
Findings during PG&E/resident exemption review of trees on Lafayette/Moraga Trail

Michael Dawson <mdawson@gmail.com>

Thu, May 18, 2017 at 11:11 AM

To: cityhall@lovelafayette.org, SFalk@ci.lafayette.ca.us, manderson@lovelafayette.org, mmitchell@lovelafayette.org, cburks@lovelafayette.org

Cc: Scott Honegger <schlawserve@gmail.com>, Gina Dawson <gdawson@gmail.com>, savelafayettetrees@gmail.com

Dear Mayor, City Council and City Staff,

On May 15, my wife Gina, Lafayette resident Scott Honegger, and I took a 3 hour walk/survey with PG&E reps to identify and discuss trees on the removal list along the Lafayette Moraga trail. The PG&E representatives present were Whitney Floratos, Jim Monniger Monninger, and Joey Perez. The agreed purpose of the trail walk was to jointly evaluate each tree for its community impact and identify trees for exemption from the 272 tree removal list. This initial effort was specific to trees along the Lafayette-Moraga trail, and we hope to continue the review along other pathways and areas owned by EBRPD, EBMUD, CCCSD, as well as neighborhood areas, all of which include trees of community concern.

We were appreciative to start this tree by tree analysis for community review and tree exemption. PG&E's representatives were polite and listened to our concerns, but offered little in terms of promises for which trees would remain or specifics on the criteria used. We were told that all of our questions would be answered in due time, but alarmingly were told at the end of the walk that their plans to begin cutting in mid-June were still on schedule. That was not our understanding after the last City Council meeting when Angus Coyle spoke, and would appreciate expedient confirmation from City Staff.

Some issues and findings we wanted to highlight to you:

- Approximately 50%-60% of the trees reviewed on the trail would be of huge community significance due to size, age, location, canopy coverage or benefit. Each tree of special concern was clearly identified communicated to PG&E.
- PG&E and the City arborist have different trees tagged in some locations due to errors. This was pointed out to us by PG&E. Accordingly, the City may have been unaware of the actual exact trees to be removed or valued prior to approval of the tree cutting agreement.
- PG&E acknowledged that they only used GPS to determine private property lines and the general location of trees. While tree trunks may appear to be on, for example, "bike path" property because of the location of fences, many fences are installed "set back" from the true property lines and many tree trunks may straddle the property lines and thus the trees would have joint ownership. This can only be accurately determined by an independent licensed surveyor, tree by tree. Actual ownership of each tree is material to the conduct of the City, PG&E, and EBRPD or other owner of land where a tree designated to be cut is located.
- PG&E cannot make fully accurate claims as to the integrity and safety of the pipelines and they appear to be uncertain of their actual condition. PG&E has apparently not pressure tested the pipeline running down the bike path since 1963, and apparently cannot use appropriate testing methods (a "pig" that moves down a line) to evaluate the interior integrity of the line due to its many curves, diameter changes, types of valves, and other constraints. Shouldn't a condition to allowing any tree cutting have been requiring PG&E to have first completed all pipeline safety and integrity testing and provided verifiable satisfactory results?
- The state of the pipeline appears to be a safety hazard in certain areas. A four-foot section of the pipe stands exposed in the NE portion of the trail (near Snake Hill). PG&E expressed concern when viewing this and even mentioned that this should be a priority over trees. We were left wondering when PG&E may have last inspected their pipeline. What written verification has the City received from PG&E regarding inspections?
- Many trees for removal were inches from identical trees not slated for removal. When asked PG&E why the stark treatment differences, they seemed to agree that simply monitoring might be a viable alternative in these cases and removal would not be necessary. It's our impression that tree removal selection is often subjective.
- PG&E claims they will conduct soil stability analysis, bird nesting analysis, analysis of herbicide use, cultural significance analysis, health impacts, etc. -- all studies not yet complete. We recommend that the city, acting in the best interest of its residents, be party to this information to determine if the appropriate reviews are being completed before allowing a tree to be cut.

- We highlighted several large oaks function as anchors to slopes both large and small. Exposed roots can be seen at several locations. One section shows active soil erosion with an orange maintenance barrier falling down the hillside.

- Whole areas that would be denuded of trees and vegetation on creek embankments would pose safety risks as there would no longer be barriers against drop-off; children walking and biking on trail as well as animals would be most vulnerable to this safety hazard.

- The pipeline runs adjacent and crosses the Last Trampas Creek in several locations. PG&E's plans to use herbicides in riparian locations should be reviewed by the Creeks Committee.

We have asked the representatives who talked with us to help us clarify the process for identifying the trees for further review and ultimately exemption. PG&E's outreach specialist Whitney Floratos and my wife will cross reference questions and concerns so that parties to the walk have shared understanding to work from. We want to reiterate that Jim, Whitney, and Joey were very receptive to our concerns and we appreciate their time and efforts on this initial leg of the tree by tree review process. However, as representatives for PG&E, we do hold them, as well as Angus Coyle, accountable to acting upon claims of actively working to reduce tree removal impact upon the community by insuring all other alternative safety precautions are in place (i.e. automatic shut-off valves, enhanced monitoring schedules and methodology) and the tree exemption process can be solidified and enacted as well.

Our views were clearly expressed to PG&E, but without City assistance to alter the existing Letter Agreement, tree cutting could commence regardless of the community's major and myriad concerns. We are hopeful City Attorney is finding enough justification to revisit, if not recall, this agreement. In the meantime, we call upon City Council to ensure PG&E documents delay in any tree cutting schedule, regardless of agreements with private property owners (including EBMUD, EBRPD, and CCCSD) until these concerns are resolved.

Will you please add this letter to the public record? We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your time-critical response.

Best,
Michael and Gina Dawson