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Letters to the editor

PG&E tree removal and wildfire safety

Recently PG&E announced plans to remove 141 mature trees in Lafayette this summer along the electrical lines of St. Mary's Road and Moraga Road. With PG&E's new discretionary "Enhanced Vegetation Management" program, entire 100-year-old heritage trees, many 30 feet or more away from power lines, will be lost despite the fact only four-foot tree trimming clearances are required by law. PG&E has better options for wildfire safety. In February, PG&E filed a 500-page "2020 Wildfire Mitigation Plan" with the CPUC describing plans to harden their system. This plan in part outlines PG&E's program to bury electrical lines underground in specific areas: high-wildfire zones intersected by roads serving as emergency routes for first responders and the evacuation of residents in tree-rich communities. If St. Marys Rd and Moraga Rd do not match these requirements, I don't know which areas will; but I do know PG&E has no plans to bring the safest electrical hardening to our area. We deserve better. Recall Lafayette's two wildfires last year caused by a new PG&E power pole. Portions of town were evacuated, and for many of us, ashes rained down on our yards while a nearby transformer exploded, leaving us without power for days. This was not caused by 100-year-old trees, but by PG&E's failure to manage their above-ground electrical grid. Lamorinda deserves what PG&E has described as a solution and has promised their own regulator: better equipment buried underground, in our populated high wildfire zones, and along major exit routes. Without a better solution, Lamorinda can look forward to more dangerous wildfire seasons and to many bare stumps that will serve as monuments of failure to enact the safest remedies possible.

Michael Dawson
Lafayette

MCC open to walkers

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions." This statement precisely describes the Moraga Country Club (MCC) Board of Director's decision to leave the golf course open for walkers, members and non-members alike.

While other similar clubs as well as many parks are adhering to the intent of Contra Costa County's (and the state's) Shelter In Place mandate, the MCC is taking pride in being inclusive rather than exclusive and tacitly inviting people from all around the county to walk on our beautiful golf course. The irony is that by trying to be a good neighbor, the MCC is, in essence, being a bad neighbor by jeopardizing the health and well-being of club residents, club members, and the entire population in the surrounding neighborhood.

In its most recent message to the membership, the MCC board stated: "The Board has taken all of the necessary precautions to ensure the safety of our Members and Staff with closures of the Clubhouse and recreation areas where possible, deciding to err on the side of caution." The irony of that statement is mind-boggling as clearly erring on the side of caution would be to close the golf course to everyone just as Orinda and Roundhill have done.

I have urged the board to be proactive rather than reactive...and close the golf course to all immediately. Surely the board will have to reverse its decision if a club member is diagnosed with COVID-19. Why increase the odds of that unfortunate occurrence? Why put the entire community at increased risk? Sadly, my position is not a popular one. Many in the club support the board's decision. They simply do not understand the risks of increased exposure to a wider population.

Ethan Bortman
MCC Resident

Dredging SF Bay?

The San Francisco Bay is a recreational treasure to be enjoyed by all residents of Contra Costa County. When the inland valley heats up, my family enjoys walking along the Bay trail at Marina Bay in Richmond, picnicking along the shore, viewing the beauty and breathing the fresh cool air.

It is unthinkable that a plan is in place to dredge the San Francisco Bay in order to allow larger and more numerous oil tankers bringing dirty tar sands to local refineries. This will add high levels of smog and dangerous particulates in the air with estimated additional CO2 emissions equivalent to 1.4 million cars per year in the county.

It is time to transition away from fossil fuels, not increase GHG emissions, nor increase the risk of a gigantic oil spill. Let's protect our natural and recreational resources for current and future generations. Let's work together for a just transition from fossil fuels and preserve the economic prosperity, beauty and health of our Bay Area counties.

Amanda Casey
Saranap

Neighbors Appeal Lot 66 Decision to City Council

Please help us fight Dick Holt's scandalous plan to develop Lot 66. In 2008, the City Council and Planning Commission denied the project because Lot 66 has never been buildable. In 11/26/08 Lamorinda Weekly: "A legal lot is not necessarily a buildable lot," said Les Hausrath, attorney for the neighbors. "The entire lot is encumbered by easement.

Recorded documents show the easement runs the width of the map. The documentation is quite clear of the existence of the easement. This lot was developed as a gateway for upper lots; it was never designed to be a developable lot." EBMUD removed Lot 66's water meter on July 1, 1970. Why? Because the lot was no longer buildable; it was designated an easement/access lot only to develop subdivisions up the hill. Lot 66 is bisected by Sessions Road. Yet current planner Jonathan Fox instructed the Planning Commission to go straight to siting and massing based on City Attorney Mala Subramanian's advice to ignore the easement issue. In 1/21/09 Lamorinda Weekly, former mayor/attorney Ned Robinson wrote, " The city attorney is just dead wrong if she says (as reported) that the city can grant a right to build on the easement (except the trail easement that the city owns). It should be noted that the county has said the lot is "unbuildable." To my knowledge, no planning agency -- city or county -- has ever tried to grant the right to develop over someone else's property.and an easement is an interest in property." On April 6, the PC voted 4-2 to grant Holt's permit. Kristina Sturm and Greg Mason, the only two PC members who saw the site's story poles, voted no. Holt served 23 years on the Planning Commission. He has a right to apply for a permit; however, the PC's decision now makes it possible for ANY developer to build on an unbuildable lot. It also sets precedent for Lafayette to IGNORE its own variances requirements and to grant special privilege to Holt and all future developers. This decision must be overturned. Support a dozen neighbors and submit public comment to the City Council.
Find me on NextDoor. Thank you.

Pam Swarts
Lafayette

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