



AGENDA

REGULAR MEETING OF THE URBAN FOREST COMMITTEE

Monday January 8, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.

Staff Liaison
Stephen Prée | 510-559-7685
spree@ci-el-cerrito.ca.us

El Cerrito City Hall
City Council Chambers
10890 San Pablo Avenue
El Cerrito, CA 94530

This Meeting Place is Wheelchair Accessible

7:00 p.m. CONVENE REGULAR MEETING

- 1. ROLL CALL** - Chair Robert Hrubes; Vice-Chair Robin Mitchell; Members, Cathy Bleier, Catherine (Cassie) Hughes, Jennifer Kaczor, Yan Linhart
- 2. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC and INTRODUCTION BY INDIVIDUALS INTERESTED IN SERVING ON THE ADVISORY BOARD**
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, remarks on agenda items will be heard at the time the item is discussed.
- 3. COMMITTEE MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS / CHANGES TO THE MEETING AGENDA** (10 minutes)
- 4. CITY COUNCIL / STAFF LIAISONS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORTS-** (10 minutes) City Council Liaison and / or City Staff may report on Council policies, priorities, and significant actions taken by the City Council, and / or matters of general interest to the Urban Forest Committee (UFC).
- 5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES-** Consider a motion to adopt the minutes from the December 11, 2023, UFC meeting. (3 minutes)
- 6. HILLSIDE NATURAL AREA FIRE RESILIENCE AND FOREST CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE** (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 REGARDING DEVELOPMENT OF 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 regarding development of the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan. * Presentation notes attached

8. COLLABORATION WITH THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COMMITTEE-

(3 minutes) Hear updates, participate in discussion, and consider possible action items regarding collaborating with the EQC.

9. COLLABORATION WITH THE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION-

(3 minutes) Hear updates, participate in discussion, and consider possible action items regarding collaborating with the PRC.

10. URBAN FOREST COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES, CALENDAR, AND WORK PLAN

Hear updates, participate in discussion, and consider possible actions that correspond with development of the Urban Forest Committee Work Plan and calendar of events. (30 minutes)

A. PG&E Moeser Lane Tree Removal Communication- (Kaczor, Mitchell)

**Draft letter attached*

B. Arbor Week 2024- (Hughes, Linhart)

C. UFC Work Plan- update discussion **Current Work Plan attached*

11. ITEMS FROM TONIGHT'S MEETING THAT REQUIRE FURTHER ACTION

(3 minutes)

12. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS- hear committee member suggestions for future UFC meeting items (3 minutes)

- Arbor Week 2024
- Work Plan Update
- Guest Speaker Daniel Gallegher, City of Berkeley, Retired Urban Forestry Supervisor
- Urban Forestry Grants and Fundraising (Hrubes, Kaczor, Mitchell)

13. ADJOURNMENT

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact the Staff Liaison, 510-559-7685. 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 El Cerrito Recycling Center during normal business hours.



Staff Liaison
Stephen Prée | 510-559-7685
spre@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us

DRAFT MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE
Urban Forest Committee
Monday December 11, 2023, 7:00 p.m.

El Cerrito City Hall
City Council Chambers
10890 San Pablo Avenue
El Cerrito, CA 94530

This Meeting Place is Wheelchair Accessible

CONVENE REGULAR MEETING: Chair Hrubes called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

1. ROLL CALL:

Present: Chair Robert Hrubes, Vice Chair Robin Mitchell, members: Cathy Bleier, Catherine (Cassie) Hughes Jennifer Kaczor, Yan Linhart.

Also present: Staff Liaison Stephen Prée; members of the public: Forrest Bice, Anne Ogonowski, Susan Schwartz.

2. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC: *Susan Schwartz* provided comments regarding the development of the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Plan and the City's HNA maintenance activities.

Anne Ogonowski also addressed the committee on the same topic and invited everyone to attend a walk through the HNA on December 23. A lengthy discussion with the UFC and the public followed.

3. COMMITTEE MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS /CHANGES TO THE MEETING

AGENDA: *Vice Chair Mitchell* reported on the EQC Green Teams invasive French Broom removal work in the HNA. *Cathy Bleier* said that she is planning to contact residents who have previously expressed interest in the UFC for potential recruitment to join the Committee. *Cassie Hughes* reported that the City trees in her neighborhood had recently been pruned by the City's contractor.

4. COUNCIL / STAFF LIAISONS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORTS: *Staff Liaison Prée* reported that City management had informed him that any fundraising for the City's urban forest program would need to be developed by staff through administrative policy & procedure by City staff and be related to plans adopted by Council. Discussion- UFC recommends this as a future agenda item. *Prée* gave a summary of the HNA Plan schedule- a public comment period on the draft plan will be in the spring.

5. ACTION ITEMS

- A. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Adopt the minutes from the November 13, 2023 UFC meeting. **Motion:** *Mitchell*; **2nd:** *Bleier*; **Ayes:** unanimous of members present; **Noes:** 0; **Absent:** 0

- B. **ADOPT 2024 MEETING CALENDAR:** Adopt the 2024 UFC Calendar with flexibility for combined UFC EQC meeting in May or June, and substituting November 4 for Veterans Day. **Motion:** *Mitchell*; **2nd:** *Linhart* ; **Ayes:** unanimous of members present; **Noes:** 0; **Absent:** 0

6. **COLLABORATION WITH THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COMMITTEE – Vice Chair Mitchell** reported that the EQC had received a report from City staff on the HNA Plan ; updates to the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, and working on the EQC Work Plan.

7. **COLLABORATION WITH THE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION-** *Kaczor* said that the PRC had received a presentation on City Cosponsored groups; they are engaged with their Work Plan and the PRC has no ad-hoc committees.

8. **URBAN FOREST COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES, CALENDAR, AND WORK PLAN UPDATE-**

- A. Arbor Day 2024- The ad-hoc subcommittee, *Hughes and Linhart*, presented their suggestions for potential Arbor Week activities (March 7-14). A discussion yielded the following preferences for development for which a motion was made to pursue: Plant a tree with school-age children; host a class on tree care; host a class or read-a-thon at the library.
- B. UFC Work Plan- *Vice Chair Mitchell* recommended postponing this item to the February meeting.
- C. PG&E Moeser Lane Tree Removal Communication- *Kazor* informed the UFC that she had been in communication with the resident that had reached-out to staff regarding their concern over mature oak tree removals by PG&E. She plans to draft a letter for UFC review at a future meeting.

9. **ITEMS FROM TONIGHT'S MEETING THAT REQUIRE FURTHER ACTION:**

- *Prée* will investigate options for an Arbor Week tree care class.
- *Kaczor and Mitchell* will draft a letter regarding the PGE Oak tree removal.

10. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS –**

- Arbor Week
- HNA Plan update
- UFC Work Plan Update
- Guest Speaker Dan Gallegher, City of Berkeley Retired, Forestry Supervisor

11. ADJOURNMENT- *Chair Hrubes* adjourned the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

This is to certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the minutes of the regular Urban Forest Committee meeting of December 11, 2023 as approved by the Urban Forest Committee.

Robert Hrubes, Chair or, Robin Mitchell Vice Chair

Stephen Prée, Staff Liaison

DRAFT

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.

Moeser Lane PG&E Tree Removal UFC letter

Overview

The Urban Forest Committee would like to raise awareness of PG&E's removal of a number of healthy, mature Coast Live Oaks and underlying vegetation from the upper part of Moeser Lane this year, and PG&E's lack of communication to the City or the public about its plans to do so. In addition to the UFC's concerns, residents in the area have also expressed their dissatisfaction to the City over PG&E's actions.

The UFC encourages the City Council to contact PG&E and request:

- A report with details of the necessity of the tree removal that occurred in June 2023
- Future preemptive communications for any tree removal plans prior to execution
- Mitigation plans to accompany any tree removal plans going forward

Background

For the past 10 years, PG&E has regularly notified City staff about their plans for vegetation management on their Moeser Lane easement. City staff consistently encouraged PG&E to remove as few mature oaks as possible, and achieve safety standards through tree pruning, not removal. Every year, City staff inquired about PG&E's mitigation plans: What could be done to mitigate the removal of native habitat? What could be replanted? Each year, the response was noncommittal. (At times, PG&E has removed natives [Redbud and Toyon] and left non-natives [Cotoneaster and Bottlebrush].)

This year, PG&E notified the City of its plans for tree removal but for the first time did not specify what kind of trees or their sizes, even when specifically prompted via email by City staff. City staff estimates approximately a dozen Coast Live Oaks greater than 10 inches in diameter were removed, again with no mitigation plan. City staff shared their concern about potential erosion and a loss of habitat, as communicated to the PG&E team numerous times in the past. Again, the response when asked for a revegetation plan was to discuss options in the future.

For added context: Three years ago, the City received a request from a nearby resident about trees that were interfering with her view. City staff and PG&E met with her and they came up with a pruning plan, which was conducted. This year, a complaint was filed again, and City staff put her in touch with PG&E and indicated the City's preference to prune instead of remove.

While the UFC understands the need to prioritize public safety concerns about wildfire and minimize wildfire risks, it is the UFC's view that the removal of these trees and lack of revegetation plans are not up to the City's urban forest management standards. It's understood that utility companies are required to maintain regulated minimum clearance distances from high voltage power lines. However, without documentation demonstrating otherwise, it is the UFC's view that the removal of trees was excessive, and the lack of a mitigation plan is unacceptable.

Coast Live Oaks, fire resistance, and risks of removal

According to the US Forest Service's Fire Effects Information System: "Coast Live Oak is exceptionally fire resistant, more so than other California oak species." The trees on Moeser include particularly large specimens of up to 50 inches in diameter, whose size and thick bark add to their fire resistance.

These trees provide a wide range of benefits and constitute an important investment in our City's green infrastructure in terms of GHG reduction and climate effects mitigation, water quality, habitat values, and aesthetics. According to the USFS Climate Change Resource Center's I-Tree Calculator, just one 20-inch Coast Live Oak in this neighborhood stores over 7,000 lbs of CO₂ (released upon cutting), and also avoids over 1,000 gallons of runoff, which is especially critical for preventing erosion on Moeser's steep gradient. Coast Live Oaks are also one of our most valuable native species for birds, pollinators, and other wildlife.

Response from El Cerrito residents

El Cerrito resident Robin Winton contacted City staff in July 2023 when she first saw the oak removal. Staff put her in touch with PG&E, who responded within 24 hours to address her concerns. Per Ms. Winton, the PG&E representative told her he was a little surprised himself about the work, that it seemed different than usual, and that he wasn't there when it happened. He assured her there wasn't any more work planned for the season, and that height compliance work of 30-foot vertical separation between wires and treetops would resume in Q1 or Q2 of calendar year 2024. Ms. Winton is concerned that the other oaks in the area are vulnerable, as she estimates that the oaks that were removed were probably about the same height as the ones remaining. Ms. Winton stresses that in the past PG&E did a great job with tree pruning and clean-up.

Additionally, in 2019, a resident wrote an email to the PG&E vegetation program manager responsible for the Moeser easement, expressing her concerns about the removal of healthy, mature Coast Live Oaks from the upper part of Moeser Lane. PG&E responded with appreciation for her email and an ask to consider other factors related to removing trees that are incompatible with power lines, and described required practices for vegetation management within areas identified as High Fire Threat District (HFTD).

In conclusion

As stated above, the Urban Forest Committee requests that the City Council contact PG&E and request a report on the necessity of the removal of Coast Live Oaks from their Moeser property in June 2023, rather than pruning to the appropriate height to meet the PG&E requirements. The UFC also requests preemptive communications and mitigation plans for any further tree removal plans prior to execution going forward, as well as mitigation plans for the trees already removed.

Thank you,

DRAFT



Urban Forest Committee

FISCAL YEARS 2022 and 2023 WORK PLAN

AND

FISCAL YEARS 2020 and 2021 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Members: Robin Mitchell Chair, Robert Hrubes Vice-Chair, Cathy Bleier, Catherine (Cassie) Hughes, Jennifer Kaczor, Yan Linhart, Melissa Feudi

MISSION STATEMENT:

Resolution No. 2007-96:

The Urban Forest Committee serves in an advisory capacity to the City Council, other commissions, and the citizens of the City with regard to the growth, maintenance, and location of trees within the City:

- To recommend programs, policies, and ordinances to implement and promote the City's Master Street Tree Plan and Urban Forest Management Plan and coordinate with Public Works Department staff regarding management and maintenance efforts;
- To promote and foster public awareness, education, interest and support for urban forestry efforts, foster volunteer opportunities for tree planting and irrigation along the city's streets and in residential front yards, and educate El Cerrito residents regarding selecting, planting and maintaining trees; and
- Promote and foster public awareness and education about potential hazards of trees near underground and above ground utilities and the appropriate tree species for avoiding such hazards.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The Tree Committee (later renamed to Urban Forest Committee) was established by Council Resolution 2007-96. The Committee's first five members (Ralph Boniello, Sheauchi Cheng, Janet Hittle, Steve Price and Mike Srago) were appointed to terms starting 9/11/12 through 1/1/2016. Since that time, additional members included Karen Christian, Shannon Lee-Rutherford, Cathy Bleier, Michael Charlton, Yan Linhart, Robert Hrubes, Mary Torrusio, Robin Mitchell, Jennifer Kaczor, Catherine (Cassie) Hughes, Melissa Feudi.

TWO YEAR FY 2022 and 2023 WORK PLAN

GOAL/OBJECTIVE	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES	PRIORITY RANKING	TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION	UFC Member involvement
A. Cultivate financial support for Urban Forest activities and priorities.	Review the adequacy of City Budget and Grants	High	ongoing	Form ad-hoc subcommittee: RM, CB. Review when it's budget decision time
	Explore the viability of a 501(c)3 group to support community urban forestry in El Cerrito.	Low	ongoing	N/A
B. Pursue recognition for El Cerrito Urban Forest Activities	Plan annual Arbor Week activities	High	March 2022-February 2023	CB, SK, RM, YL, CH,
	Explore Tree City USA growth awards. Pursue if appropriate	Medium	mid-2022	CB, RH
C. Provide UFC related input on City plans	Support development/update of City plans, e.g., Urban Greening Plan (EQC), Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and/or Climate Action Plan	Medium to High	as needed based on plan schedule	RM will report back as needed. JK also from PRC
D. Foster development of a comprehensive vegetation & ecosystem restoration and management Plan of El Cerrito urban forest.	(see F. below)			
	Review and revise the city Urban Forest Management Plan to include street trees, city parks and HNA	Medium	end of 2022	YL will review RH supports
	Review and revise Master Tree list as needed	Medium/Low	end of 2022	RM form ad-hoc subcommittee with SK
E. Develop and establish volunteer tree care corps for EC residents.	Identify and work with interested residents and provide necessary training.	Low to Medium	ongoing	w/recommendation; action pending.
	Work with residents to identify tree planting, tree care and funding priorities and opportunities	Low to Medium	ongoing	

F. Work with community, EC Fire Department and others to address fire hazard and risks in our urban forest (see D above)	Subcommittee will look for grants to revise the HNA vegetation management plan in order to reduce fire hazards.	High	early to mid 2022	4 ad-hoc mtg.s w/ recommendation; action pending.
	Update Master Tree List for fire prone trees, as needed. (liability issues and conflicting information may limit this)	Medium/Low	ongoing	See D.
	Consider use of films, workshops, or other methods to evaluate fire hazard mitigation options (prescribed burn, goats, plantings, etc.) for protecting Hillside Natural Area and surrounding urban forest	Low to Medium	ongoing	
G. Enhance Urban Forest Committee communication and messaging to promote public engagement and education	Create education and outreach subcommittee to develop an overall strategy for messaging, education, outreach	High	end of 2022	YL, CH, SK
	Communication audit and development of new/improved communication methods (Instagram and other social media)	High	mid-end of 2022	JK, CH
	Work with staff to develop and add content to EC web site, e.g. FAQs, educational publications, links to arboriculture and urban forest research websites.	Medium	mid-end of 2022	JK, CH, CB
	Improve public use of tree inventory	Low to Medium	ongoing	
H. Collaborate and coordinate with other City of El Cerrito committees, boards and commissions, as well as other cities	Establish contacts/liaisons with appropriate committees to facilitate future collaboration, and review agendas and minutes to identify policies and activities relevant to the Urban Forest Committee.	Medium	ongoing	UFC members rotating attendance to EQC, PRC
	Explore collaborations with other cities and groups in the Bay Area, e.g. Richmond Trees, Friends of 5 Creeks	Medium	ongoing	RM , RH
I. Recruit more Urban Forest Committee members	Develop outreach strategy to inform the public about ECUFC and recruit more members. Three new members by December 2022	Medium	end of 2022	RM
J. Educate residents on urban forestry topics through events.	Inform the public about the new Tree and Shrub ordinance.	High	end of 2022	SK, JK (related to audit)
	Put on a tree care workshop, e.g. pruning or disease. Research existing materials.	Medium		Virtual, requires camera. RM, SP

	Host a film on a current urban forestry topic.	Low		
	School engagement – Arbor Week, other occasions	High		RM, SK
K. Enhance Committee expertise and understanding through educational opportunities	Invite public, Council, agency and technical speakers to address issues of current interest.	High to Medium	ongoing	all
	Attend urban forestry related workshops, presentations, conferences, etc. to enhance technical expertise.	Medium High	ongoing	all
	Create orientation “packet” for new members, including review of key committee documents and accomplishments (e.g., work plan, tree list, outreach materials)	High	Spring 2022	CB, RM
L. Tree planting	Identify and work with residents to plant trees on residential property and street trees	Medium	ongoing	

ONGOING PROJECTS

PROJECT	ACTIVITIES
Secure funding and public support for urban forestry activities	Evaluate and respond to various state, federal and private grant opportunities, such as Caltrans Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program (EEMP), CALFIRE Urban Forestry and Air Resources Board grant application opportunities.
Input on El Cerrito policies and plans affecting trees	Review and comment on City land use and planning documents relevant to urban forest concerns.
Provide and participate in educational outreach to community	• Develop and distribute materials related to Master Tree List, tree inventory, tree care, etc. • Participate in community events (e.g., April Earth Day, Hillside Festival, July 4th).
Arbor Day Celebration	Plan and operate yearly Arbor Week event, March 7-14
Enhance Committee expertise and understanding through educational opportunities	• Invite public, Council, agency and technical speakers to address issues of current interest. • Attend urban forest related workshops, presentations, conferences, etc. to enhance technical expertise. • Create orientation “packet” for new members • Review and revisit important committee documents (workplan, tree list, etc)
Update El Cerrito approved tree species list as needed	Keep apprised of community concerns, related to invasive species, nuisance plants and fire-related issues.

PRIOR YEARS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

GOAL/OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING GOAL	STATUS
A. Become a Tree City USA	Complete application to receive the Tree City USA designation.	Done, City was awarded TCUSA in 2019 , and maintained for 2020, 2021
B. Revised El Cerrito’s Master Tree List	Developed and used criteria to identify suitable tree species for parking strips and other public green spaces. Arborist also secured input and review by outside experts.	Done, approved by the City, and posted 2017.
C. Promoted and provided input to the new Tree Ordinance to protect and enforce City street trees.	UFC Committee identified objectives and practices to support increased tree protection, provided input and reviews to City’s development of ordinance, and recommended its adoption to Council.	Ordinance adopted June 2019.
D. Participated in community events	• Members Mitchell and Torrusio participated in “Ask the Arborist” online presentation with City Arborist Preé and the El Cerrito Garden Club. • March 2019, Arbor Day tree planting in Poinsett Park. • April 2019, Earth Day clearing of Eucalyptus debris and duff at Hillside Natural Area. • Ivy clearing at Canyon Trail Park for Earth Day, 2018.	Complete and ongoing

	● Cerrito Vista Park planting for Arbor Week, 2018. ● Held table at July 4th EC festival. ● Tree Circus at Harding After School Enrichment Program, March 2018. ● Planted memorial tree for EC Centennial in fall, 2017. ● Participated in Centennial parade and held table at community event ● Provided table at 2017 July 4th EC festival.	
E. Provided input to EC policies affecting trees.	Developed comments on Parks and Recreation Plan.	Complete
F. Educated Urban Forest Committee on tree health and urban forest care and management	● Joe McBride presentation on wildfire prevention plans for Strawberry Canyon to ECUFC. ● Jerry Kent, formerly with EB Parks, made a presentation on wildfire to ECUFC. ● Sue Duncan presentation on Make El Cerrito Fire Safe and also on Firewise to ECUFC. ● Amos White presentation on his 100k Trees for Humanity to ECUFC. ● Member Hrubes made presentation on Forest Sustainability Certification (FSC). ● Members Mitchell, Feudi and Bleier attended CA Urban Forest Council online conference. ● City Arborist Prée and Members Bleier surveyed EC Hillside Natural Area for Sudden Oak Death (SOD) for 2012- 2021 UC annual surveys. ● City arborist Prée made presentations on pruning, planting and other tree care issues. ● Committee members Bleier, Linhart, Price, and Srago attended <i>The Impact of Climate Change on Urban Forest Trees</i> a seminar by Dr. Joe McBride (Professor Emeritus, UC Berkeley), hosted by the East Bay Municipal Utility District. ● Committee member Srago attended the California Forest Pest Council annual meeting, focusing on “Tree Mortality in Urban and Rural Communities.” ● PG&E Vegetation Program Manager, Matthew McLane, gave a presentation about the Urban Forest and Utility Delivery Interface in El Cerrito.	Complete

	● Battalion Chief David Gibson provided a presentation to the UFC on Wildfire Prevention and Preparedness: “Mega-Fire, The New Norm” and El Cerrito’s fire prevention work in the Hillside Natural Area. ● PRESENTATION: A HISTORY OF THE FRIENDS OF EL CERRITO TREES by Ann Thrupp.	
Developed and/or provided educational materials and outreach to community	● Member Torrusio made presentation on personal Instagram account, #elcerritotrees, created to promote urban forests. ● Provided guidance to the City for updating website tree and urban forest materials. ● Provided information at 2019 July 4th EC festival, including summary handouts about Master Tree List.	Complete