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EBMUD put on the spot for failure to address landslide on Augusta Drive

By Sophie Braccini



Moraga pedestrians used to be treated to a nice walk along Moraga Creek up to the crossing of the Lafayette-Moraga trail and Canyon Road. Nowadays when one ventures on the Canyon Bridge, the access to the trail is closed, and has been since January of 2016.

All that has been done is tarping the hill on the southern side of the trail, that same hill that failed last March and forced a family of five to vacate their home and relocate. The end of their ordeal being nowhere in sight, friends and neighbors have rallied around them and are now demanding that the town take action. "A family has been red-tagged out of their house for a year and EBMUD has not done anything for a whole year," said Steve Garrett who came to the Jan. 25 Moraga Town Council meeting along with 20 other people in support of the Moraga family.

In March the Alfords noticed that a portion of their deck was leaning. After inspecting the ground behind their property they noted cracks in the EBMUD ground that started to affect the home's foundations. They moved out.

Some neighbors on Augusta Drive are also affected with irregular water delivery and loss of the use of their backyards.

At the time the problem started EBMUD indicated that it had inspected the area but that the soil was so saturated that nothing could be done until it dried out. But the only visible difference today over what was a year ago is the tarp that covers the entire hill.

Friends of the Alfords told the town council that they had attended EBMUD meetings and talked during public comments but that all they got were polite nods. They forcefully demanded that the town council take action and keep them informed of their progress.

It so happens that at the Jan. 11 council meeting council member Dave Trotter had asked that the topic of the trail be put on the agenda of a future meeting. He had asked that both EBMUD, who owns the land, and East Bay Regional Park District that manages the trail be invited to provide a report on what is going on with the landslide, and present their plan to restore the trail and protect the uphill neighbors.

"Leaving it just tarped is not an option," the council member had said. Vice mayor Roger Wykle had proposed during that same meeting that town staff make a formal written request to the water agency, adding that if EBMUD would not answer, "We will go stand on their desk!"

Town manager Bob Priebe said the agency refused to answer any questions because of pending

litigation.

After the public outcry on Jan. 25 staff restated the impossibility they had had to get an answer from the utility, and the council members reaffirmed their determination to get a result. "It takes a village and we are on your team," said Mayor Teresa Onoda after she was able to restore order following the first raucous incident of her short career as mayor. Worked-up by months of frustration and the inability to get a straight answer, some residents lost patience when they understood that the council could not discuss an item that was not on the agenda.

Since the group of residents had come to talk during public comment, the council could not discuss actions other than what had already been decided at the Jan. 11 meeting. One Moragan proposed that the topic be a permanent agenda item. Rather, the mayor asked that a draft letter be put on the agenda for the Feb. 8 meeting, and that the topic be continued if necessary. The council will also discuss if more can be done. The town manager proposed to look into the franchise agreement with EBMUD and see if the town could have any type of leverage over the agency.

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