



Staff Liaison
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AGENDA

REGULAR MEETING OF THE Environmental Quality Committee

Tuesday, January 9, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

City Council Chambers
10890 San Pablo Avenue

This Meeting Place is Wheelchair Accessible

7:00 p.m. CONVENE REGULAR MEETING

1. **ROLL CALL** – Chair Howdy Goudey; Vice-Chair Simrun Dhoot; Members Buddy Akacić, Pamela Austin, Fred Bialy, Mark Miner, Sean O'Connor, Paloma Pavel, Sheila Tarbet, Rose Vekony
2. **ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC** *(Estimated time: 5 minutes)*
Remarks are typically limited to three minutes per person and may be on anything within the subject matter jurisdiction of the body. Remarks on non-agenda items will be heard first, as well as introduction by individuals interested in serving on the advisory body. Remarks on agenda items will be heard at the time the item is discussed.
3. **COUNCIL/STAFF LIAISONS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORTS** *(5 min.)*
Staff and/or Council Liaison Lisa Motoyama may report on policies, priorities, and actions taken by the City Council, and/or on matters of general interest to the EQC.
4. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES** *(5 min.)*
Consider a motion adopting the minutes of the EQC meeting held on December 12, 2023.
5. **COLLABORATION WITH THE URBAN FOREST COMMITTEE** *(10 min.)*
Hear updates, participate in discussion and consider possible action items regarding collaborating with the City's Urban Forest Committee.
6. **HILLSIDE NATURAL AREA FIRE RESILIENCE AND FOREST CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN PRESENTATION FROM CITY STAFF** *(30 min.)*
Receive a presentation from City staff on the process and timeline of the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience And Forest Conservation Management Plan and participate in discussion.
7. **FRIENDS OF FIVE CREEKS PRESENTATION ON THE HILLSIDE NATURAL AREA FIRE RESILIENCE AND FOREST CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN** *(15 min.)*
Receive a presentation from Friends of Five Creeks and participate in discussion on the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience And Forest Conservation Management Plan.
 - Presentation and public comment letter attached.
8. **EQC ANNUAL WORK PLAN** *(10 min.)*
Consider a motion to approve the EQC Work Plan and Calendar for 2024.
 - 2024 Calendar, Work Plan and 2023 Achievements attached.
9. **EQC BUDGET AND CALENDAR OF EVENTS** *(30 min.)*
Hear updates, participate in discussion, and consider possible action items regarding planning, logistics, and expenditures for the EQC calendar of events, including:
 - Green Team 2024 Cleanups / Broom Pulls:
 - Jan. 20, Saturday, 10am, Broom pull w/ Trail Trekkers, HNA Madera Open Space
 - Feb. 17, Saturday, 10am, Broom pull w/ Trail Trekkers, location TBD

- March 24, Sunday, El Cerrito Plaza Bart Station cleanup
- April 20, Saturday, Earth Day TBD
- June 2, Sunday, Baxter Creek Park cleanup (w/ Baxter volunteers)
- Aug. 11, Sunday, Northern Gateways Park cleanup
- Sept. 21, Saturday, Coastal Cleanup Day, Baxter Creek Park (TBD)
- Oct. 12, Saturday, Northern San Pablo Ave. cleanup
- Dec. 1, Sunday, Baxter Creek Park (w/ Baxter volunteers)
- Earth Day - April 20, 2024

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS (10 min.)

Hear committee member announcements and suggestions for future EQC agenda items. Potentially engage in discussion and make decisions regarding logistics of EQC consideration of items including:

- An EC Drive Electric Event

11. ADJOURNMENT

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact the Staff Liaison, Christina Leard, at (510) 215-4338. Notification 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the City to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting. (28 CFR 35.102-35.104 ADA Title I). Any writings or documents provided to a majority of the members regarding any item on this agenda will be made available for public inspection at the El Cerrito Recycling + Environmental Resource Center (7501 Schmidt Lane) during normal business hours.



Staff Liaison
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DRAFT MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING OF THE Environmental Quality Committee

Tuesday, December 12, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

City Council Chambers
10890 San Pablo Avenue

This Meeting Place is Wheelchair Accessible

CONVENE REGULAR MEETING Chair Goudey called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

1. **ROLL CALL** – Chair Howdy Goudey; Members Fred Bialy, Mark Miner, Sean O'Connor, Paloma Pavel, Sheila Tarbet, Rose Vekony **Absent:** Vice-Chair Simrun Dhoot; Members Buddy Akacić and Pamela Austin **Also Present:** Christina Leard, Staff Liaison

2. **ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There were public comments made by El Cerrito residents Anne Ogonowski, Susan Schwartz, and Audrey Liese, addressing the Hillside Natural Area (HNA) Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan that is currently under development.

3. **COUNCIL/STAFF LIAISONS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORTS**

Staff Liaison Leard provided a brief update on the December 5 City Council meeting and recommendations from the City Council Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Advisory Bodies. She noted that the item will return to the City Council in January or February for final approval and the recommended actions are not yet in effect. Ms. Leard also noted the Council adopted a new Strategic Plan.

Ms. Leard provided an update and draft timeline for the development of the Hillside Natural Area (HNA) Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan, and noted that a joint EQC and UFC (Urban Forest Committee) meeting would be scheduled in May or June to discuss the draft plan once it is released to the public.

4. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

Consider a motion adopting the minutes of the EQC meeting held on November 14, 2023.

Move/Second: O'Connor/Miner **Action:** Passed a motion to adopt the Minutes of the November 14, 2023 EQC meeting. **Ayes:** Goudey, Miner, O'Connor, Pavel, Vekony **Noes:** None **Abstain:** Bialy, Tarbet

5. **COLLABORATION WITH THE URBAN FOREST COMMITTEE**

Urban Forest Committee Member Robin Mitchell gave updates from the recent Urban Forest Committee meeting. Ms. Mitchell announced an Arbor Day project to take place the week of March 7-14.

6. **CLIMATE ACTION AND ADAPTATION PLAN (CAAP)**

EQC Members heard brief updates from Staff Liaison Leard regarding development of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan. The City hopes to have a public draft ready by February/March.

7. **EQC ANNUAL WORK PLAN**

The Committee reviewed the draft 2024 work plan and 2023 accomplishments and made comments for suggested edits to be considered for final approval at the January 2024 meeting.

Ms. Leard announced that she is not able to attend the February 13 EQC meeting and proposed canceling the February meeting or pushing to Thursday February 15. The

committee decided to push the meeting to February 15, and the full 2024 calendar would come back in January for final approval along with the work plan.

8. EQC BUDGET AND CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Staff and Committee members provided updates on recent events the EQC has supported and discussed plans for future events in 2023, including:

- Green Team 2023 Cleanups / Broom Pulls:
 - Dec. 3, Sunday, Baxter Creek Park cleanup (with regular Baxter volunteers) (Debrief)
 - Dec. 10, Sunday, 10am, Broom pull w/ Trail Trekkers, HNA, Regency Ct. (Debrief)
 - Jan. 20, Saturday, 10am, Broom pull w/ Trail Trekkers, location TBD
 - Feb. 17, Saturday, 10am, Broom pull w/ Trail Trekkers, location TBD
 - Additional dates TBD
- Earth Day - April 20, 2024; Staff Liaison Leard requested the help of the EQC in planning the 2024 Earth Day celebration.

9. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Staff and Committee members made announcements and suggestions for future EQC agenda items including:

- Support for Kiosks on Ohlone Greenway
- Don't Litter Campaign to encourage businesses that don't pick up after their events
- An EC Drive Electric Event
- Composting Enforcement
- MCE Clean Energy & California Public Utilities Commission Updates
- Environmental, Social, And Racial Framework - Link to the [JEDI Tool](#)
- Climate Adaptation, Severe Weather Events, and Emergency Preparedness
- Environmental Films Series
- Integrated Pest Management Report from City Staff
- EQC Collaboration with Young People in El Cerrito
- Tool/Toy Lending Library
- Urban Greening Plan Implementation
- Community Member Suggestions (e.g. Meatless Green Mondays)
- Open Space Preservation
- Mitigation of heat effects; Federal Inflation Reduction Act

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Howdy Goudey, Chair

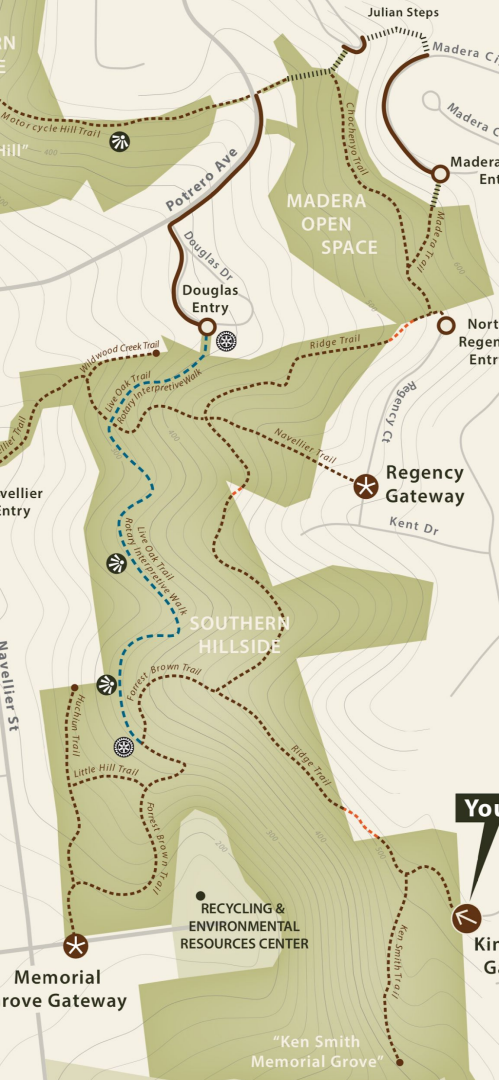
This is to clarify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Regular Environmental Quality Committee meeting of December 12, 2023 as approved by the Environmental Quality Committee.

Christina Leard, Staff Liaison

Fire safety and nature in a new Hillside Natural Area plan

Six slides for Friends of Five Creeks' Jan. 4, 2024, input





1. Left: Private property crosses service roads. Cooperation is vital.

City, contractors, and volunteers need accurate maps they can use. Neglected patches become dangerous, like the dry weeds and broom more than six feet tall in the background below.





2. A target list of problem plants, records, marking, and follow-up are needed. One example: Birds eat berries and roost, seeding shrubs above Schmidt Lane. Twiggy invasive cotoneaster is being allowed to take over. Small, slower-growing seedlings of less-flammable native toyon get mowed.



3. Plastic and erosion-control rolls show dangers of disturbing steep banks to remove eucalyptus (left). These are not sustainable solutions. “Restoration” is difficult and uncertain. Mowing vegetation on road and trail cuts can lead to erosion and slides (below left). It also destroys refuges for native plants (below right).



4. Manage based on reality, not assumptions.

Hillside Natural Area oak forest often has an almost bare understory (left below).

The eucalyptus below right is nursing native oak, toyon, blackberry, honeysuckle, yarrow, and more – needed for a healthy forest and wildlife.





5. Along road cuts, a toyon becomes a magnificent tree. An elderberry, bare in winter, nurses native blackberry. These forest openings are vital to diversity. Rigid rules for fire and fuel breaks would devastate them.



6. Steep trail edges are refuges for natives like maidenhair ferns (left). Mowing can destroy them. More than a dozen plants are found in one or two places in the Hillside Natural Area – like the deerweed (right), valuable for pollinators and restoration.

These small refuges of diversity need mapping and protection.



Friends of Five Creeks' input for the Hillside Natural Area Wildfire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan, Jan. 4, 2024

Fire Safety and Nature in a New Hillside Natural Area Plan: Jan. 4, 2024, input from stakeholder [Friends of Five Creeks \(F5C\)](#) for a draft Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan, as part of public comment scheduled to close Jan. 5. [Six slides illustrating some points below are here](#).

This document centers on how to achieve the goal stated in consultants' slide presentation at Public Workshop 1: **"An updated plan is needed that will address and balance fire resilience with native forest conservation and will help secure grant funding."** California's 2021 Wildfire and Forestry Resilience Action Plan (<https://wildfiretaskforce.org/action-plan/>, 2021, p. 13) points out specifically that **"Healthy forests include woodlands, grasslands, chaparral, shrublands, and related vegetation types."**

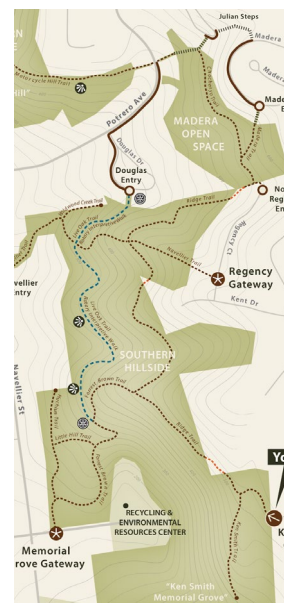
We agree that **the most pressing priority probably is removing tall, highly flammable groves of eucalyptus and pines**. We understand the city's eagerness to obtain permits in what may be a short-lived window of grant opportunity.

However, **El Cerrito should not miss this opportunity to take low-cost steps to plan for other aspects of fire-hazard reduction while protecting and nurturing varied plants and wildlife and increasing human enjoyment, including collaboration with citizens.**

This long document has three sections, organized around agreement, differences, or supplements to the thoughtful and detailed Nov. 12, 2023, letter from Make El Cerrito Fire Safe (MECFS), whose efforts through the years we admire and salute.

1. Points of agreement with the Nov. 12, 2023, letter from Make El Cerrito Fire Safe

- **F5C and MECFS share a main goal:** Friends of Five Creeks (F5C) and MECFS seek a **plan that, as El Cerrito has promised, will "guide the City's fire fuel reduction, native forest conservation, and maintenance activities."** We agree on the urgency of removing tall, highly flammable groves that could spread fire rapidly over large areas.
- **As the MECFS letter says, a plan must be based on accurate information. Maps that accurately delineate boundaries of public properties are essential (Slide 1). Several private properties project well into what appears to be the Hillside Natural Area, even crossing service roads (map right).** Accurate maps also are needed to establish and maintain access and fuel or fire breaks, and to promote mutually beneficial cooperation. This applies on many levels. Here are two examples:
 - **Staff, down to sub-contractors, need maps** to make sure that patches of tall dry weeds are not left unmowed – an ongoing common problem – and to protect habitat from accidental destruction ([Slides 1 & 2](#)).
 - **Maps would show that some blanket guidelines are impractical or impossible.** For example, requiring fuel breaks 100 feet beyond property lines would in some cases be next to impossible due to creek canyons or cliff-like slopes. In other cases, they would paradoxically destroy vibrant habitat while landowners could plant, for example, flammable Pampas grass or juniper well into what appears to be "natural area."



This is not theoretical. Property owners have planted fire-prone eucalyptus and prickly-Moses acacia immediately adjacent to the Hillside Natural Area; others maintain clumps of Pampas grass or French broom.

- **The MECFS letter is correct that there have been more fires than consultants have reported.** We remember two in the main Hillside Natural Area, both apparently from campfires. In October 2018, we photographed the remains of one (photo available). Camping continues (photo available).

Like MECFS, we believe this new plan must incorporate [the El Cerrito - Kensington Wildfire Action Plan \(2017\)](#) and the Resolution Declaring Wildfire Prevention and Safety As A Top Priority (2021).

The thoughtful 2017 plan sets goals. The new plan can provide specifics on how to move toward carrying out those goals, including those quoted below.

- Section 6.1: **“A method for changing, updating, and revising the plan, and the need to monitor, keep people involved, plan collaboratively, and report specifics of treatment and other activities.”**
- Section 2.3.5: **“Funding and incentives for private property owners. ‘Seed’ funding. Balancing habitat needs and defensible space. Effective techniques to reduce noxious weed invasion after soil-disturbing hazardous fuel reduction treatments.”**
- Section 2.3.7: **“Scientifically based resource and vegetation management that protects and improves native habitat values.... Balance protection of biological resources with hazardous fuels removal...Including use of volunteers to reduce fuel loads...”**

Already, volunteers and small grants to local organizations have contributed significantly to fire-fuel reduction. The city has supplied publicity, tools, and green-waste removal. It has allowed volunteers to mark plants that need protection for some work, and often acted on tips submitted by citizens through informal channels. Citizens could do more at little cost, from maintenance to developing joint projects. Examples are below, under Section 3.2.

- Section 3.1: **“Removal of invasive plants of known high flammability listed in a recognized source...Many of the recommended actions will take long-term commitment over multiple years to address the complex hazards.** Some actions have current funding, but additional funding and efforts are needed...”.

A new plan should require a regularly updated list of target plants and methods to map them and track effects of actions. (Slide 2) Lack of accurate maps and records continues to lead to dangerous pockets of vegetation being overlooked. It creates an illusion that current conditions are long-term. In addition, knowledge and institutional memory are lost when key staff members change. Some flammable invasives, such as the cotoneaster that has all but taken over the slope north of Schmidt Lane. These omissions are dangerous in the face of climate change and new “invasions.” A new plan should recommend methods of tracking multi-year efforts, from “restorations” to removal of specific problems plants such as French broom and Pampas grass. **Citizens can aid these efforts using non-profit GPS mapping apps such as iNaturalist and CalFlora.**

Sections of the 2017 document on what is funded or not should be updated, and possible funding improvements suggested.

- Section 3.2: **“Working with potential partners** to find common ground, share ideas, and develop joint implementation of local projects. These partners may expand **beyond traditional agency partners to include volunteer groups...organizations...homeowner associations....”**

The new plan should specify some ways the city should work with these groups and allow for adding more ways. Here are a few possibilities: Better integration with city committees and Green Teams; encouragement, publicity, and support for neighbors and groups seeking small grants; clear, publicized methods for reporting problems; and working with citizen volunteers using citizen-science apps to map, mark, and report resources to be protected, spots needing fuel reduction, or effects of interventions. ..

2. Points of difference from the Nov. 12, 2023, letter from Make El Cerrito Fire Safe

Based on our volunteers’ many years of reducing fire risk, mapping, and stewarding diverse plants and animals in this treasured urban green space, Friends of Five Creeks respectfully differs from or suggests supplementing some points in the MECFS letter.

- **Incorporate the broad range of possibilities for reducing fire hazard from the 1994 plan, not the plan itself.** Development, conditions, and climate probably have changed too much in 30 years to directly incorporate the 1994 HNA Fire Hazard Reduction Plan. An updated plan should revisit the 1994 plan’s still-relevant considerations, including for example, access, adequate water lines or other methods of fighting fires, and budgeting for maintenance.
- **Blanket widths for fire and fuel breaks edging trails, roads, or property lines, or rigid mowing heights and schedules, would be dangerous and unworkable, leading to erosion, slides, washouts, and invasion by fire-prone weeds.** Here are a few examples ([Slides 3, 5](#)):
 - Along the service road that runs north from the Hillside Church area, vital to reach the sewer line and channelized Wildwood Creek, tree removal has already required covering extremely steep creek bank with plastic to prevent a washout – not a sustainable solution. Segments of the almost cliff-like bank above the road, once rich in honeysuckle, ferns, and native shrubs, are now bare (due to drought and removal of fallen trees) and threaten slides onto the road.
 - The service road that leads downhill from the north end of Regency Court runs in part only a few feet from the steep creek canyon. Cutting the elderberries, buckeyes, and other native trees and shrubs here would put the road at risk, particularly as climate change brings stronger and more destructive storms. “Leaving the roots” is not a sustainable long-term solution. Just as on the service road described above, segments of the steep roadcut that have been stripped of vegetation threaten to collapse onto the road.
 - Section 1, on the need for accurate maps, outlines the unworkable or paradoxical effects of requiring fuel breaks based on property lines rather than structures. Effective fire safety requires cooperative effort among property owners and the city. Agreements including conservation or other easements are a possibility.

- Many native plants cannot survive or spread themselves if mowed before they can set seed, mowed so low that they cannot shade out competitors, or cut so low and often that they simply die.

Mowing should be scheduled, but flexibly and based on existing vegetation and climate conditions. In a simple example, in the late, wet spring of 2023, early mowing would have been largely a waste --- while unusually extensive late mowing was needed due to late-sprouting heavy fuel loads. This mowing didn't all get done.

A plan should budget for the cost of maintaining fuel and fire breaks and consider the likelihood that El Cerrito will maintain them. Disturbance, including mowing, invites invaders. After the Oakland Fire Storm, the East Bay Regional Park District created a firebreak in the hills east of Berkeley homes. Despite its extensive resources, it did not maintain this, so that by the time current fears of fire rekindled, much of this "break" had grown up in tall, dangerous thickets of invasive French broom, poison hemlock, fennel, and the like.

3. How can El Cerrito balance fire resilience with native forest conservation?

Keeping people safe while preserving natural values to the extent practical will require flexibility and ongoing adaptation. From experience, Friends of Five Creeks suggests some guidelines we believe will be among the most effective and least expensive ways to achieve both these goals.

- **A plan should budget for the long-term costs of removing and replacing, maintaining fuel and fire breaks. It also should weigh the likelihood that El Cerrito will maintain these.** As consultants have pointed out, disturbance, including mowing, invites invaders.

After the Oakland Fire Storm, the East Bay Regional Park District created a firebreak in the hills east of Berkeley homes. Despite its extensive resources, it did not maintain this, so that by the time current fears of fire in the wildland-urban interface were rekindled, much of this "break" had grown up in tall, dangerous thickets of invasive French broom, poison hemlock, fennel, and the like.

- **Preservation is much cheaper and more likely to succeed than restoration.** In their December presentation to stakeholders, consultants asked: How can we manage costs for planting, monitoring and maintaining native plant and tree communities? What is the realistic vision for the restoration of native habitat? The best answer is, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

A little extra planning and effort to keep native understory when trees are removed. and to protect hotspots with varied plants and habitat will be much cheaper and easier than paying for consultants, plans, and permits. and then trying to keep new "restoration" plantings alive, generally without irrigation, while curbing eager invasives ([Slides 3- 6](#)).

Most of Friends of Five Creeks work over 27 years has been trying to save areas that were "restored" by professionals and then abandoned. Our advice: If someone says they can restore an area, insist that they show you similar projects where their proposed techniques have succeeded and been maintained for at least 10 years.

- **Guidelines for mowing, fuel breaks, fire breaks and other interventions should be flexible, adopted with recognition of terrain and existing conditions, and accurately mapped so that staff and contractors can follow them.**

Much of the area's biodiversity would be devastated by rigid, generalized rules for fire and fuel breaks, mowing dates, or removal of understory potential "ladder fuels." Here are examples, including actions needed:

- **Small areas needing protection, including those needed by wildlife such as wood rats, should be mapped, marked, and protected.** The Hillside Natural Area is a relatively small "ecological island" surrounded by development. Many native plants or animals, once wiped out, are unlikely to re-colonize through barriers of buildings, streets, cars, and people. In addition, many species not legally requiring protection state- or nationwide can be easily wiped out because they are found in only one or a handful of spots in the Hillside Natural Area ([Slide 6](#)).
- **At least the "better" wildflower meadows deserve appropriate and flexible mowing heights and times.** Annual plants must set seed in order to survive. Mowing too early can wipe them out. In California's climate, many annuals have mass "superblooms" with years between when few sprout. If these are mowed too early, a replacement seed bank may not be built up for many years, if ever. Early mowing already devastated the sky-blue arroyo lupine, now rare. But even tough perennials will eventually blink out if they are repeatedly mowed too low, cannot grow enough leaves to feed their roots, and cannot set seed.
- **To maintain diversity, vegetation removal and mowing should recognize the following realities, and work with nature rather than trying to fit it into false categories and generalizations:**
 - **The Hillside Natural Area is a complex mosaic of slopes, soils, exposures, moisture, conditions of shade and sun, and many other factors, many of which we do not understand. Its wildlife requires food and cover, and in turn influences what grows.**
 - **Without fire, expansion of the closed-canopy oak forest, with little understory, has created a nearly barren understory over large areas (now then broom has been suppressed) ([Slide 4](#)). This is already a shaded fuel break over large areas ([Slide 4](#)).**
 - **Plants and animal life is generally more abundant in forest edges, clearings made when old trees die and fall, and openings provided by roads and trails ([Slides 3, 5](#)).**
 - **These road and trail openings often are especially important as refuges for native plants that cannot compete with invaders in "good" conditions. Poorer soils, steep banks, a bit of extra drainage can be vital for delicate melic grasses, polypody and goldback ferns, and some wildflowers ([Slide 6](#)).**
 - **Eucalyptus trees, despite shedding abundant oils and bark, often foster healthy communities of toyon, native blackberry, honeysuckle, yarrow, soap root, and other natives – more than in adjacent oak forests or grasslands. ([Slide 4](#)). Trees should be removed carefully, keeping this source of new natives.**

The Hillside Natural Area can have a plan that keeps people safe, and costs low, by working with nature. We hope this will be El Cerrito's goal.

From: [Brian Richmond](#)
To: [Karineh Samkian](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: HNA Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group
Date: Sunday, November 12, 2023 6:54:15 PM
Attachments: [NPS Fire Management Newsletter- Eucalyptus.pdf](#)
[1994.05.01_EC_HNAFireHazardReductionPlan.pdf](#)
[El Cerrito - Kensington Wildfire Action Plan \(2017\).pdf](#)

Caution! This message was sent from outside your organization.

Members of the HNA Stakeholders group,

The Make El Cerrito Fire Safe (MECFS) group asks that these top priorities be added to the plan, and corrections and concerns addressed.

Corrections (to Wildfire Risk document)

- HNA boundaries are inaccurate throughout all maps in "Executive Summary Wildfire Risk".
 - For example, the eastern border near Earl, Duke, Baron, and King courts is substantially farther east.
- Wildfire history missing fires (p. 10):
 - 10-6-2020 on HNA/PGE land, likely human-caused
 - 10-17-2023 on HNA/PGE land, likely human-caused
 - 11-2-2023 on HNA land, likely human-caused (<https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/brushfire-on-el-cerrito-hillside-threatens-several-homes/>)
- If the wildfire history list is accurate, the frequency of fire events has increased

Concerns

It is critical that the HNA Plan incorporate the Resolutions already adopted by El Cerrito, notably:

El Cerrito - Kensington Wildfire Action Plan (2017)

<https://el-cerrito.org/DocumentCenter/View/7216> (and attached)

An Appendix to the Contra Costa Countywide Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

Resolution Declaring Wildfire Prevention and Safety As A Top Priority (2021)

<https://civicclerk.blob.core.windows.net/stream/ELCERRITOCA/412dd73d-1c10-4e42-9ca0-156884df0f8b.pdf?sv=2022-11-02&st=2023-10-11T02%3A49%3A08Z&se=2024-10-11T02%3A54%3A08Z&sr=b&sp=r&sig=sCArKn%2F2OqaKp%2F9iTc4qlHoNA9edwMSZt75a4RKi9zs%3D>

City Council Meeting (July 20, 2021) - <https://elcerritoca.portal.civicclerk.com/event/359/overview>

Notice of adoption (Aug 6, 2021): <https://www.el-cerrito.org/DocumentCenter/View/15874/CM-Update-08062021>

- Includes "Reducing fuel loads in the Hillside Natural Area"

1994 HNA Fire Hazard Reduction Plan (attached)

Main MECFS Priorities

A. Top Priorities

1. Human life & safety need to be explicitly listed as the top priority.
2. Protection of homes and property within the community.
3. Preserve HNA by preventing catastrophic wildfires and creating an ongoing vegetation maintenance program with funding dedicated specifically for HNA.

B. Vegetation Management

- per the CWPP - El Cerrito - Kensington Wildfire Action Plan, Sections 4.1 - 4.3 Hazardous Fuel Reduction Treatment (Adopted by EC city council in 2017 and created in conjunction with EC Fire, Friends of Five Creeks, EC Trail Trekkers)

1. 100-300 ft from property lines (CWPP):
 1. Shaded fuel break around the perimeter of HNA, pruning limbs to at least 8' above ground, removing ALL

Eucalyptus and Monterey Pines.

2. Keep grasses to 6 inches starting in April-May annually, and a second cutting when dry, no later than June in this 100' zone.
2. 30 ft fire break around all fire roads / emergency access roads, trees limbed to 15' above road and thinned within 30 feet (CWPP).
3. Extend 200 ft shaded fuel break from property lines on upslopes, as described above (generally east and north boundary of HNA), (CWPP).
4. Remove all eucalyptus and Monterey pines <2 ft diameter at chest height (and treat the stumps)
5. Create a plan for removing ALL remaining eucalyptus and Monterey pines.
6. Fund and perform regular (annual, at a minimum) vegetation maintenance, ideally using a combination of human or machine cuttings and animal grazing.
7. Include expert advice on natives that should be seeded or otherwise encouraged, especially in areas of invasive removals.
8. Create a fire access road into the valley south of Kent Dr. as outlined in 1994 Hillside Natural Area Hazard Reduction Plan.
9. Incorporate other similar relevant information from the 1994 plan into the new 2024 document, such as accurate maps with descriptions and names of areas, trails and roads.

C. Budgeting

1. Assure there is adequate funding for regular maintenance, greater than current levels. It is less costly to maintain once major work is done.
2. Apply for any and all available fire and fuel mitigation grants

D. Fire Dept

1. Ensure that the ECFD will set priorities for fire resilience in and hazardous fuel reductions in HNA.
2. The ECFD should test fire road access and inspect the water sources on regular basis within and adjacent to the HNA.
3. Identify any improvements needed to access and infrastructure

Eucalyptus - Fire risk & Ecological damage

National Park Service research on eucalyptus in the bay area shows:

3x - higher fire fuel loads in eucalyptus forests than in coast live oak forests

3x - fewer arthropods, small mammals and bird species in eucalyptus forests than in native Oak-Bay woodland and grasslands

Other notable impacts to ecology:

ALTERED - Ecology is altered by eucalyptus forests. With 3 times fewer numbers of arthropods, small mammals, and birds, the native ecosystem cannot thrive. Eucalyptus alters the bird species composition. The few bird species found to prefer eucalyptus were widespread species that occupy many different habitats throughout their range.

HARM - Birds attracted to insects feeding on eucalyptus nectar may suffer higher rates of mortality or reproductive failure. Some native birds (e.g., Anna's Hummingbird) may have lower nest survivorship in eucalyptus forests than in native forests.

Study link:

https://www.nps.gov/pore/learn/management/upload/firemanagement_fireeducation_newsletter_eucalyptus.pdf (attached)
(For the sake of brevity and clarity, we provide a link to only this study. If needed, we can provide more citations of research studies demonstrating how eucalyptus forests elevate fire risk and damage native ecosystems.)

Thank you,
Brian

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Brian Richmond, PhD



2024 Regular Meeting Schedule

City Holiday/Closed
Regular Meeting
Special Meeting
Location: In person at
Council Chambers (10890 San Pablo Ave)
Meeting Time: 7:00 p.m.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COMMITTEE

JANUARY 2024							FEBRUARY 2024							MARCH 2024						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6					1	2	3						1	2
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
28	29	30	31				25	26	27	28	29			24	25	26	27	28	29	30
														31						
APRIL 2024							MAY 2024							JUNE 2024						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6				1	2	3	4							1
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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21	22	23	24	25	26	27	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
28	29	30					26	27	28	29	30	31		23	24	25	26	27	28	29
														30						
JULY 2024							AUGUST 2024							SEPTEMBER 2024						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6					1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
28	29	30	31				25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30					
OCTOBER 2024							NOVEMBER 2024							DECEMBER 2024						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5						1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
27	28	29	30	31			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	29	30	31				



Environmental Quality Committee

2024 WORK PLAN

AND

2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Members: Chair Howdy Goudey; Vice-Chair Simrun Dhoot; Buddy Akacić, Pamela Austin, Fred Bialy, Mark Miner, Sean O'Connor, Paloma Pavel, Sheila Tarbet, Rose Vekony

Because the City of El Cerrito recognizes that environmental quality is an important issue that demands immediate and ongoing attention, the Environmental Quality Committee (EQC) was established in 2008 by Resolution 2008-13 as a Council-appointed body of up to 15 El Cerrito residents and business owners. It typically meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 7 PM in City Council Chambers (or virtually as required). The enabling resolution identifies the whole City's role and responsibility in reducing environmental impacts and the EQC's role in providing environmental leadership and effecting cultural change in the way that the City and its residents relate to the environment.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Environmental Quality Committee's **mission** is to educate, inspire, and activate our community to thrive in a socially just, equitable, and regenerative manner.

The EQC **duties and responsibilities**, as stated in its enabling resolution, are

1. To serve in an advisory capacity to the City Council, staff, other boards, commissions, and committees, and the citizens of the City with regard to environmental quality issues within the City of El Cerrito
2. To recommend programs, policies, and ordinances to the City Council and promote the City's environmental quality efforts
3. To promote and foster public awareness, education, interest and support for environmental quality efforts, foster volunteer opportunities, and educate El Cerrito residents regarding environmental quality and issues relating to environmental impacts

The EQC **goals** are

- To reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to meet or exceed targets of the El Cerrito Climate Action Plan, also proposing revised goals as appropriate
- To apply a framework of social, racial, and environmental justice in the implementation of our work
- To promote environmental education, action, engagement, equity, and justice
- To involve learners of all ages
- To help businesses and residents work and live in a more sustainable and environmentally friendly fashion
- To inform and champion the City's environmental policies and ordinances
- To change material use patterns by encouraging Reduction, Reuse, Recycling, and Composting
- To champion energy/water efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainable transportation
- To minimize hazardous chemical use and human/environmental exposure to toxins
- To protect, expand, and steward green spaces with public path/trail connectivity; maintain and restore natural areas with an emphasis on native ecosystems; and encourage a network of human/wildlife-friendly green habitat throughout the City
- To support water quality, healthy creeks and forests, and green infrastructure to increase resiliency in the face of climate change
- To bring attention to disadvantaged community members who are inequitably impacted by environmental degradation

The EQC's work is guided by the 2015–2020 El Cerrito Strategic Plan (excerpted below):

Goal F: Foster environmental sustainability citywide

- Be a leader in setting policies and providing innovative programs that promote environmental sustainability.
- Promote environmental education to facilitate behavioral changes by working with the school district and other community groups.
- Implement policies to promote waste diversion (i.e., mandatory commercial recycling and green waste).
- Encourage alternative modes of transportation to the single occupancy vehicle.
- Implement and monitor the City's Climate Action Plan to:
 - Reduce vehicle miles traveled (by creating well-connected, pedestrian, bicycle and transit-oriented urban forms that will make it easier for residents and visitors to leave their car behind.)
 - Facilitate energy and water efficiency and greater use and generation of clean energy
 - Reduce the amount of waste generated in El Cerrito
 - Make municipal operations more resource-efficient and environmentally friendly

On August 20, 2019, the City of El Cerrito approved a resolution (2019-52) and joined hundreds of jurisdictions across the globe in declaring a climate emergency. This resolution, which sets a target to reduce GHG emissions further, with the ultimate goal of reaching zero GHG emissions, has heightened both the urgency and import of the EQC's work.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since the EQC's establishment in 2008, the committee's emphasis has cycled between public education, community volunteer organization, and environmental policy, but the general commitment to all forms of action envisioned for the EQC has remained consistent over time. The committee has also consistently maintained a high fraction of the 15 member capacity, with both long-serving members and a rotation of new members.

2024 WORK PLAN

OBJECTIVE	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	PRIORITY RANKING	TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION x
1. Public Education and Outreach	a) Use “Reduce Transportation Carbon Emissions” as the EQC’s theme for 2024.	1	1 year
	b) Champion the CAAP (Climate Action and Adaptation Plan).	1	1 year (ongoing)
	c) Implement our JEDI tool (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) as part of all our EQC work.	1	1 year (ongoing)
	d) Host public events (e.g., films, lectures, webinars, workshops, youth activities, EV car and bike test-drives and rides) to mobilize residents about the Climate Emergency and educate them on electrification, sustainability, and resiliency.	1	1 year (ongoing)
	e) Provide outreach and resources to inform residents of tax incentives for electrification and the income-qualified rebates that will become available in 2024 through the federal Inflation Reduction Act, as well as local and state incentives and rebates, with special emphasis on new programs for those with lower incomes.	1	1 year (ongoing)
	f) Provide public outreach and education about active transportation alternatives to automobiles, including public transit and micromobility options, as well as programs offered in our city to reduce car ownership.	1	1 year (ongoing)
	g) Pilot public education and outreach to promote electrification in home retrofits and encourage the replacement of gas-powered home appliances and landscaping equipment.	1	1 year (ongoing)
	h) Expand outreach to youth in the city’s schools and invite El Cerrito High School’s Eco Club to collaborate with the EQC on climate issues.	1	1 year (ongoing)
	i) Engage with the public at major City events that take place in 2024 and perform other outreach activities to spread awareness.	1	1 year (ongoing)

	j) Lead public outreach on water-saving measures and fire-safe practices (defensible space, xeriscaping).	2	1 year (ongoing)
	k) Co-sponsor the Hillside Festival and other related hikes and educational events.	2	1 year (ongoing)
	l) Co-sponsor Fix-it Clinic and El Cerrito Free Market events to promote waste reduction.	2	1 year (ongoing)
2. Volunteer Work Parties	Hold a Green Teams work party every other month (~ 6/year); diversify work party activities; organize broom pulls and other regular habitat improvement projects.	1	1 year (ongoing)
3. Policy Development and Recommendations	a) Provide input to, and host public meeting for, the CAAP update to accelerate achievement of zero net GHG emissions, as stated in our declared climate emergency; to promote electrification to reduce residential and commercial natural gas usage; and to focus on equity. Engage in the budget process to assure it includes CAAP goals and provide recommendations to help achieve social, racial, and environmental justice goals. b) Provide input and review of the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan. c) Develop and promote policies to increase electrification of new buildings and decrease or eliminate use of natural gas citywide, with a focus on new developments and landscaping equipment. d) Support efforts to promote and expand the use of electric vehicles and charging infrastructure in the City; support current City efforts such as including charging infrastructure; provide more public charging in logical places as City budget permits. e) Participate in the development of new active transportation and parking management changes expected for the transit-oriented development project at El Cerrito Plaza BART station. f) Interface with other relevant City commissions and committees to help develop environmentally friendly policies	1 1 2 2 2 2	1 year 1 year (ongoing) 1 year (ongoing) 1 year (ongoing) 1 year (ongoing) 1 year (ongoing)
4. Implementation of City	a) Work to enhance and promote active transportation modes and access in El Cerrito and support the initiatives of the Sustainable Transportation Program.	1	1 year (ongoing)

Environmental Programs	b) Expand stewardship of Hillside Natural Area (invasive plants; deferred maintenance) and support wildfire risk reduction while preserving native plants and habitat (as a resource, provide access to the fire-safe plant list from ECFD/Diablo Fire); support the work of the Urban Forest Committee and the Hillside Natural Area Master Plan.	1	1 year (ongoing)
	c) Help implement City policies related to new State solid waste regulations for businesses and residents.	2	1 year (ongoing)

2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING GOAL
1. Public Education and Outreach	a) Promoted electric vehicle outreach and education in collaboration with Drive Clean Bay Area. b) Participated in National Drive Electric Week events. c) Tabled at Bike to Work Day and the WorldOne 4th of July festival to promote electrification of vehicles, home heating and cooking, including induction cooktop loaner programs. d) Promoted the SunShares program. e) Promoted and hosted 2023 Earth Day work parties. f) Co-sponsored 2023 East Bay Green Home Tour. g) Promoted the postponed 7th Annual Hillside Festival, co-sponsored with El Cerrito Trail Trekkers. h) Maintained steady coordination with the Urban Forest Committee, including participation in Arbor Week event. i) Received presentations from the Sustainable Transportation Program manager and from El Cerrito Strollers and Rollers (now El Cerrito/Richmond Annex Walk & Roll). j) Co-hosted a screening of <i>The Street Project</i> with El Cerrito Strollers and Rollers at the Rialto Cinemas. k) Co-sponsored El Cerrito Free Market events and secured a site for them in the library parking lot. l) Continued recurring agenda items to present an example of environmental art at each meeting.
2. Volunteer Work Parties	a) Organized in-person Green Teams work parties, including trash removal from streets, parks, and creeks and participation in Coastal Clean-up Day; held broom pulls in the Hillside Natural Area.
3. Policy Development and Recommendations	a) Hosted public meetings on the CAAP and provided recommendations and feedback to the CAAP consultant. Two EQC members serve on the CAAP stakeholder advisory group. b) Provided a member to represent the EQC on the new Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group c) Provided advise to Council about changes to the communications between advisory groups and Council, Staff and other advisory groups, as well as other aspects of how advisory bodies operate
4. Implementation of City Environmental Programs	a) Supported City programs through public education, outreach, and work parties.

ONGOING PROJECTS

PROJECT	ACTIVITIES
1. Green Team Work Parties	Coordinate roughly six trash clean-up events each year in various City parks, the Ohlone Greenway, and City streets. Organize other volunteer work parties focused on weed/invasive plant removal, pollinator habitat restoration/stewardship, tree planting (in collaboration with the Urban Forest Committee and City arborist), and maintenance/stewardship of the Hillside Natural Area.
2. Hillside Festival	Assist Trail Trekkers in production of the annual event celebrating the Hillside Natural Area with many hikes, talks, and activities.
3. Climate Action and Adaptation Plan Implementation and Progress Metrics	Work with City staff to complete development of the CAAP and begin to implement it, including timely progress on “early wins.” Explore opportunities to reduce residential natural gas use and promote electrification of home appliances, automobiles, and landscaping equipment as a complement to 100% renewable electrical power. Promote improved municipal electric vehicle infrastructure/readiness and fleet management. Explore ways to achieve greater social, racial, and environmental justice.