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Campolindo High School Counselor Patrick Turner addresses a packed Plaza Park at a protest June 7 in Lafayette.

Photo Pippa Fisher

Residents gather for peaceful protests amid pandemic

By Pippa Fisher and Sophie Braccini

The anger and frustration of a nation, triggered by the recent death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police, has been evident even in the sleepy Lamorinda suburbs. Several peaceful protests were held in Lamorinda last week, with

the largest on June 7 in Lafayette, featuring speakers who called out the racism they say they regularly experience in the schools and community. Earlier protests had led to rioting and looting in neighboring Walnut Creek, and the mayors of all three Lamorinda cities had declared states of emergency, and had reached out to community members for calm.

In Lafayette Mayor Mike Anderson addressed the city June 1 in a Facebook Live broadcast, taking a few moments to address the historical aspect of prejudice towards people of color, and reminded the community of its shared humanity.

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Nearly 80 trees slated for removal on St. Mary's Road: council powerless to intervene



PG&E work began June 1, with tree removal planned to start the week of June 15.

Photo Pippa Fisher

By Pippa Fisher

The city council recognized with expressed frustration, their powerlessness to regulate Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s enhanced vegetation management along St. Mary's Road in Lafayette ahead of the utility's planned work this summer, which will include the removal of 79 trees on both city-owned and privately-owned land.

Work started on the gas transmission pipeline June 1, and a portion of St. Mary's Road will be closed Monday through Friday, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. through Aug. 14. The tree removal is scheduled to begin the week of June 15. "None of us want this to go the way it's going," said Vice Mayor Susan Candel at the May 26 council meeting.

City attorney Mala Subramanian explained that the city's own tree ordinance rules are preempted by the California Public Utilities Commission General Order 95 and so this work is outside local control.

Based on this preemption, the city cannot require PG&E to provide arborist reports, which are generally required under the ordinance. While the city has requested this information, PG&E has so far declined to provide it.

To minimize impact to the community the EVM program work will be happening in conjunction with work to install 450 feet of new gas pipeline across the bridge south of South Lucille Lane, completing a capacity expansion project from two years ago, and system hardening, consisting of pole and wire replacement along St. Mary's Road.

But it is the tree removal that has prompted pages of letters and comments to the council over the past couple of months.

On April 13 PG&E Manager of Integrated Public Affairs Marcos Montes presented to the council, covering all aspects of the work. Montes explained that the EVM work addresses vegetation that poses a high potential for wildfire risk.

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