

Published December 19th, 2012

Lafayette Sinkhole on the Mend

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Cathy Tyson

A deluge of rain on Dec. 2 caused a torrent of water that when coupled with upstream debris blocked a Mt. View Drive storm drain. All that water swirling around eventually chipped away at soil above the drain and under the roadway and - voila! A 15-foot sinkhole was born.

When the roadway collapsed, utilities pipelines also took a hit: PG&E, EBMUD and the sanitary sewer lines needed an immediate fix. Utility crews rallied to restore service and city engineering staff had to hustle to complete plans in order to get a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers. Working late into the night, Engineering Services Manager Tony Coe, Senior Engineer Farzaneh Sanders and Associate Engineer Matt Luttrupp produced the detailed plans necessary for repair work and managed to get the critical paperwork in by a 6 a.m. deadline the next morning in San Francisco.

With potentially more rain on the way, it was clear that expediting this repair project is the best option for residents and to curb potential added expense.

Contractor C.C. Myers, known for its experience in completing infrastructure jobs quickly, is slated to finish the

work before Christmas Day. How much is all this going to cost? There's a time and materials contract with a cap of \$600,000, barring unforeseen circumstances. Any surprise work will be renegotiated to the mutual satisfaction of both parties.

While the City of Lafayette has a sizable fund for emergencies, according to City Manager Steven Falk, "It's not clear, yet, where the funding will come from." He explained, "The City, last Friday, submitted a request to the State for relief from the California Disaster Assistance program; we've not heard any response from the Cal EMA office yet. We're also looking closely at our insurance policies to see if there is any opportunity for coverage. Finally, of course, as a last resort, we can use funds from the City's General Fund reserve, which has about \$6 million."

Just last week, crews were re-routing power lines and working to get utilities out of the way to accommodate the massive equipment necessary to bring in the 10-foot diameter pipe sections, that weigh 42,000 pounds each, and installing a temporary upstream diversion dam to re-route the creek.

A big part of the problem was the amount of debris, according to Luttrupp, that caused "unintended consequences." Branches, leaves and more get washed down the creek and get hung up causing these blockages. He suggests homeowner's creek frontage property is not a recycling bin.

Got creek debris? Clean it up.

The City sends periodic reminders to creek-front property owners reminding them of creek maintenance. The most recent letter, dated June 5, 2012, states, "Residents are responsible for inspecting and maintaining their portion of the drainage channel/creek, to ensure it remains free of all debris such as grass clippings, tree limbs, leaves and waste vegetation, trash, and other objects that could obstruct the full flow of water." The letter goes on to caution homeowners about storing firewood or having a compost pile on the creek bank. Unfortunately, while the property owner gets the reminder, Luttrupp speculates that the information doesn't necessarily trickle down to tenants who may be renting.

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[back](#)

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