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# PG&E Security Plans Rankle Lost Valley Residents in Orinda

By Vic Ryerson



This image of a masonry security wall was presented at the meeting. Image provided

Pacific Gas and Electric Company's plans to beef up the physical security around its Moraga Substation in Orinda's Lost Valley neighborhood immediately fired up the neighbors, who are concerned that the work will adversely affect aesthetics, noise and the environment in the area.

In an effort to address their concerns, PG&E hastily convened a meeting in the Orinda Library at 3 p.m. March 29. Four PG&E managers were present to explain the utility's actions to residents. Attendance by the neighbors was modest because of the workday timing, but those who showed up were very vocal.

Jack Paulus, secretary of the Lost Valley

Association, was present to represent both those who were there as well as others who could not attend, but individual speakers did not hold back. In the end, the raucous meeting produced a detente of sorts, and the prospects for resolution of the dispute look promising going forward.

The Moraga Substation is a key link in the utility's regional electrical grid serving the East Bay. It was built in the late 1940s, and the Lost Valley neighborhood grew up around it. At the meeting Vic Baker, PG&E's senior manager for the Mt. Diablo Division, explained that the construction project is an upgrade required to comply with mandatory security standards. It will principally consist

of a new 12-foot-high masonry wall and a 10-foot-high chain link fence with vinyl slats around the perimeter to obscure the view into the facility. The wall will be built along the front (east) side of the facility, and the fence will enclose the rest.

Construction is slated to begin "immediately" ("about three weeks from now" in PG&E terms, according to Baker) to take advantage of the dry season, and will require about two months to complete if there are no weather-related delays. Crews will work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and no work is scheduled to be done on weekends at the present time.

The project will require removal or trimming of about 30 trees, and this, along with potential environmental effects to the adjacent creek and noise, became the key issues in the discussion at the meeting. The trees to be affected are of various types, including pine, oak, willow, and redwood.

Residents of the bucolic neighborhood – which includes a barn and pasture on Lost Valley Road – reacted strongly to the possible loss of screening vegetation, and are also concerned about construction noise and disruption.

PG&E explained that the new measures are required under the North American Electric Reliability Corporation Critical Infrastructure Protection Plan (NERC CIP). NERC is a not-for-profit international regula-

tory authority whose mission is to ensure the reliability of the bulk power system in North America. Its physical security standards are mandatory under Federal Energy Regulatory Commission rules. PG&E gave priority to the Moraga Substation project because of the recent Metcalf incident in San Jose in which a major substation was vandalized, threatening the reliability of regional electric service.

PG&E says it notified the City of Orinda of the Moraga Substation project in the fall of 2015, but did not send letters to area residents until March 11, 2016. Lost Valley residents, who are no strangers to threats of encroachment and disruption by developers, quickly rallied in response. Although the meeting produced a lot of smoke in addition to some light, it concluded with an agreement between the two sides to form a joint task force to work out their problems.

"We regret not having completed additional community outreach on this issue," says Tamar Sarkissian, PG&E spokesperson. "As a result of the March 29 community meeting, we are committed to working closely with the City of Orinda and our substation neighbors to ensure clear communication about the substation improvements and our security concerns. Going forward, we are creating a working group with representatives from both PG&E and the neighborhood to discuss this and other ongoing issues."

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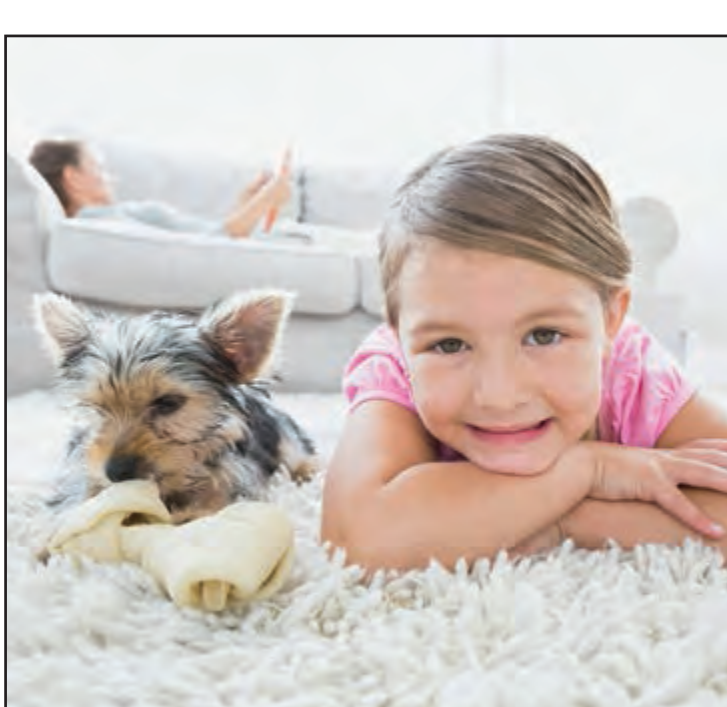
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