

**San Francisquito Watershed Council
Steering Committee minutes
December 14, 2005**

Introductions. Pam Sturner (SFWC Project Director) introduced Sapna Singh, the Watershed Council's new Outreach Coordinator. Sapna began working for the Watershed Council on November 17th and has made a big positive difference in the short time she's been here. Sapna's major interests are volunteerism and sustainability. Her background in forest habitat issues comes from her experience working with the World Wildlife Fund's Project Tiger, of which her grandfather was the administrator at Corbett National Park in India. She is on the Board of Sustainable San Mateo County and her background is in law. She has been a volunteer supervisor and continues to volunteer with Child Associates and has also worked on many asylum cases for the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights. In her role as our outreach coordinator, Sapna plans to help connect the Watershed Council to other community and stewardship groups and to help make the Watershed Council more widely known to the community.

Pam also reintroduced Katie Pilat, the former outreach coordinator, in her new role as restoration projects manager. As many of you know, Katie's background is in civil and environmental engineering, and she has played a primary role in managing the Watershed Council's on-the-ground projects for a while. She will now be working full time on them in this new position.

Agenda approved. November 9, 2005, minutes will be approved in January. The next meeting will be January 11, 2006.

Announcements

- Trish Mulvey (SFWC volunteer): The USGS will be hosting its regular every-third-year Open House this June 3rd and 4th. The theme will be the science of natural hazards. The Watershed Council should have this on their radar screen and be looking for the USGS's call for participants.
- Trish Mulvey (SFWC volunteer): The two latest in the Oakland Museum of California map series have been published. The back of the first, which covers West Valley, builds on a historical theme and adds modern water infrastructure. The back of the second, which covers central San Jose, focuses on stewardship opportunities in the Coyote Creek watershed. A south San Jose map will be completed in the spring. Viv Blomenkamp is the local nonprofit reseller of the maps. They are also available on the Oakland Museum website (<http://www.museumca.org/creeks/PAMap.html>) and through their store. Remember that shipping is much cheaper per map if you buy lots of copies.
- Pam Sturner (SFWC): The Watershed Council is holding a workday on January 7th. It will be a planting day at Woodside Elementary School.

Presentation: Update on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers / San Francisquito Creek JPA project (Cynthia D'Agosta, SFC JPA)

Pam introduced the presentation saying that the Steering Committee had requested to hear more about the status of the Army Corps project at its November meeting.

Cynthia began by saying that she wanted this to be more of a conversation than a presentation and everyone should feel free to ask questions at any time. Her portion of the discussion would be an overview about where we are, how we got here, and what's next with the Army Corps project. Kevin Murray would talk later about the tools for moving forward.

Cynthia passed out a handout with information about the project on one side and a chart showing the Army Corps's project process on the other. The chart is posted on the JPA's website at http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/public-works/documents/jpa-COE_flow_chart.pdf.

Referring to the Army Corp's project chart: The gray boxes show tasks that are completed. This represents the last 1-1/2 to 2 years of work and completion of the Reconnaissance study, including the 905b report and the Project Management Plan, both of which are posted on the JPA's website. Right now we are at the beginning of the feasibility phase, which is projected to last 4 years. Since this watershed has already been studied extensively, this 4-year period is shorter than the 5 years this phase typically takes. When the feasibility phase is finished, we will move to the pre-construction and design phases. After this, the JPA will need to go back for congressional authorization to get funding for the construction phase.

Question: Is there a requirement that a project must meet a certain cost:benefit (c:b) ratio in the feasibility phase in order to move on to the pre-construction phase?

Response: The Army Corps will put forward a plan that meets the c:b ratio requirement. The community partners (local sponsors) can alter the plan, but they must pay for any increase in cost.

Question: Is it possible that there might not be any plan from feasibility phase that meets the c:b requirement?

Response: Yes, but it is more likely that there will be a plan that meets the c:b requirement but may protect against something less than the 1% (100-year) flood.

The feasibility cost-sharing agreement was signed at the November 17, 2005, JPA board meeting. Final negotiations are now taking place to start the actual work. The JPA will invoice the Army Corps and manage the account.

The Reconnaissance report provided a solid basis of alternatives, and during the feasibility phase these alternatives will be examined.

Question: The Reconnaissance report looked mainly at flood damage reduction. What is the ecosystem restoration component of the project?

Response: That will be the creative area. There is a lot of biological information available for the watershed. The sediment plan contains management measures for sediment. The Corte Madera Creek Guide that Kevin and Leslie Lambert of Portola Valley worked on together will also provide good habitat restoration and preservation material. Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration projects are a new approach. The Ecosystem Restoration component will also receive credit in the c:b ratio, which is new and exciting.

The JPA will develop a communication plan about the project with the Army Corps. The Project Management Plan requires public outreach in the communications plan and will be focused on CEQA/NEPA requirements and the process to fulfill those requirements. Cynthia will meet with the Army Corps Communications Officer on Monday. They will develop a scope to develop the plan from now until the end of January. The Watershed Council and other individuals will be contacted during this process as stakeholders.

Question: Who will pick the consultant that will do the communications plan?

Response: The JPA management team and the Army Corps. There are 14 consultants that are already under contract with the Army Corps. They will be considered first, but others will be considered if none in the first group meet the needs. There are consultants that will develop the plan to do stakeholder outreach. Another consulting firm will then be hired to implement the plan, which is when the public outreach will actually start, hopefully in the fall of 2006. The Army Corps would like to hold a public meeting in April to explain the project process as an introduction to the stakeholders.

Cynthia then turned the presentation over to Kevin Murray to talk about the execution of the communications plan. He explained that the Army Corps will approve a communications plan, which will be funded by a 50/50 split between the Army Corps and the local sponsor. If the local sponsor wants to do more outreach beyond the approved plan, it must pay for any increased cost. The JPA submitted a Proposition 50 proposal to help fund the local sponsor portion.

The communications plan will result in information that will be presented on the JPA website, in newsletters, and at public meetings. One component will be a list of answers to Frequently Asked Questions. The JPA anticipates that part of the communications plan will be some kind of live “always on” communication, such as a blog. In the meantime, as questions about the project come up, please email them to the JPA (sfcreek@menlopark.org) with a subject heading “FAQ.” The JPA will post a running document with these questions and responses on their website (<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/public-works/jpa-index.html>). This document already includes questions from the October 5, 2005, meeting of the three councils meeting and other questions that have already been raised. The questions and responses will be reviewed by the Management Team and the Army Corps before they are posted. The JPA would like to talk to any tech-savvy people about online communications. They also recognize that their site (within the Palo Alto website) is not always easy to find.

Comment: A blog generates the expectation of instantaneous communication. Once you do this, it’s a lot of work to maintain. You might instead just want to regularly index your site so that it is easy to find information with a keyword search. This helps people get the information they are looking for.

Response: Part of the communications plan might be for the JPA to get its own website.

Comment: It’s easy to create an alias that allows you to appear to have your own front page but directs readers to the same website.

Cynthia commented that the JPA is now doing the groundwork to set up the necessary administrative systems with the Army Corps. The JPA executive committee, which includes

Cynthia, Beau Goldie from the Santa Clara Valley Water District, and Neil Cullen from the San Mateo County Flood Control District, will have its first quarterly meeting with the Corps on January 6, 2006. The big-picture, high-level project status will be reviewed at these regular quarterly meetings, which will be attended by a colonel and the Corps Project Manager. This project is being partnered with the shoreline project, which will look at the levees around the bay as the salt pond restoration project moves forward. The Santa Clara Valley Water District will be the local sponsor for Santa Clara County (Adobe Creek and south), and the JPA San Francisquito Creek project has incorporated the Menlo Park and East Palo Alto tidal study area (from Adobe Creek north to Marsh Road).

There will be a study session about the project at the January 30, 2006, meeting, which will be in Palo Alto. This will be an opportunity for the neighborhood association to present short-term flood management concepts. On February 15, 2006, the Corps and the JPA management team will have an all-day meeting about the start of the project.

Comment: I've read that the West Coast is not well prepared for tsunamis. Is there any way tsunami preparedness could be related to flood control?

Response: I don't know much about tsunamis and am not sure how they could be incorporated into the study.

Comment: Eric Geller at the USGS is a world expert on tsunamis and would be a great resource for this topic.

Question: We've heard a lot of questions like, "What will the project look like?" How and when might we get information that gives a sense of the Flood Damage Reduction project options?

Response: Visuals do make a big impression on people, and maybe we can include this in the Frequently Asked Questions that we are planning to put together.

Question: Do we have all local funding we need?

Response: We have the required 50% local share (\$3.5 million) of the funding through the end of the Feasibility Phase. We will talk about ways to fund future phases in the communications plan.

Question: Could not having local share funding for future phases stall the project?

Response: Yes. When we finish the Feasibility Phase and sign the design agreement, we'll need to have the local funding for the design phase in place.

Comment: Funding of future phases could be a big issue. If we're talking about construction estimates of around \$100 million, we'll need to have a local match of \$30-\$50 million.

Response: During the Feasibility phase we'll begin to understand the potential costs better. If the project includes multiple objectives including recreation, flood control, and quality of life improvements, voters are more likely to approve funding. San Mateo County is looking at a park bond for example, and might be able to combine this with that.

Comment: Voters have already approved a 15-year bond with \$16-\$18 million for San Francisquito Creek.

Presentation: Corte Madera bank stabilization planning (Leslie Lambert, Town of Portola Valley, and Kevin Murray, SFC-JPA)

Leslie began the presentation by providing background about how the Corte Madera bank stabilization planning project came into existence. In 1999 the Town Planning Commission approved an ad hoc committee to consider how to protect the riparian corridor. The committee recommended a program that included riparian regulations. The Commission held public workshops at which the community voiced concern about private property rights. Another factor was that this was happening at the same time the Town was working on below-income housing in Portola Valley. The Town decided to hold off on trying to implement riparian regulations and instead to focus on more outreach on the subject. In the meantime, the Planning Commission adopted some guidelines for use by staff in planning applications on the creek corridor.

Question: Do people own to the centerline of the creek?

Response: In many cases, yes, and often in the past bank stabilization projects took a piecemeal approach.

The Town's Planning Commission will be taking up the issue of riparian regulations again this year. The outreach and creek guidelines report, which Kevin will talk about next, have gotten a lot of good information to the community and helped a great deal with public perception and understanding. The Town hopes this will help with the regulations.

Kevin provided additional history about how the outreach project in Portola Valley got started. A few years ago, the JPA and downstream communities (Menlo Park, Palo Alto, and East Palo Alto) commissioned a bank stabilization master plan that gave bank stabilization guidance for the downstream communities. After the completion of that project Marge DeStaebler and Kevin attended a grant seminar, after which Marge approached Kevin and former Watershed Council Project Director Phil Chang saying that the Town needed more outreach about bank stabilization. The JPA applied for and was awarded a \$71,000 grant from the Department of Water Resources Urban Stream Restoration Program for an outreach project about bank stabilization in Portola Valley. The project was bid and awarded to PWA and H.T. Harvey. The project team worked hard to make sure that the public perceived the project as outreach and education, not regulation.

Kevin passed out a handout about the report, which gave sample representative text for each report section. The report is available online at

<http://www.portolavalley.net/ikorb/ikorb.php?func=newsreader&start=10> or <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/public-works/jpa-projects.html>.

For the study, Corte Madera Creek was broken down into three reaches: Reach 1 (Westridge to Mapache) is residential, Reach 2 (from Willowbrook to Westridge) is the Town Center area, and Reach 3 (along Alpine Road to Willowbrook) is the least urbanized.

Section 3 of the report deals with how creek systems work. The project team including consultants held 5 site visits with property owners at private homes and out at the creek to talk about how the creek works and how banks become destabilized. There was a lot of interest on the part of the community but not a lot of understanding.

Section 4 of the report discusses existing conditions, including a biological assessment of wildlife and habitat, and typical problems seen on the creek. Section 5 shows components of the

types of projects that could be used to resolve different kinds of bank problems. Each reach was characterized by prevailing conditions, and conceptual recommendations were made for the different kinds of conditions most prevalent in each reach. Specific property recommendations were not made. Kevin then showed a cost-benefit diagram for the different conceptual approaches, balancing potential cost with potential ecological benefit. He also showed a sample schematic diagram of one of the restoration approaches, in this case revegetated rock. For each restoration approach, there is a description, a visual diagram, a cost-benefit scale, and recommendations to be used to approach an engineer who might do the design for the specific project. There is also a table showing permitting authorities that might require consultation for potential projects.

Turnout at the neighborhood meetings was high, and the meetings seemed to really help people understand how the creek works. There was a lot of good discussion about alternatives to hardscape practices.

Comment: I attended several of the meetings held at different locations, and going to different parts of the creek helped me appreciate the diversity of the conditions in different reaches.

Comment: The consultants were great – really knowledgeable and patient.

Comment: Many of the property owners had never been down to the creek in their own backyards!

Leslie said that she felt the meetings really gave participants more respect for how to approach problems on the creek. She said that next steps for the project would be to hold more creek meetings and walks at different times of the year; continue the Town's annual mailing about creek debris and maintenance; develop Frequently Asked Questions about bank stabilization, a questionnaire to solicit feedback from the community, and guidelines for creek maintenance; and have a booth about the subject at the Town picnic. We should also do the same kind of outreach for the Town's other creeks, including Los Trancos and Sausal.

Comment from Trish Mulvey: We need to make sure the Collaborative's work on guidelines and standards for development near streams is shared with the Town.

Response from Leslie Lambert: The Town is very interested in hearing about the Collaborative's work.

Comment: Looking at other town or city creek ordinances would be useful to Portola Valley and may help the community understand that this is a common and useful regulation.

A member of the Woodside Conservation and Environmental Health Committee (CEHC) called Leslie and was interested in finding out if a similar project could be done for Woodside. A CEHC member also called Kevin to ask him to come talk to the committee about the project. Leslie mentioned that the Town of Portola Valley was looking for a public works project on which to use some of the concepts from the report.

Comment: Andy Lipkis of TreePeople in Los Angeles is coming to give a presentation at Hidden Villa on January 30 about urban forestry and watershed management.

Staff reports

Pam Sturner, Project Director:

As noted earlier, the Watershed Council has hired a new Outreach Coordinator, Sapna Singh. We are thrilled to have her on board.

This month we also submitted a concept proposal for a CalFed Watershed Program grant. The proposal asks for funding to develop three elements: (1) a pilot landowner assistance program similar to SMPL (Stream Management Program for Landowners) run by the Urban Creeks Council in the East Bay, (2) a strategic communications plan (with the help of a professional communications consultant), and (3) an assessment of opportunities for new on-the-ground volunteer opportunities so that we can be prepared to take on new workday sites if that becomes feasible and desirable to do. Project partners would be the Urban Creeks Council, the Town of Portola Valley, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District. This project speaks to the Watershed Council's highest priority -- outreach and education -- and would help connect our outreach and on-the-ground work and fill a longstanding need of creekside landowners.

Katie Pilat, Restoration Projects Manager:

We had a great volunteer workday at El Palo Alto Park on December 3rd. Our next workday will be January 7th at Woodside Elementary School. Our stormwater demonstration projects are well into the construction phase. Hopefully we'll have them finished and start monitoring and outreach early next year. We have just signed contracts for the design of two fish passage improvement projects: one for a culvert replacement on McGarvey Gulch in Huddart Park, one for adding baffles to the bottom of two boxes culverts on Los Trancos Creek. We hope to start design review for these projects in the spring.

Meeting adjourned.

In attendance:

Bill Springer – Santa Clara Valley Water District
Philippe S. Cohen – Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford
Katie Pilat – SFWC
Sapna Singh – SFWC
Art Kraemer – Crescent Park Neighborhood Association
Kevin Murray – SFC-JPA
Viv Blomenkamp – League of Women Voters Palo Alto
Pam Sturner – SFWC
Paul Heiple – PV Conservation Committee
Marge DeStaebler – PV Conservation Committee
Leslie Lambert – Town of Portola Valley
Trish Mulvey – SFWC

Minutes respectfully submitted by Katie Pilat