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From Front Page

Local Governments Stop PG&E Tree Cutting Project – For Now

... continued from page A1

She added that it appears the line runs along the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail where numerous trees are planted, but PG&E's map is not very precise and the agency told the town it would not give it precise data on the pipeline before July.

Falk and his public works team estimated that there are at least four zones where Lafayette is at risk for losing significant trees to the utility's chainsaws. "The riparian corridor along Mt. Diablo Boulevard near the Lafayette Reservoir; mature street trees along the south side of Mt. Diablo Boulevard between Diablo Foods and Chico's; decorative trees in Lafayette Plaza, the eastern trellis also appears to be at risk; and scores of mature trees along the west side of St. Mary's Road between the Community Center and the Moraga town border," he said.

Janet Keeter, Orinda's city manager, said, "We have requested specific data from PG&E but are not expecting a response before May." On PG&E's pipeline map, it looks like Glorietta Boulevard and the portion of Moraga Way that runs from Glorietta to the Moraga border would be impacted.

While cities are concerned about the safety of their residents and want proper maintenance of the gas lines, they challenge PG&E's right to cut trees with complete disregard for local rules and environmental laws. They believe that there are also other ways to protect the pipelines from tree roots.

"PG&E has been testing the lines with high-pressure water which is more directly related to public safety," said Keimach. "This clearance of vegetation and structures above the pipeline has a number of issues and the benefit to the pipeline safety seems debatable." She added that PG&E has failed to produce evidence that tree roots ever damaged pipelines (roots grow toward water, not gas), and that if they did, there are a number of root barrier systems that could be explored before resolving to cutting down the trees. The Moraga Town Council is not scheduled to discuss the issue at this time.

"Lafayette will refuse to issue encroachment permits to PG&E for tree removal along the pipeline pathway until the cities and PG&E have arrived upon a process for resolving

these issues," said Falk. "I have ordered the police chief to direct his police officers who come upon such work to stop utility workers from trimming trees until the matter is reviewed by the city engineer."

Keeter says that the issue has not been discussed by the Orinda City Council yet, but it is likely that the city's position will be to hold PG&E to the same standards as anybody else when it comes to cutting trees. Orinda's municipal code prohibits removal of protected trees without a permit. The application to cut a tree carries a fee and includes mitigation measures such as replacement or moving of the tree.

"Respecting this important partnership (with cities), PG&E will not remove any trees under this program in the East Bay until a shared solution is reached," said Soto. But the agency remains committed to addressing trees and structures over its pipelines that can interfere with safely accessing, inspecting and maintaining the pipelines. PG&E's pipeline map can be found online at www.pge.com/safety/systemworks/gas/transmissionpipelines.

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Civic News Lafayette

Update on the Old Library Reuse Task Force

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Andy Scheck

It's hard to miss the giant signs in front of the old Lafayette library and the former doctor's office across the street. What to do with this pair of city-owned properties is currently in the hands of the Old Library Reuse Task Force that is seeking to evaluate and make a recommendation on the highest, best and most fiscally respon-

sible use. The group wanted to get the word out to other interested parties, who may have missed the initial outreach effort, hence the signs.

Consisting of volunteers who represent a range of viewpoints and some city leaders, the task force first set out to find a way to compare proposals. After much discussion, project evaluation criteria were nailed down and consist of a four-part analysis: plan consistency, environmental impacts, economic and social impacts, and success factors. The thorough list of questions for all applicants runs the gamut from traffic congestion, a credible business plan, and obviously very important – does the proposer have the appropriate financing in place to complete rehabilitation and construction.

Presentations have already been made by the City of Lafayette and the Lafayette Dance Center, along with a combined effort from Lafayette Senior Services Commission and the Lafayette Community Foundation to form a downtown community center. Additional proposals from Futures Explored, Eden Housing, Wellspring Educational Services and the Lafayette School District will likely stretch into the summer months.



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