



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

File #: 17-0285, Version: 1

REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Pacific, Gas and Electric Tree Removals and Planting Plan for East California Avenue (Information Only)

BACKGROUND

Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) initially rolled out its Community Pipeline Safety Initiative (CPSI) in November 2013. The purpose of the CPSI is to ensure that PG&E's gas pipelines are operating safely by reviewing the areas above and around the natural gas transmission lines to be certain that first responders and PG&E emergency response crews have critical access to pipelines in the event of an emergency or natural disaster. Attachment 1 includes information distributed by PG&E about the program.

As per PG&E, trees, tree roots, brush, and structures can threaten safety because they can block firefighters' access during emergencies and can prevent PG&E crews from performing important safety and maintenance work. Tree roots pose a safety risk because they can damage the protective coating of underground pipelines, leading to corrosion and leaks. Because of this the CPSI reviewed various transmission line locations, including many in Sunnyvale, and made recommendations for removing trees that PG&E felt either blocked access or posed safety risks to the integrity of pipelines. PG&E proposed to remove approximately 220 trees in Sunnyvale which caused a lot of concern and negative feedback from the City and public.

PG&E recognized they needed to take a step back, reevaluate their criteria for tree removal, and reconsider the number of trees that were being recommended for removal. As part of this new process, PG&E was able to reduce the removal of trees by approximately 80%, including maintaining the trees along Homestead Road and other locations in Sunnyvale. However, even with the reevaluation, PG&E concluded that the trees along East California Avenue adjacent to Central Expressway still would need to be removed (Attachment 2 - Location Map).

DISCUSSION

A 6-inch natural gas transmission line runs along the north side of East California Avenue in a landscape area adjacent to a sound wall and Central Expressway. Directly above the transmission line are redwood trees that are occasionally topped by PG&E to provide safety clearance for their overhead electrical lines that are in the same location. PG&E was in contact with the City regarding the removal of approximately 30 trees in this area several years ago through the CPSI effort because they blocked access to the gas transmission line for first responders and posed a risk to the integrity of the pipeline. PG&E contacted the City about obtaining a permit and began coordinating a potential plan for removing the redwoods and replanting the site with landscaping, including: trees, shrubs and vines, as well as, irrigation.

The City stressed the importance of mitigating the impact of the tree removal with a robust planting plan along East California Avenue. PG&E agreed and committed to preparing a design for the new landscaping and irrigation plan. During the initial stages of the design process PG&E approached the City because they were having difficulty finding a good location for the new trees due to the existing size of the project area and the location of the underground natural gas transmission line. The City recognized the importance for planting new trees for the neighborhood and worked with PG&E to resolve the issue. The solution was to move the curb out approximately five feet to create additional landscape area that would accommodate new trees. The species of trees and location were selected so that they would not pose an impact for accessing the pipeline or for corroding it. PG&E has held multiple community meetings with the public, distributed information via mail, went door to door along East California Avenue, and presented the proposed planting plan to City Council on April 12, 2016.

At this time, PG&E is almost complete with the plans for the new landscaping and irrigation along East California Avenue, and once they are completed to the City's requirements, a permit for removing the trees and replanting the area will be issued. Attachment 3 and 4 show the landscaping concept plan and some renderings of what the proposed landscaping will look like when established. The City will be responsible for future maintenance and it will be performed within current budgets.

Besides the East California location, PG&E has approached the City about removing eight other trees on City property in Fair Oaks Park (Attachment 5). PG&E will be required to mitigate the loss of those trees as well, and once the necessary mitigation plan and outreach is complete, staff will move forward on issuing that permit. The remainder of the trees PG&E is proposing to remove as part of the CPSI program are on private property. PG&E is working with the property owners and the Community Development Department regarding the potential removal of those trees.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

PG&E has held multiple community meetings with the public, distributed information via mail, went door to door along East California Avenue, and presented to City Council on April 12, 2016. The last two public meetings held to discuss the tree removal and replanting plan along East California Avenue were on August 10, 2016, and March 1, 2017.

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ATTACHMENTS

1. PG&E Community Pipeline Safety Initiative
2. Location Map
3. Tree Removal and Landscape Concept Plan
4. Existing and Proposed Renderings
5. Fair Oaks Park Removal Locations