



**Staff Liaison**

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## AGENDA

### REGULAR MEETING OF THE Environmental Quality Committee

**Tuesday, May 12, 2026 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 Fred Bialy; Vice-Chair Pamela Austin; Members Howdy Goudey, Sean O'Connor, Eleanor Pilling Chapplelear (Youth Member), Mordecai Stayton, Sheila Tarbet
- 2. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC** (5 min.)  
*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. COUNCIL/STAFF LIAISONS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORTS** (5 min.)  
Staff and/or Council Liaison Carolyn Wysinger 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** (3 min.)  
Consider a motion adopting the minutes of the EQC meeting held on and April 14, 2026.
- 5. COLLABORATION WITH THE URBAN FOREST COMMITTEE** (5 min.)  
Hear updates, participate in discussion and consider possible action items regarding collaborating with the City's Urban Forest Committee.
- 6. PRESENTATION FROM FRIENDS OF THE HILLSIDE** (40 min.)  
Receive a presentation, participate in discussion and consider possible action items regarding collaborating with the Friends of the Hillside Natural Area.
- 7. FY 25-26 WORK PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS** (40 min)  
Hear updates, participate in discussion and consider possible action items regarding implementation of the FY 25-26 work plan and documentation of FY 25-26 accomplishments.
- 8. EQC BUDGET AND CALENDAR OF EVENTS** (10 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 2026 Cleanups
  - Sat 4/25 Earth Day – Northern Gateways (*Debrief*)
  - Sat 6/27 – Northern Gateways (Meet at Northeast corner of Knott & Key)
  - Sun 8/2 Baxter Creek (w/ Baxter Volunteers)
  - Sat 9/19 Coastal Cleanup Day – Location TBD
  - Sun 10/11 – Northern Gateways (Meet at Southwest Potrero & San Pablo Ave, Del Norte Plaza parking lot)
  - Sun 12/6 – Baxter Creek (with Baxter volunteers)
- April 25, 2026 – [El Cerrito Earth Day](#) & Repair Workshop (*Debrief*)
- May 2-3, 2026 – El Cerrito 12<sup>th</sup> Annual [Hillside Festival](#) (*Debrief*)
- May 14, 2026 – [Bike to Wherever Day](#)
- May 16, 2026 – [Spring Citywide Garage Sale](#)
- July 4<sup>th</sup> WorldOne Festival
  - Planning for tabling

**9. CANCEL OR RELOCATE JUNE 9 EQC MEETING (5 min.)**

Participate in discussion and consider possible action items regarding canceling the June 9, 2026 EQC meeting or relocating to Hana Gardens.

**10. ELECTRIFY MY BLOCK PROGRAM DISCUSSION ON HOW TO SUPPORT THIS PROGRAM IN EL CERRITO (5 min.)**

Receive updates, participate in discussion and consider possible action items regarding support for [Electrify My Block](#).

**11. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS (2 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:

- Annual Member Recognition Event – Wednesday, June 10, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.
- FY 25/26 Accomplishments (due 7/1/26)
- BAAQMD Updates
- Foodware Ordinance Support

**12. 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.



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## **DRAFT MINUTES**

### **REGULAR MEETING OF THE Environmental Quality Committee**

**Tuesday, April 14, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.**

City Council Chambers  
10890 San Pablo Avenue

**This Meeting Place is Wheelchair Accessible**

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

- 1. ROLL CALL –** Chair Fred Bialy; Vice-Chair Pamela Austin; Members Howdy Goudey, Sean O'Connor **Absent:** Eleanor Pilling Chappelle (Youth Member), Sheila Tarbet **Also Present:** Christina Leard, Staff Liaison
- 2. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**  
Public comment was received from Richmond resident Cordell Hindler and El Cerrito resident Audrey Liese.
- 3. COUNCIL/STAFF LIAISONS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORTS**  
Staff Liaison Leard provided updates on the City's FY 26-27 budget process.
- 4. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**  
Consider a motion adopting the minutes of the EQC meeting held on March 10, 2026.  
**Move/Second:** O'Connor/Bialy **Action:** Passed a motion to adopt the minutes of the March 10, 2026 EQC meeting. **Ayes:** Austin, Bialy, Goudey, O'Connor **Noes:** None
- 5. COLLABORATION WITH THE URBAN FOREST COMMITTEE**  
Urban Forest Committee member Robin Mitchell provided updates from the most recent meeting of the Urban Forest Committee.
- 6. EQC MEMBER APPOINTMENT PROCESS**  
Committee members conducted an interview, participated in discussion, and considered possible action items regarding recommending for appointment members to the EQC.  
Public comment was received from Richmond resident Cordell Hindler.  
**Move/Second:** Goudey/O'Connor **Action:** Passed a motion to recommend to City Council the appointment of Mordecai Stayton to the Environmental Quality Committee. **Ayes:** Austin, Bialy, Goudey, O'Connor **Noes:** None

## 7. ELECTIONS FOR CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Committee members nominated and elected a Chair and Vice-Chair for an annual term beginning April 2026. Chair & Vice-Chair training (virtual) will be held in May.

**Move/Second:** Goudey/O'Connor **Action:** Passed a motion to re-appoint member Fred Bialy as EQC Chair. **Ayes:** Austin, Bialy, Goudey, O'Connor **Noes:** None

**Move/Second:** Bialy/O'Connor **Action:** Passed a motion to re-appoint member Austin as EQC Vice-Chair. **Ayes:** Austin, Bialy, Goudey, O'Connor **Noes:** None

## 8. ELECTRIFY MY BLOCK PROGRAM DISCUSSION ON HOW TO SUPPORT THIS PROGRAM IN EL CERRITO

Committee members heard updates, participated in discussion and considered possible action items regarding support for [Electrify My Block](#).

## 9. FY 25-26 WORK PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Committee members heard updates, participated in discussion and considered possible action items regarding implementation of the FY 25-26 work plan.

Public comment was received from El Cerrito resident Robin Mitchell and Richmond resident Cordell Hindler.

## 10. EQC BUDGET AND CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Committee members heard updates, participated in discussion, and considered possible action items regarding planning, logistics, and expenditures for the EQC calendar of events, including:

- Green Team 2026 Cleanups / Broom Pulls
  - Sat 4/25 Earth Day – Northern Gateways (Meet at Northeast corner of Knott & Key, 9a.m. – 12 p.m.)
  - ~~Sat 5/23 Invasive brush & trees removal Location TBD~~
  - Sat 6/27 – Northern Gateways (Meet at Northeast corner of Knott & Key)
  - Sun 8/2 Baxter Creek (w/ Baxter Volunteers)
  - Sat 9/19 Coastal Cleanup Day – Location TBD
  - Sun 10/11 – Northern Gateways (Meet at Southwest Potrero & San Pablo Ave, Del Norte Plaza parking lot)
  - Sun 12/6 – Baxter Creek (with Baxter volunteers)
- April 25, 2026 – [El Cerrito Earth Day](#) & Repair Workshop – Volunteers needed
- May 2-3, 2026 – El Cerrito 12<sup>th</sup> Annual [Hillside Festival](#)
- May 14, 2026 – [Bike to Wherever Day](#)
- May 16, 2026 – [Spring Citywide Garage Sale](#)
- July 4<sup>th</sup> WorldOne Festival

## 11. CLIMATE ACTION AND ADAPTATION PLAN (CAAP) IMPLEMENTATION

Committee members heard updates, participated in discussion and considered possible action items regarding implementation of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.

## 12. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Staff and Committee members provided updates on recent events the EQC has supported and discussed plans for future events in 2026, including:

- Annual Member Recognition Event (*tentative*) – May 28, 2026
- FY 25/26 Accomplishments (due 7/1/26)
- Presentation from Friends of the Hillside on work in the HNA
- BAAQMD Updates
- Foodware Ordinance Support

## 13. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 p.m.

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Fred Bialy, 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 April 14, 2026 as approved by the Environmental Quality Committee.

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Christina Leard, Staff Liaison

DRAFT



## BIENNIAL WORK PLAN FISCAL YEAR 2025/2026 - 2026/2027

### Environmental Quality Committee

Chair **Fred Bialy**; Vice-Chair **Pamela Austin**; Members **Simrun Dhoot**,  
**Howdy Goudey**, **Heather Hayashi**, **Sean O'Connor**,  
**Eleanor Pilling-Chappelear (Youth Member)**, **Sheila Tarbet**

#### Staff Liaison

Christina Leard | (510) 215-4338  
cleard@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us  
Public Works Department

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**MISSION STATEMENT:** The Environmental Quality Committee's **mission**, as established by Resolution 2008-13, is the following:

- 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;
- To recommend programs, policies, and ordinances to the City Council and promote the City's environmental quality efforts; and
- Promote and foster public awareness, education, interest and support for environmental quality efforts, foster volunteer opportunities, and educate El Cerrito citizens regarding environmental quality and issues relating to environmental impacts.

**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.

**FISCAL YEAR 2025/2026**

*Items listed in priority order*

Goal or Objective	Proposed Activities	Funding and other Resources requested	Estimated Staff time needed	Timeline For Completion	Lead Committee Member
Promote Environmental Awareness and Education	1) Participate in or Promote Public Engagement Events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promote public events such as films, lectures, and workshops to raise awareness about environmental issues, climate change, and sustainability.</li> </ul>	1)	1)	1)	1) Pam
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Organize or promote a film showing in Spring 2026.</li> </ul>	\$400	4 hours	Spring 2026	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explore offering activities like EV car and bike test-drives to showcase sustainable transportation options, possibly in Library parking lot.</li> </ul>	No cost	1 hour	Ongoing	
	2) Provide Outreach and Resources:	2)	2)	2)	2) Fred
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inform residents about tax incentives and rebates for electrification and sustainable practices.</li> </ul>	\$50	1 hour	Dec 2025	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop a fact sheet about available incentives/rebates</li> </ul>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offer education materials on active transportation alternatives and programs for reducing car ownership.</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Summary fact sheet based on materials from the Go Green! Active transportation fair.</li> </ul>	\$50	1 hour	Dec 2025		
3) Engage Youth and Schools:	3)	3)	3)	3) Fred & Eleanor	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaborate with schools and youth organizations to expand environmental education programs and involve young residents in climate initiatives.</li> </ul>	No Cost	None	Ongoing		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support effort by EQC Youth Member to pass a climate literacy resolution for the WCCSD</li> </ul>	No cost	None	Dec 2025		

	<p>4) Community Outreach and Collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engage with the public at city events and through other outreach activities to raise awareness about environmental conservation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tabling at EC 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival and other city events as they occur.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Co-sponsor relevant community events such as the Hillside Festival, hikes, Fix-it Clinics, and Free Market events.</li> </ul>	<p>4) No cost</p> <p>No cost</p> <p>No cost</p>	<p>4) None</p> <p>None</p> <p>None</p>	<p>4) Ongoing</p> <p>Annual</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>4) Howdy</p>
<p>Facilitate Community Engagement through Volunteer Work Parties</p>	<p>1) Organize Regular Green Teams Work Parties with Diverse Habitat Improvement Projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hold Green Teams work parties every other month to establish a consistent schedule.</li> </ul> <p>2) Collaborate with other environmentally focused community groups (Trail Trekkers, Friends of Five Creeks, Baxter Creek Volunteers, Friends of Hillside Natural Area) in habitat improvement projects (e.g. Broom pulls, removal of other invasive species)</p> <p>3) Stewardship of Hillside Natural Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expand stewardship efforts in the Hillside Natural Area.</li> <li>● Support the implementation of the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan and collaborate with the Urban Forest Committee.</li> </ul>	<p>1) No cost</p> <p>2) No cost</p> <p>3) No cost</p> <p>No cost</p>	<p>1) 2 hours per month</p> <p>2) 1 hour</p> <p>3) None</p> <p>None</p>	<p>1) Every other month</p> <p>2) Ongoing</p> <p>3) Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>1) Sean</p> <p>2) Howdy</p> <p>3) Pam &amp; Heather</p>
<p>Advocate for Implementation of CAAP Policies and other Policy Change</p>	<p>1) Advocate for policies in the CAAP update to accelerate progress toward zero net greenhouse gas emissions, promote electrification, and prioritize equity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaborate with EC staff to implement city CAAP priorities and receive regular updates on implementation.</li> </ul> <p>2) Engage in Budget Process to Support CAAP Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Advocate for CAAP goals during the budget process to ensure allocation of resources for achieving social, racial, and environmental justice objectives.</li> </ul> <p>3) Support efforts to electrify new and existing buildings and transportation in El Cerrito.</p>	<p>1) No cost</p> <p>2) No cost</p> <p>3) No cost</p>	<p>1) Monthly updates</p> <p>2) None</p> <p>3) None</p>	<p>1) Ongoing</p> <p>2) June 2026</p> <p>3) Ongoing</p>	<p>1) Fred</p> <p>2) Howdy &amp; Eleanor</p> <p>3) Fred &amp; Howdy</p>

	4) Support implementation of Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan recommendations:	4) No cost	4) None	4) Ongoing	4) Heather & Pam
	5) Explore alignment with local and global climate policies.	5) No cost	5) 1 hour	5) Ongoing	5) Eleanor

**FISCAL YEAR 2026/2027**  
*Items listed in priority order*

Goal or Objective	Proposed Activities	Funding and other Resources requested	Estimated Staff time needed	Timeline For Completion	Lead Committee Member
Promote Environmental Awareness and Education	1) Participate in or Promote Public Engagement Events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote public events such as films, lectures, and workshops to raise awareness about environmental issues, climate change, and sustainability.</li> <li>Explore offering activities like EV car and bike test-drives to showcase sustainable transportation options, possibly in Library parking lot.</li> </ul>	1) \$400	1) 4 hours	1) Spring 2027	1) Pam
		No cost	1 hour	Ongoing	
	2) Provide Outreach and Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inform residents about tax incentives and rebates for electrification and sustainable practices.</li> <li>Offer education materials on active transportation alternatives and programs for reducing car ownership.</li> </ul>	2) \$50	2) 1 hour	2) Ongoing	2) Fred
		No Cost	None	Ongoing	
	3) Engage Youth and Schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with schools and youth organizations to expand environmental education programs and involve young residents in climate initiatives.</li> </ul>	3) No Cost	3) None	3) Ongoing	3) Fred
4) Community Outreach and Collaboration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with the public at city events and through other outreach activities to raise awareness about environmental conservation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tabling at EC 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival and other city events as they occur.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4) No cost	4) None	4) Ongoing	4) Howdy	
		No cost	1 hour	Annual	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-sponsor relevant community events such as the Hillside Festival, hikes, Fix-it Clinics, and Free Market events.</li> </ul>	No cost	None	Ongoing	
Facilitate Community Engagement through Volunteer Work Parties	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organize Regular Green Teams Work Parties with Diverse Habitat Improvement Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold Green Teams work parties every other month to establish a consistent schedule.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Collaborate with other environmentally focused community groups (Trail Trekkers, Friends of Five Creeks, Baxter Creek Volunteers, Friends of Hillside Natural Area) in habitat improvement projects (e.g. Broom pulls, removal of other invasive species)</li> <li>Stewardship of Hillside Natural Area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand stewardship efforts in the Hillside Natural Area.</li> <li>Support the implementation of the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan and collaborate with the Urban Forest Committee.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No cost</li> <li>No cost</li> <li>No cost</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 hours per month</li> <li>1 hour</li> <li>None</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Every 2 months</li> <li>Ongoing</li> <li>Ongoing</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sean</li> <li>Howdy</li> <li>Pam &amp; Heather</li> </ol>
Advocate for Implementation of CAAP Policies and other Policy Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for policies in the CAAP update to accelerate progress toward zero net greenhouse gas emissions, promote electrification, and prioritize equity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with EC staff to implement city CAAP priorities and receive regular updates on implementation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Support efforts to electrify new and existing buildings and transportation in El Cerrito.</li> <li>Support implementation of Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan recommendations:</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No cost</li> <li>No cost</li> <li>No cost</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly updates</li> <li>None</li> <li>None</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> <li>Ongoing</li> <li>Ongoing</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fred</li> <li>Fred &amp; Howdy</li> <li>Heather &amp; Pam</li> </ol>

## ONGOING PROJECTS

Project	Activities	Funding and other Resources requested	Estimated Staff time needed	Lead Committee Member
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.	None	2 hours per month	Sean
Hillside Festival	Assist Trail Trekkers in production of the annual event celebrating the Hillside Natural Area with many hikes, talks, and activities.	None	1 hour	Pam
Climate Action and Adaptation Implementation and Progress Metrics	Work with City staff to implement strategies and tasks identified in the CAAP adopted in July, 2024. 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.	None	1 hour/month	Fred & Howdy

**PRIOR FISCAL YEAR (FY 24-25) ACCOMPLISHMENTS**  
*Updated annually by July 1 and provided to City Council on Consent*

Goal/Objective	Activities Supporting Goal	Status
Public Education and Outreach	a) Tabled at the WorldOne 4th of July festival to promote electrification of vehicles, home heating and cooking, including induction cooktop loaner programs. b) Sponsored the water refill station at the 2024 WorldOne 4th of July festival. c) Received a presentation on El Cerrito's participation in the Cleaner Contra Costa Challenge at the August meeting. d) Co-sponsored Albany FilmFest at the Rialto Cinemas Cerrito that included Albany GreenFest, a showing of five environmental short films on October 10, 2024. e) Co-sponsored and co-organized the April 26 GO GREEN! Mobility Fair at El Cerrito BART f) Promoted the Annual Hillside Festival, co-sponsored with El Cerrito Trail Trekkers. g) Co-sponsored June 7, 2025 Green@Home East Bay Electrification Tour. h) Maintained steady coordination with the Urban Forest Committee, including participation in the March, 2025 Arbor Week event. i) Received a presentation from City Staff at the December 2024 joint meeting with the Urban Forest Committee on the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience And Forest Conservation Management Plan. j) Continued to Co-sponsor El Cerrito Free Market events. k) Co-sponsored Fix-it event on March 22, 2025 at El Cerrito Community Center. l) Tabled at Bike to Work Day 2025. m) Provided input for public information about all-electric ADU's for City distribution.	a) Recurring b) Complete c) Complete d) Complete e) Complete f) Recurring g) Recurring h) Ongoing i) Complete j) Recurring k) Complete l) Complete m) Complete
Volunteer Work Parties	a) Organized eight (8) in-person Green Teams work parties that focused on trash removal from streets, parks, and creeks (including participation in Coastal Clean-up Day).	a) Ongoing
Policy Development and Recommendations	a) Provided a member to represent the EQC on the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Received a presentation from City Staff at a joint meeting with the Urban Forest Committee on the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan.</li> </ul> b) Received a presentation on the Richmond Complete Streets project at the September 2024 meeting and offered feedback.	a) Ongoing b) Ongoing
Implementation of City Environmental Programs	a) Supported City programs through public education, outreach, and work parties.	a) Ongoing

**Move/Second:** Goudey / O'Connor **Action:** Passed a motion to adopt the EQC Biennial Work Plan for FY 25-26 & FY 26-27 and FY 24-25 Accomplishments. **Ayes:** Bialy, Austin, Goudey, Hayashi, O'Connor, Tarbet **Youth Member Chapplelear:** Aye **Noes:** None

# Volunteer efforts in the HNA Past, present, future

Updates on the progress made in the Hillside Natural Area  
by Friends of the Hillside



# Context

- **HNA Reality Check**
  - **Large: 100 acres** vs. 30 acres at Albany Hill — a local source of inspiration, where strong city support has enabled long-term, consistent, and effective stewardship.
  - Limited city funding: **< \$50,000/year**
  - **Understaffed: Limited dedicated staff capacity, with Stephen balancing multiple city responsibilities**
  - Reliance on temporary funding: **~\$900,000 Measure X over 4 years (exceptional, not recurring)**
- **Limits of Current Approach**
  - Restoration methods exist, but **not feasible without baseline funding**
  - **One-time grants ≠ long-term sustainability**
- **Moving Forward**
  - Estimated need: **~\$300,000/year**
  - Shift toward **predictable, stable, ongoing funding**
- **Community Strength: Volunteers and local groups are essential to current progress and long-term sustainability**

# About Friends of the Hillside

## Officially since Spring 2024

Fall 2022: Community-led initiative in the “Hidden Valley” area

Part of the **Berkeley Partners for Parks umbrella non profit**

Like Friends of Five Creeks and Pacific Oak Community Garden

**Our Motto:** *Steward the land • Reduce fire risk • Build community*

## Our Philosophy

- Small, consistent community actions, repeated over time
- Learning by listening to the land
- Seeing the HNA as a **hidden gem**, not just a high-risk WUI

## What We Cultivate

- Biodiversity
- Education
- Community connection



## Humans are part of the ecosystem.

- Our actions shape ecological outcomes, positively or negatively
- People can function as **caretakers**, not just users of the land. Sense of responsibility
- Long-term resilience depends on **active human participation**

# Steward the Land (1/2)

- **Plant ID, phenology & monitoring**
  - Updated Native Plant List & Ongoing Population Monitoring
  - Habitat Identification: Soil, geology, hydrology, and site history analysis
  - In progress: a restoration-focused map of the HNA.
- **Restoration approach to date**
  - **Adaptive stewardship:** Learning from the land + Improving practices over time
  - **Foundational work: French Broom removal**
    - **Maintain legacy areas**
      - Builds on years of work by Friends of Five Creeks and Trail Trekkers - See appendix
      - Revisit annually to remove new French broom seedlings
      - Long-lived seed bank (>30 years) requires sustained follow-up
    - **Sustain efforts in newly opened areas**
      - First 3 years are critical
      - Ongoing management of disturbed soil and heavy seedling recruitment
  - **Maintain areas cleared by Measure X crews in upper Madera** (thistle and broom removal)
  - **Triage** (like an emergency room): prioritize early weed management, targeting species such as crofton weed, field calendula, and stinkwort before they spread.



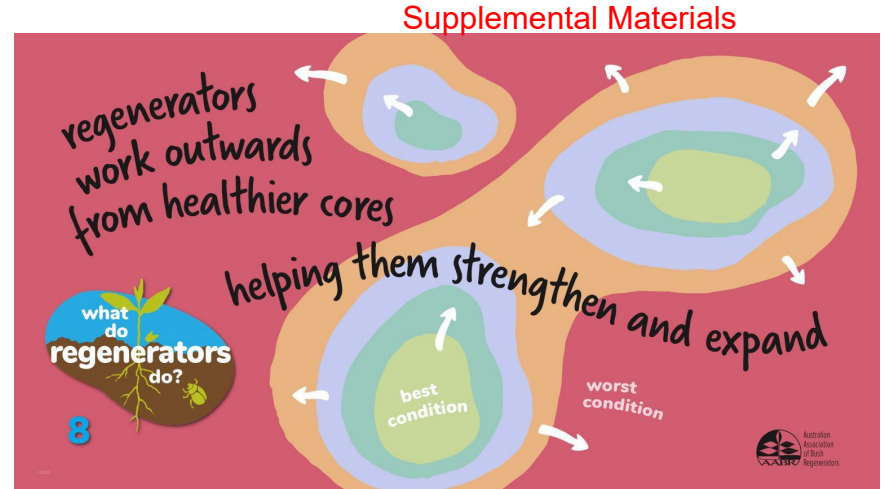
# Steward the Land (2/2)

## The Bradley Method (Passive Restoration)

- Developed by bush regenerators, the **Bradley** sisters, in Australia
- Focuses on working **with natural processes**, not against them

## Core Principles

- Start with **healthy native “islands”**
- Understand their habitat conditions and ecological context
- Work **from best to most degraded areas**
- Use **minimal disturbance** (mainly hand weeding)
- Give native species a competitive advantage
- Allow natural seed set and dispersal
- Let native plants **regenerate naturally from the seed bank**



## Outcome

Gradual, low-impact restoration that builds **resilient ecosystems over time**

# Reduce Fire Risk (1/4)

The HNA is a Wildland–Urban Interface (WUI) site classified as a high fire risk zone with close proximity to homes and schools.

## Top contributors to fire risk:

- Invasive grasses
- Dense, forest-like thickets of french broom
- Dessicated coyote brush branches
- Invasive fire prone trees

## What have we done to reduce fire risk?

- Thatched dead grasses
- Trimmed dead branches from coyote brush
- Removed thousands of french broom stalks one-by-one

→ **Created ~100 piles of this flammable material** 🎉

To reduce the fuel load, we already filled dozens of dumpsters but at the lower Madera area, the site is steep and difficult to access, and the volume of material is significant, hauling it away is not a viable option.



4 volunteers removed this dense thicket of french broom

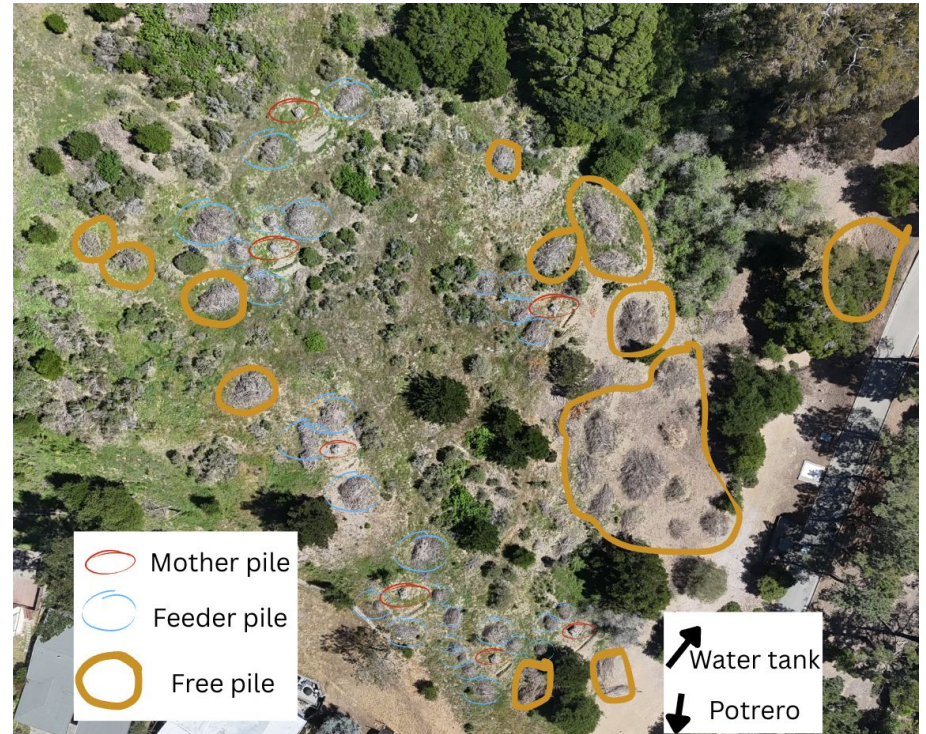
# Reduce Fire Risk (2/4)

100 piles of dead vegetation 🗑️ but...

## What happens next?

- Partnered with El Cerrito Kensington Fire Department to strategize fuel removal - controlled burn method
  - Fire Chief Chase Beckman surveyed the site 2x to confirm that our piles were best-practice, and ready for a safe, controlled burn.
- Scheduled a prescribed burn of these piles, targeting the week of **April 11-19 (cancelled - NEW DATE TBD)**
- 50% of the piles will be burned
  - Fire fuel has been building up for decades. While this is the first controlled burn in years, the Fire Dept is confident that they can arrange a yearly burn moving forward until fuel load is reduced.

**Estimated impact:** piling reduced fire risk by 30%\*, and then burning will reduce risk by 81%\*



\*Estimates from nonlinear fuel model. see Appendix for methods

# Reduce Fire Risk (3/4)

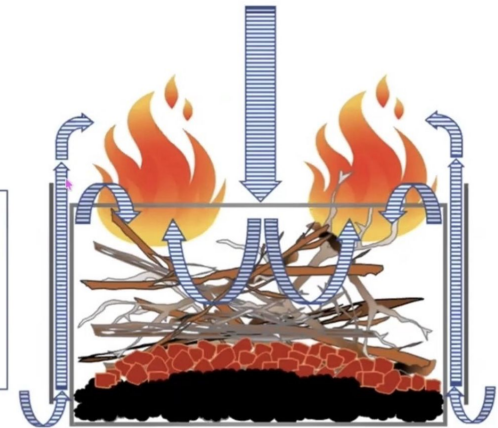
## Public Safety

While Indigenous stewards have used controlled burns for centuries to manage vegetation, we recognize that they can raise public safety concerns.

- Contact with Madera Elementary school
- The El Cerrito Kensington Fire Dept. will issue public statements notifying residents of the upcoming burn.
- We are advocating for practices that reduce smoke and improve efficiency, including producing biochar.

## Future methods to explore

- Flame-cap (ring-of-fire) kiln: an engineered, airflow-controlled system for producing biochar that burns cleanly and reduces emissions
- There are portable ones for \$2,000  
<https://tarterparts.com/products/ring-of-fire>
- Already used by Sonoma Ecology Center + recent scientific studies
- Fundraising + biochar byproduct resale?



**Ring of Fire Biochar Kiln**

Airflow and Flames – Counter-flow air from the top keeps embers contained and flame lengths low.

# Reduce Fire Risk = Climate Action (4/4)

## Preventing Catastrophic Carbon Release from catastrophic fires

### Fire Resilience also means long-term Carbon sequestration

#### A healthier landscape can store more carbon long-term

- Restore native meadows and biodiversity
- Support resilient ecosystems adapted to California conditions
- Reduce overcrowded or unhealthy vegetation
- Promote fewer trees, but healthier and more fire-resilient ones

### Meadow Restoration Matters: Native grasslands are powerful carbon sinks

Our restoration work supports:

- Deep-rooted native perennial grasses
- Improved soil structure
- Increased biodiversity
- Long-term carbon sequestration underground

# Build community

- Open to all ages and experience levels
- Creating a hands-on connection to nature
- Building a dedicated stewardship community
- Sharing knowledge about: Native plants, Fire ecology, Land stewardship

Since Spring 2024: 1,500 volunteer hours

- 2x work parties a week
- 1x per month with weed warriors from F5C
- Special events: UC Berkeley Project: 2x a year, 50 students

Notable community events:

- Collaboration with the city of El Cerrito: Arbor Event, Earth Day
- MLK Day of Service with 30+ Madera Elementary families, Easter Calendula Hunt



# Looking Ahead (1/2)

## Scope

- **Maintain legacy areas**
- **Sustain efforts in newly opened areas (lower Madera)**
- **Expand restoration footprint**
  - Explore new priority zones (e.g., Motorcycle Hill)
  - Grassland restoration
  - In the future, we are dreaming of a more active restoration:
    - i. Seed collection, plants propagation
    - ii. Reintroduction of nearby plants to increase the biodiversity and keep our local genotype alive



# Looking Ahead (2/2)

- **Strengthen partnerships with**
  - City of El Cerrito
  - Schools (Madera, El Cerrito High School)
  - Friends of Five Creeks + Trail trekkers
  - CNPS (conjoint events + knowledgeable members help for plant ID)
  - Sister sites: Albany Hill, Urban Tilt (Richmond), EBP Wildcat Canyon
  - Mentors: Susan Schwartz, Jim McKissock, Glenn Schneider from Skyline Gardens, Pepperwood Preserve in Santa Rosa
- **Secure sustainable funding**
  - Support letters for the city to get grants
  - Grants
  - Fundraising for material and bigger actions the city does not have the funding for. ex: ring of fire
- **Continue growing the volunteer network**
  - Website, mailing list, social media, meetup...
  - Though the city: Green newsletter, Views and News...
  - Network, partnerships...



# Grants

- [The Contra Costa Fish & Wildlife Propagation Fund](#)
  - small, annual county grant that supports projects improving local fish and wildlife habitat
  - typically applications opening in late spring and due around early August.
- Diablo Fire Safe Council's Partners in [Wildfire Prevention Fuel Reduction Grant Match](#)
  - small cost-share program (typically up to about \$3,500–\$5,000)
  - helps communities and property owners hire contractors or leverage volunteer work to reduce wildfire fuel loads and create defensible space.
- [State Urban Greening 2026 grant](#)
  - for climate-resilient
  - multi-benefit projects (restoration, fire risk reduction, community access)
  - Estimated amount per award: \$200,000 – \$5,000,000
  - Applications due June 4, 2026. Priority given to projects:
    - Providing direct and meaningful benefits to vulnerable populations, disadvantaged communities, or severely disadvantaged communities.
    - Using the services of the California Conservation Corps (CCC) or Certified Local Conservation Corps (LCCs)
    - Leverage private, federal, and local funding or produce the greatest public benefit

# Immediate Needs & Concrete Actions with the Forest committee

## Streamline the decision making process

- Can the **Forest Committee play a more active decision-making role for the HNA?** For example, by including a short (e.g., 15-minute) coordination segment at each Forest Committee meeting to align efforts, make timely collective decisions, and use staff time as efficiently as possible.
- Adopt an **official “pre-approved plant removal list”** to empower volunteers, improve efficiency, and ensure consistency in stewardship practices.

## Support with fuel reduction and vegetation removal logistics

- Clarification on **dumpster access**: how many can be allocated annually, and whether we can coordinate directly with a specific department
- Usage of city carts for **hauling material** from more remote areas
- Coordination with the Fire Department and Stephen on **planning and scheduling regular burns**

## Ongoing consultation with Friends of the Hillside

- Become an **official partner**
- **Support strategic prioritization of limited city resources**, clarifying what is best suited for volunteers versus contractors
- **Provide clear ecological guidance to contractors** to avoid unintended impacts (e.g., mowing timing, wood chip placement affecting habitat)
- Explore **partnership opportunities with Parks & Recreation** to leverage additional resources

# Collaboration with the EQC

# Appendix



# Friends of Five Creeks Legacy

For 28 years, the all-volunteer F5C has restored many natural areas in the bay area, among them three large, neglected semi-natural areas in El Cerrito :Cerrito Creek at El Cerrito Plaza, Cerrito Creek from Adams Street to Pierce Street and the HNA

**The goal has been to create projects that welcome people and wildlife, with reasonably sustainable and diverse vegetation, and a lightened, sustainable maintenance load for the agencies responsible.**

Since 2004, F5C—alongside partners—helped transform the Hillside Natural Area from a **dense, fire-prone landscape** dominated by **broom and pampas grass** into a more accessible and managed space through sustained community effort and targeted grant-funded projects.

Volunteers removed a **wide range of invasive species**: Pampas grass, cotoneaster, fennel, cardoon, poison hemlock, wild radish, Himalayan blackberry, acacia and lower-growing invasives including Algerian and English ivy (*Hedera* spp.) and cape ivy (*Delairia odorata*).

Their interns' careful and thorough [survey of woodrat nests](#), important “ecosystem engineering” in the El Cerrito Hillside Natural Area, in 2024 with a call to action to protect and actively support their populations by managing their habitat and reducing key threats.

Friends of Five Creeks has systematically documented, tracked, and long-term monitored native plant communities, building a **valuable record of ecological change and restoration progress**. The Friends of Five Creeks ~70-species native plant list informed the consultants' work on the Hillside Natural Area Fire Resilience and Forest Conservation Management Plan and remains a [reference on the City of El Cerrito's website](#).

# Trail Trekkers: Legacy & Ongoing Action

Origin: Formed to successfully promote public **acquisition of the Madera property**, connecting the HNA to Motorcycle Hill — a foundational step in expanding public open space access.

## Core Activities

### 1. Advocacy

**Advocates** for the expansion and protection of public open space in El Cerrito through collaboration with community groups, city leadership, and partner agencies, including recent involvement in fire prevention efforts.

### 2. Direct Action

- **Trail building** (created the Motorcycle Hill trail), **maintenance**, and **habitat restoration** (e.g., broom removal)
- Led successful efforts to install **trail signage** in the HNA (ongoing beyond HNA)

### 3. Community Engagement

- Organizes **events** that connect people to open spaces (Hillside Festival since 2014, hikes ...)

# Wildfire Risk Model: calculations and assumptions

## Model Formulation

Wildfire spread risk and suppression effort are modeled as nonlinear functions of relative fuel load, reflecting the disproportionate impact of fuel continuity and ladder fuel structure on fire behavior. Let  $(F)$  represent normalized fuel fraction (pre-removal  $F_0=1$ )

### Inputs and Parameters

Parameter	Value	Description
$F_0$	1.0	Baseline fuel load (standing broom = 100%)
$F_1$	0.40	Post-removal fuel load (~60% broom removed)
$\alpha$	1.8	Spread risk exponent
$\beta$	2.2	Suppression effort exponent

User inputs: 120 piles  $\times$  60 plants/pile = 7,200 plants removed, representing ~60% of total broom biomass in El Cerrito Hillside Natural Area.

### Calculations

text

Baseline (standing broom):

$$R_s(F_0) = 1.0^{1.8} = 1.00 \text{ (100\%)}$$

$$R_e(F_0) = 1.0^{2.2} = 1.00 \text{ (100\%)}$$

Post-removal (piles scenario):

$$R_s(F_1) = 0.40^{1.8} = 0.192 \text{ (19.2\%)}$$

$$R_e(F_1) = 0.40^{2.2} = 0.133 \text{ (13.3\%)}$$

Risk reduction:

$$\Delta R_s = 1 - 0.192 = 0.808 \text{ (80.8\%)}$$

$$\Delta R_e = 1 - 0.133 = 0.867 \text{ (86.7\%)}$$

# Wildfire Risk Model: calculations and assumptions cont.

## Model Formulation

Wildfire spread risk and suppression effort are modeled as nonlinear functions of relative fuel load, reflecting the disproportionate impact of fuel continuity and ladder fuel structure on fire behavior. Let  $(F)$  represent normalized fuel fraction (pre-removal  $F_0=1$ )

### Model Results

Scenario	Fuel Fraction $F$	Spread Risk $R_s$	Suppression Effort $R_e$
Standing broom	1.00	100%	100%
Cut & piled (unburned)	0.40	19.2%	13.3%
Reduction	-60%	-80.8%	-86.7%

### Sensitivity Analysis

Fuel Remaining	Spread Risk Remaining	Effort Remaining
0.30	12.1%	7.3%
0.40	19.2%	13.3%
0.50	28.2%	21.5%