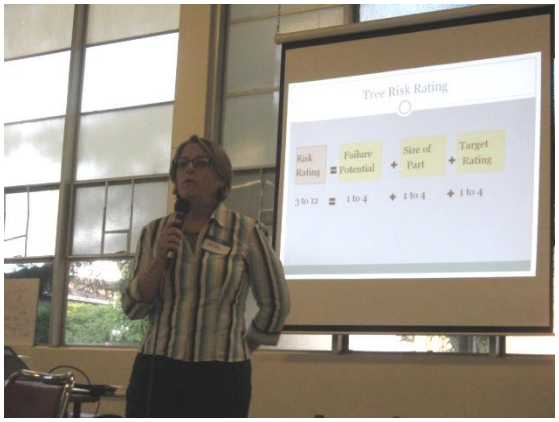
Open House & Presentation

The meeting began with a brief Open House, which allowed community members to review tree risk profiles for each of the 37 trees with a diameter of six inches or greater that were evaluated at the St. Mary Avenue site and to ask representatives from the County questions about the tree risk profiles.

Hank Ackerman, Flood Program Manager, introduced the Flood Control District staff members. Mr. Ackerman explained that the purpose of the July 13 workshop was to discuss the results of the tree analyses at the St. Mary Avenue site with the community, and to receive input and feedback from community members based on the material presented. Mr. Ackerman explained that the District had already held two community meetings—the first for the analyses of trees at Huff Avenue site and the second for the Cary Drive site, and that the District would hold a fourth meeting, tentatively scheduled for late August. At this

meeting, the County will explain the plan that it has developed to address hazardous trees at the three sites; community members will be invited to comment.

Nelda Matheny, President of HortScience and a Board-certified Master Arborist, provided a presentation about the methodology of the 12-point tree risk assessment system, which was used to rate the trees as each of the three sites. Ms. Matheny underlined the difference between "risk" and "hazard":



Risk is defined by the likelihood that a tree will fail and cause injury or damage; a hazard describes 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 July 13 PowerPoint presentation. The link to the presentation is provided above.)**

Ms. Matheny walked through the profiles for several of the 37 trees that she had evaluated at the St. Mary Avenue site. The complete set of risk profiles for each of the trees at this site was available in Tree Survey Report binders available at the workshop. The Tree Survey Report will also be posted on the District's website.

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. Many of the questions and comments were similar in nature to those provided at previous meetings and focused on the challenges posed by ivy, wind and excessive soil moisture. The majority of the questions and comments related to clarification of the tree risk assessment system and the options for mitigating the risk presented by hazardous trees, such as pruning.

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

<u>Project and Process</u>

Will the District be collecting additional community input? Please clarify the purpose of the next community workshop.

Yes, the District will be collecting additional community input. The current process included three community workshops, one for each of the sites under

consideration along San Leandro Creek: Huff Avenue, Cary Drive and St. Mary Avenue. After this evening's meeting, which is the last of the three community meetings, the District will review the feedback received as well as the individual tree risk assessments for each of the sites. The District will develop a plan for addressing the hazardous trees factoring in the risk ratings, public comments, and other considerations, which will be shared with the community. In late August, the District will hold another workshop to review the proposed project and to collect community feedback about it. The District will send out information about the next community workshop in a couple of weeks.

The community has heard that the St. Mary Avenue site is being considered because it would provide access to the creek. We are afraid that our quiet street will be impacted by this project. If you need to remove a tree, what is the exit strategy?

The St. Mary site is being considered because some of the trees are hazardous and need to be evaluated. There is access to the creek at St. Mary Avenue and Cary Drive, and there may be access from other public locations, such as schools or parks. The District will need to obtain a permit before any project work can begin, so the community will be notified in advance.

Was HortScience involved with the tree survey that was conducted eight to 12 years ago? Is there any evidence that the tree hazards are getting worse in the San Leandro Creek area?

HortScience was not involved in a tree survey prior to this project. When trees have not been maintained, the risk tends to be greater.

Tree Risk Assessment

Were factors like potential pest infestations and the growth of ivy on trees considered in the tree risk assessments?

The tree risk assessments include all factors that might affect a tree. Ivy growth, in particular, can add weight to a tree where there is foliage, and create a strain on the branches. Native trees have an especially tough time competing with ivy for sunlight and nutrients.

In using the 12-point risk rating system, you lose some of the detail [other relevant information] by assigning it a number. If a tall, healthy tree is close to a house, it could be assigned a risk rating of six. However, if a tall, unhealthy tree is located in an area that could not potentially harm a person or property, it could still be assigned a risk rating of six. It would be preferable to keep the tall, healthy tree.

The risk rating assigned to a tree will not be the only factor that determines what action will be taken to minimize risk. Other factors, such as pruning and other techniques to potentially minimize risk will also be carefully considered on a tree-by-tree basis. It is important to note that in many cases, the trees near San Leandro Creek have a higher risk rating because they are located on a slope. If they were located on flat ground, the risk rating might be slightly lower.

How frequently have trees failed in the San Leandro Creek area?

Since 1998, the District has monitored and mapped trees that have failed along San Leandro Creek. The county has counted 23 instances of full tree failures and 39 instances of tree branches failing over the last 12 years. This includes all trees in the San Leandro Creek area, both on public and private property. The District does not maintain trees on private property.

Tree Management

How does the risk rating assigned to a tree influence the technique used to manage the tree? Will the District remove all trees with a risk rating of 12?

A high risk rating does not determine the tree management technique. The District will decide the risk threshold that it can accept in order to minimize risk to nearby residents and property. The District will then review each tree above that risk threshold and look at available options for reducing risk. In some cases, the District may prune trees. In other cases, the District may have to explore other options. There is no simple way to reduce the risk of a tree. The District will make an effort to save as many trees as possible, while continuing to keep public safety as its number one priority.

How will the District manage trees that have shoots or young saplings growing from the base of the tree?

The District does not have a plan for the removal of saplings that are growing out of the base of trees; each tree will be managed differently depending on the risk assessment and potential risk-reduction measures.

Wind

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

Yes, the northwesterly to southwesterly prevailing winds were considered during the assessment process, which can give an indication of where the wind force will come from. However, when a tree is leaning, the direction of the lean is a more important factor in determining the direction of its fall than the prevailing wind. For trees on steep slopes that are not leaning, trees generally fall down slope, and in this case, into the creek.

How will the El Niño weather system affect the trees that have been assessed?

The risk assessment assumed winds of 40 mph or greater, combined with the effect of wet soils. In most cases, these wind speeds would impact trees with a risk rating of eight or higher.

Can the wind still knock a tree over even if it does not have many branches in its canopy? Have you seen this occur in your experience?

Yes, the wind can still knock over these types of trees. Some trees grow tall and have a high degree of taper; they have very few branches and tend to look like a toothpick. A tree without branches attached to the trunk does not have any counter-balancing weight. In the wind, a tree like this is more susceptible to falling.

Ivy Growth

How will the ivy growing at the St. Mary Avenue site be addressed? How does the ivy impact 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 the growth of the new tree.

Pest Infestation

Of all trees surveyed at the St. Mary Avenue site, did any of them have pest infestations?

No pest infestations were detected in the trees located at the St. Mary Avenue site.

St. Mary Avenue Site-Specific Trees

Meeting participants asked Ms. Matheny questions about individual trees and the tree analyses developed by HortScience. Community members wanted to know how risk ratings were calculated for particular trees. Community members were particularly interested in learning about tree management techniques that would reduce a tree's risk rating. The following questions and comments represent those made by community members regarding the St. Mary Avenue site trees.

Risk Assessment

- Clarify how the tree risk rating was determined and applied to specific trees
- What management techniques would reduce the risk rating of a specific tree?

Tree Management Techniques

- How will the trees be managed by the District?
- How will a tree with two trunks be managed by the District?
- What are the various tree management options to reduce the risk of certain trees? (How would pruning, trimming, or removing branches be used to address various risks?)
- How frequently will trees have to be pruned?
- The removal of trees will cause problems for nearby property

Tree Characteristics

- What are the reasons for the absence of branches?
- What are the reasons for ivy growth?
- What are the reasons for additional tree trunks?

Additional Comments

- Community members were concerned that the District was not managing trees well in the past, and the lack of a clear plan has resulted in tree hazards
- A community member was concerned that the District was not considering the removal of ivy in the creek area. She cited a Cape Ivy study that found a feasible way to remove this invasive form of ivy.
- Community members were concerned that trees would be removed, especially in place of other tree maintenance practices.
- Community members were happy to hear that the District does not plan to remove all Eucalyptus and that the District will consider saving these trees when possible.

Key Outcomes

The District will review all public comments collected at the community workshops for Huff Avenue, Cary Drive, and St. Mary Avenue. The District will develop a project plan for addressing hazardous trees and hold another community workshop to obtain community input. The next community workshop will be held in late August or early September. More information will be sent out prior to the next workshop and posted to the Public Works department's website at **http://www.acgov.org/pwa/**