

## **Notes from 1st Street West Meeting on Flood Control Alternatives**

City of Sonoma and SCWA, Feb. 4, 2015

Sonoma Community Meeting Room, 177 1<sup>st</sup> Street West, Sonoma

A public meeting was held Feb. 4, from 6-8 p.m. at the Sonoma Community Meeting to receive input on the alternatives being proposed to reduce flooding in the 1<sup>st</sup> Street West area. A total of 24 members of the public signed in, including three members of the Sonoma City Council. SCWA Director and County Supervisor Susan Gorin was in attendance, in addition to Susan Hermosillo from Rep. Mike Thompson's office. Reporters from the Press Democrat and Sonoma Index-Tribune were present.

What follows is a synopsis of the comments and questions received following the presentations.

**Karla Noyes** - Observation: Doesn't subscribe to the idea that just because the grant money is available, we should spend it. This is an opportunity to take a long view, work with landowners in the surrounding hillside areas and identify areas for swales up Norrbom Road. "Let's increase groundwater recharge by putting in swales upstream."

She prefers Alternative #2.

**Bill Spencer**, First Street West resident - Recalled the 2006 New Year's Eve flood that came into his property on the west side of 1<sup>st</sup> Street West. Water overflowed near the eucalyptus trees "jumped the road" and it took him two weeks to clean up the silt from portions of his property. When the water jumped the road, there was no water in the creek. "Fryer Creek is nice ... historic, natural, home to wildlife." He favors taking down the eucalyptus trees and widening the channel. He said the Tarantinos (who own the house across the street from the trees) are concerned about them falling. He said to take out the trash rack. Alternative 3

**Bill Wilson** - Favors removing eucalyptus trees. "They are dirty trees" and create lots of debris.

### **Swale in Depot Park?**

**Dick Fogg**, 1<sup>st</sup> Street West resident, said the swale would affect the use of Depot Park. "Every kid in town goes to a birthday party at Depot Park."

**Comment from audience:** "There is already a swale there." Also said it already ponds during heavy rain.

**Bill Wilson:** A swale at Depot Park would create a safety hazard. High flows through the swale, even a few feet deep, could knock a person down.

**Tom Dunlap**, 1<sup>st</sup> Street West property owner - The creek didn't flood when he was a kid growing up there. The spot where the trash grate is now was open and it flowed freely. The depth of the creek at his property is now deeper He remembers being able to jump over it. Eucalyptus trees have encroached into the channel. Flooding wasn't an issue in the 1950s. Doesn't know that a storm drain is the solution. He thinks there should be work done above Depot Park. "Eucalyptus are non-native, there may not be public sentiment against their removal." Solution is to keep the creek intact. Safe pedestrian passageway could be created with the right design. We do not want more parking.

**Comment from audience:** Take out the trees. Make the channel along depot park nicer, with sloped banks and new trees.

**Comment from resident who lives just downstream of the eucalyptus trees on the Dunlap property:** Nobody is talking about recharge. There is a city well in the vicinity which could benefit.

**Kent Gylfe (SCWA)** – Water Agency conducted soil and permeability tests in two areas in the vicinity and there were no favorable recharge sites found because of soil conditions.

**Question:** What about bioswales behind Field of Dreams?

**Kent Gylfe (SCWA)** – There is some percolation, but not at great rates. General Vallejo park site has been investigated, and some recharge could occur there. Sonoma Ecology Center is working with State Parks and we remain interested in exploring options.

**Karla Noyes** – suggested soil treatments (organic amendments) to encourage soil health, microbial activity and permeability. Shouldn't give adobe soils a bad rap.

**Bill Wilson** – observation – with the studies and scoping study “Isn't it time to produce a single answer to the modeling?” He'd like to see a standardized flooding model so we know what we're looking at. Prefers Alternative 1a: “Why do something for a 10-year flood, or a 25-year flood. With the expense involved, should fix it for a 100-year flood.” He cited safety as a major issue.

**Teri Shore** – Sonoma resident, but not in the 1<sup>st</sup> Street West neighborhood. “Is this the best use of the money? People are sensitive to trees in Sonoma Valley. If you cut them down, do some research first on the impacts to wildlife, birds, shade. Do it right. Do some public outreach.”

**Comment from woman in audience:** She lived through Hurricane Sandy and then moved to Sonoma. She commented that safety is a real issue. She recounted a story of being trapped in her car during a high-water event. Her car was parked on 1<sup>st</sup> Street West and she had to be rescued from flooding due to the clogged inlet.

**Doug McKesson**, former Sonoma City Councilmember. We had a plan and the money 10 years ago to put in a storm drain. This project is very deserving. Grant money is specifically for this project. Let's look at police records for incidents that have occurred. There is plenty of liability with that ditch. This is a worthy project and it is foolish not to do it. This is an excellent opportunity for the city of Sonoma.

**Resident who lives in the house on Dunlap property:** Favors alternative 1b. He has seen fox, bobcat and deer in the area. Has seen deer feeding in the creek. Hears the frogs. Owls and hawks in the trees. But the trees are the biggest issue. Get rid of the eucalyptus trees. But don't destroy the creek. Once you've done that you are not going to get it back.

**Christine Bohar**, 1<sup>st</sup> Street West resident – Seems like you are trying to spend the money that you’ve got and that makes me nervous. Loves the sound of the frogs in the creek. To have that gone would be a loss for Sonoma. We need to make the street friendlier not busier.

**Director Gorin** – I am glad to hear request for a bike path. She’d like to see the city and the county work together to figure a way to put a bike path on 1<sup>st</sup> Street West.

(**City Engineer Dan Takasugi** later noted that the standard width of a bike path is 8-10 feet and with the creek and right of way requirements, a bike path may not be feasible.)

**Tom Dunlap** – Would alternative 1b preserve the creek? Would it be reconstructed? How would it look?

**Greg Guensch (SCWA)** – Alternative 1b would put in the pipe and leave a channel. The existing channel will be impacted by pipe construction. When the channel is reconstructed, it could be smaller.

One idea is to create a way to keep low flows in the channel (with the pipe installed), to provide enough water to maintain wildlife and habitat that exists now.

**Tom Dunlap** – The creek’s size has changed. It is narrower and deeper. It had been lined with stones, which have been removed over the years due to channel clearing. The solution should be to protect the environment and reduce flooding.

**Herb Heil** – Any thoughts to looking for detention opportunities upstream?

**Kent Gylfe (SCWA)** – We have explored opportunities and they are fairly limited.

**Betty Andrews**, a consulting water resources engineer, ESA – There is a risk of fractures in bedrock and the risk of creating an outflow elsewhere. Upstream detention may be feasible but it is complicated with land use and property ownership issues.

**Tom Dunlap** – If the trash rack is an issue, has there been any thought given to putting additional drains on 1<sup>st</sup> Street West to allow escaped water to get back into the existing storm drain pipe?

Kent Gylfe and Greg Guensch (SCWA) – Don’t think there are any inlets until you get down to Spain St. There would have to be inlets on the west side of street also that route water back to the pipe.

**Question and comment** (unidentified speaker): What about stormwater that comes from above the park? Aren’t flows increased with parking lots and other paved surfaces? This probably contributes to higher flows.

**Jenny Cherney** – Favors the 1b alternative, with the channel remaining. It will have some recharge benefits.

**Resident who lives in the house on Dunlap property**– Said water level in channel goes down when the City turns on its pump, indicating connectivity between the surface water and groundwater.

**Laura Havlek**, owner, Sign of the Bear, 1<sup>st</sup> Street West business – Question of carts and horses ... (which comes first) “Is the pipe bigger at W. Spain Street to accommodate flows?”  
(Consensus was that the storm drain was larger downstream from 1<sup>st</sup> Street West.)

**Tom Dunlap** – The Swiss Hotel property on W. Spain has not experienced any flooding on the front side of the property.

Meeting ended at approximately 7:45 p.m.

**Tally of stated preferences for the proposed alternatives:**

- Alternative 1a: Wilson (1)
- Alternative 1b: Unidentified neighbor, (1)
- Alternative 2: Noyes (1)
- Alternative 3: Spencer (1)

(Other preferences could be presumed, but comments were not specific enough to assign a stated preference.)

NOTE: Five people spoke in favor of removing the eucalyptus trees.