

San Mateo County Tree Ordinances Update Project

A Collaboration of the Planning and Building, Parks, and Public Works Departments and the Office of Sustainability

Facilitated by the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center

January 26th, 2017

455 County Center, Room 405

9:30 – 12:00

Meeting Summary. The following meeting summary is provided for Steering Committee member review and comment. Please provide any comments or corrections to staff via email.

Meeting Objectives:

1. Discuss policy options for managing exotic tree species on urban and rural lands, ranging from large scale restoration or vegetation management projects to individual tree removals.
2. Discuss policy options for how to authorize tree management activities on rural lands ranging from large scale vegetation management to individual tree removals near homes.

9:30 (9:37)	Welcome and Greeting (Actual Start)
9:35 (9:41)	Group and Facilitator Introductions, Agenda Review Joe LaClair and AddieRose Mayer, Facilitator, Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center
9:45 9:50	<p>Joe McBride Presentation: The pros and cons of eucalyptus stands on the landscape, and the nature and value of eucalyptus as a novel ecosystem, followed by questions from the Committee</p> <p>Q&A</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you consider the density of species on the transects you surveyed? I did not, but there might be some good information developed from doing this. 2. The San Mateo County coast is infested with Eucalyptus. Do Eucalypts impact flooding, reduce stream flow or cause other water problems? I don't know that anyone has looked at how they affect the quantity of water. Surely the effect is from precipitation. Also, I don't know of a published study measuring whether Eucalyptus trees reduce streamflow. 3. In the pros, you stated biodiversity as a pro, even though the oak woodland provides 300 species versus 160 species in Eucalyptus. How is this positive?

The point is not that one is better than another, but to point out that Eucalyptus stands are not biological deserts and they do provide habitat for many species. I'm not suggesting we equate their value with oak woodlands.

- 4. Regarding the matrix that was already mentioned, I do have a concern around water usage. I also think another thing that should be considered is the cost to manage these stands because they could actually create more damage and we should consider the cost needed to manage it.**
- 5. Do Eucalyptus absorb more water than comparably sized native species? We don't know because such studies haven't been conducted.**
- 6. Related to the study in the Presidio – when is wind a factor?**
I don't think Paul Ehrlich of the Presidio looked at wind as a hazard.
- 7. When Coyote Point was looking to cut down Eucalyptus stands for more parking, there was no positive information presented regarding these stands. So, I really appreciate your study and presentation. Is it likely that Coyote Point Eucalypts have higher moisture content and if so, could it be an important factor to guide the county on managing these Eucalyptus stands?**
I think it would. Also, there are other dimensions to consider, such as fire risk. For example, San Francisco's recently adapted city plan calls for most Eucalyptus to be reduced in city parks.
- 8. Coastal SMC Eucalyptus displaces an ecosystem. Has a comparison between eucalyptus and coastal scrub been made, instead of just another tree? There are so many plants and animals that live in coastal scrub that wouldn't be able to live in a Eucalyptus stand.**
We're not planting any more Eucalyptus. It's not invasive and studies have shown that. Again, I am not proposing that the value of Eucalyptus is comparable to native habitats, simply that many species use them.
- 9. I think the considerations should be site specific and evaluated site by site. For example, Angel Island has a very different climate. So it is really important to communicate differences to constituencies that are on both sides of the question, as well as consider unique site factors. Likewise, there are other areas where the stands can be a problem because they displace native habitat and we have an obligation to manage for that.**
- 10. Depending on habitat, I've seen where they are not expanding but it's a problem in scrub and grasslands. I've measured about 40 different stands and I found that some stands were averaging more than 1 foot a year of expansion. But there are others that the stands are static.**
- 11. Do you know if in SF, where there is a plan to remove, are they taking in account the displacement and when nesting isn't taking place.**
We don't know when it will take place; the plan was approved, but there are no money. There is currently no action plan. The plan will take place park by park, and I'm sure they are not going to do it during nesting.
- 12. Are there any studies about Eucalyptus and the changed soil characteristics?**
Yes, in Berkeley and at Angel Island. Measurements showed that the level of phosphorus goes up, P_h goes up, and this is interpreted as an improvement to

	<p>the potential for annual grasslands where Eucalyptus has been planted and later removed.</p> <p>13. Studies about the increase in phosphorus in soil and P_h in South America related to erosion control (something we'd need in the coastal zone). Aware of any studies that would help with that?</p> <p>Not local, but the landside problems in Quito, Ecuador were studied, looking at Blue Gum Eucalyptus that showed they are effective in controlling landslides, so they planted Eucalyptus for control.</p> <p>14. How many types of Eucalyptus species are there and which ones were used to control the land sliding?</p> <p>600 in Australia Blue gum was used in Quito</p> <p>15. Most of our current Eucalyptus concerns and conversations are around blue gum.</p>
10:15	<p>Staff Presentation - Policy Options for Managing Exotic Tree Species – Joe LaClair Q&A and Input</p> <p>1. Do you distinguish between single Eucalyptus v. a stand? (there are cultural areas within the County where they provide a cultural value and I wouldn't argue against that) but the report is worded to only address single trees instead of stands. Would you consider something around those lines, more nuanced towards the clusters that do have a cultural or significant value?</p> <p>Of course, the current tree ordinance does consider stands and we did not include all of the potential policy options. In the urban and suburban landscape, the County tends to get eucalyptus removal requests on a one by one basis and we do over 100 tree permits a year. On the contrary, permits for removal of Eucalyptus stands are rare. Having the Steering Committee help us characterize the values that we should consider when making these decisions is important.</p>
10:25	<p>Committee Discussion</p> <p>2. The instrument you gave us [paper with options] is designed for yes or no answers, but there's no consideration for case by case. I know writing policy is complicated, but I also think this an important consideration.</p> <p>3. Encourage clear definitions of how you're defining terms; example: cultural trees and criteria to designate as such, so that over time theses definitions can stay constant and be evaluated on an even playing field. Biological and ecological considerations should be used in every decision as well as the cultural landscapes where they are, even if it's a challenge.</p> <p>4. Clear definition of exotic and native. These definitions can vary and it's an important consideration.</p> <p>5. Would removal of large stands of Eucalyptus change land development potential for a developer to create a housing development? Is that an issue?</p>

Most large Eucalyptus stands are on lands designated for RM or PAD, so I can't foresee any place for that happening. Development of these lands is too constrained by other policies, unlike in urban areas, where this may be possible if large-stand Eucalyptus removal were allowed. We're trying to balance that issue with the goal of protecting the tree canopy.

6. Site specific matrix is the answer to a lot of these questions rather than yes or no.

We agree, and we want to know what the Steering Committee believes the necessary findings are that the County should be addressing to incorporate in the policy and guide these decisions. We will bring this back with policy language (including findings) for your feedback.

7. About the county permit for removal of exotics, what does the process look like for native trees? If it's not heritage or significant, can you remove it?

No permit needed for removal of any tree under 12 inches; over 12 inches, a significant tree permit is required. In the RM district trees 18-inches in diameter or more require an RM permit. Heritage tree size requirements are species specific— these permits receive higher scrutiny.

In CA many jurisdictions, have ordinances that allow Eucalyptus removal without a permit; what we're trying go to gauge is whether we should consider such a policy here in SMC especially in urban areas. But during these discussions that may change, and the size of trees protected might become smaller, e.g., less than 12-inches. There are other jurisdictions that have other numbers or consider other species (such as Palo Alto).

8. Hummingbirds aren't only present because of Eucalyptus; garden plants also attract them. The term grand trees: Concerned with definition of significant trees just because of diameter. How do you word the ordinance to define grand trees? The definition of exotics is thrown around loosely, one could argue that Monterrey Cypress and Pine are also considered exotics, according to the ordinance. California natives or trees that are adapted to our climate conditions are not exotic. I'd like to make a case that we adopt Monterrey Cypress to our native's lists. Many Eucalyptus aren't a problem; it's the blue gum. Along the mid coast, these three species are all over. It's not a matter of planting but how it's done, it's often a matter of minding the volunteers.

The County could establish a process for citizens designating a grand tree/heritage trees, that's something we can consider: having a more practical process of defining or designating specimens, could be a policy we add. Clarifying the definition of exotics is also an important goal of this effort.

It's not just about the diameter, it's stepping back and looking at a tree.

9. Are we going to talk about planting trees?

Our current ordinance, doesn't talk about that, but the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance does to a degree. We will bring mitigation planting policies to the Committee for discussion.

	<p>10. This is a wonderful group and we’re having a wonderful conversation of complex and challenging topics. But, when this is written, it is implemented by the planning staff some of whom don’t have the knowledge. How is it going to be implemented? I’ve had experience where we gave input and it was implemented completely different. How can we all work together to give these input considerations?</p> <p>We’re hiring arborists for the implementation and building capacity on the staff because these issues are important to the community and decision makers and we need to ensure we have the capacity to implement this. We are expanding our partnership with the Parks Dept, in part to help us with this.</p> <p>11. When we talk about the benefits of Eucalyptus stands, it’s not about arguing about other ecosystems – not a comparison because depending on the goal, is how it will be managed. Therefore, saying these stands have no value, creates a problem, so it makes no sense making comparison. We need to keep in mind that the ordinance applies to the entire County.</p> <p>The other thing is about definition; it’s important to define and leave out terms where we don’t need them. If we’re trying to restore, it doesn’t matter which ones we’re trying to restore, so consider taking out “exotic”.</p> <p>12. Fire officials receives calls from property owners requesting funds and permits to remove hazardous trees. Another factor we deal with are the landscape stands that have been abandoned, as well as the large stands without houses (easier to deal with vegetation management) and other stands in areas with many houses (can’t deal with that problem because of permits that require replanting for trees remove-frustrates efforts to create defensible space).</p> <p>13. Removing terms and being specific would be good because I’ve had the opportunity to work with developers who don’t care what tree they use. The more specific we can be in ordinance; better recommendations will be made by the planning staff to the developers</p>
10:55	BREAK
11:05	<p>Staff Presentation Objective #2 – Policy Options for Rural Lands- Mike Schaller-</p> <p>1. Timber Production Zones (TPZ) are not addressed by the proposed vegetation management policies.</p>
11:20	<p>Committee Discussion – Policy options for Rural Lands – AddieRose Mayer</p> <p>3. Rural areas: in regards to the regulation of removal of exotic trees, what exotics are being considered?</p> <p>Dealing with the all exotic species. We’re want to know whether it’s a good overall goal of the County to remove large stands of exotics throughout the county. We’ve gotten some sense that the answer is no.</p> <p>What are the findings that should be made to approve a VMP? What does the process look like? (permits, considerations, conditions, how is the permit granted?)</p>

4. The current situation in rural areas is less the removal of trees, but more so the removal of stumps without any permits because of erosion. This should be considered because of the environmental impact, e.g., erosion. Include encouraged vs discouraged practices and permits that regulate these processes.

It's not that there should be no permit requirement, but how more streamlined it should be, especially for large strands (rather than single backyard trees).

Another big issue is visual landscape.

5. Resource Management District – hoping to get a streamlined process of removal to facilitate restoration projects. To have a tree ordinance that allowed stand removal would be of great value to the County.

The ordinance preamble can explain the ordinance purpose, why it's being adopted, necessary, and what are the benefits.

6. HWY 1 has many trees that are blocking views.

7. RM, PAD, TPZ permits take time and money to process. Are the agricultural operational needs in a specific area considered? Is it possible to implement a much simpler process to prove that trees conflict with ongoing agricultural use? Danger at times with these VMP because 90% of the people want to make a good use of the land, and those who don't the county can enforce the ordinance upon them.

8. Mid Pen developed a plan that has many of the things you've [Joe and Mike] been saying, in place. It'd be great to get a [general] permit from the County for the work we want to do, instead of project by project. We're here to save the environment and we covered what you're asking for, both the content and supported by a public process. Any way we can work with the County to streamline the process, would be great.

9. In one case, a parking lot for a park– trees were taken down, others were required to be put in. Doesn't make sense, but the current ordinance states that should happen. Build flexibility in the tree ordinance to distinguish between urban areas and VM for rural areas.

We agree that different management approaches are important, but we also have to meet goals as climate action plan – trees are great benefit to address climate change. We'll come up with alternative.

10. The cost of obtaining permits is prohibitive, and in some cases, the project can't be finished. Is there a way to streamline permitting to prevent the need of more than one permit?

CEQA is a state law that can't be dodged but the plan, for this VMP policy, is that it might help to integrate permitting into one process.

Another approach might be that the County adopts a programmatic EIR for a planning policy it adopts that projects can tier from. Also, the Coastal Commission's LCP certification process is "CEQA Equivalent" and the County is looking into whether that process can provide the necessary programmatic

CEQA clearance for future projects to tier from. Not doing the environmental analysis is not an option; it has to be done for every project.

- 11. Rough estimate for the cost of developing Mid Pen Plan? Charged for resource management – cost can be challenging. More than \$50K**
- 12. Mitigation – in a recent restoration project conducted by the SF PUC, the native plant material was contaminated with Phytophthora fungus and infected the site, requiring removal of all plants, and holding them onsite to avoid further spread. Should not buy and plant natives, unless they are grown in clean nurseries: only 2 that follow protocols, sanitation, and soil pasteurization. Remediation will probably still be needed. Midpeninsula has switched to planting acorns and seeds instead of plant stock to avoid contamination and for flexibility as well as flexibility for species. Habitat restoration without impacting wildlife.**
- 13. We need policies and permit requirements we can meet when we have limited resources.**
- 14. Staff: should we use something like the site matrix developed by Joe McBride as the basis for crafting findings for ordinance policies affecting the removal of large numbers of exotic trees, e.g., a vegetation management plan? Questions [provided in the handout] need to be answered in a more comprehensive way than yes or no. The yes or no responses are helpful, but not the entire story. We seek to develop policies that will not unduly burden agencies.**
Provide as much detail as you'd like. The more we get from you, the better we can move on.
- 15. For fire safety, following tree removal, including with new construction – not replanting trees might be more beneficial, but because of existing ordinances, problems are created for the fire department. There are conflicts that don't have an apparent solution. Each project should be looked at separately. A broadly applicable ordinance doesn't allow it.**

