

First Street West Flood Control Alternatives

MEETING SUMMARY

November 19, 2015

NOTE: Correction to the agenda: City Council will hear this item on Dec. 7th

WELCOME: Ann DuBay (Community & Govt Affairs, Sonoma County Water Agency) welcomed people and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to update neighbors and other stakeholders on the First Street West Flood Control Project, which is a component of the larger City Watersheds of Sonoma Valley Project. The input received will be included in the presentation to the Sonoma City Council on December 7.

BACKGROUND (see presentation for additional detail): Kent Gyle (Principal Engineer, Sonoma County Water Agency) reviewed the flooding problems and reminded people of the community meeting in February 2015 to discuss four alternatives to reduce flood risks. Kent summarized community concerns with those alternatives, and said that the Water Agency and City went back to the drawing board to develop three new alternatives that met the objectives of (1) reducing flood risk on First Street West and (2) not increasing flooding downstream. He noted that the Water Agency and City were awarded a \$1.9 million Proposition 1E grant for reducing flood risks for a prior project that didn't pan out. The California Department of Water Resources has allowed the Water Agency to modify the project concept to reduce flooding on First Street West, but an alternative must be chosen and the project started in order to secure the grant.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES (see presentation for details): Greg Guensch (engineer and project manager, Sonoma County Water Agency) described the three alternatives, which include (1) a 6-acre foot underground detention basin and some channel improvements; (2) a 3-acre foot underground detention basin with a 54" pipeline, bike/pedestrian path and bioswale; and (3) a 3-acre foot underground detention basin with some channel improvements. He discussed the pros/ cons and costs of each alternative.

HYDROLOGY MODELING (see presentation for details): Carlos Diaz (engineer, ESA) described the model used to determine the level of flood protection that would be provided by each alternative. Alternative 1 provides protection during the 100-year flood (a flood that has a 1 percent likelihood of occurring in any given year) while alternatives 2 and 3 provide protection during a 25-year flood (a flood that has a 4% chance of occurring in any given year).

PUBLIC WORKS PERSPECTIVE (see presentation for details): Dan Takasugi (City Engineer, City of Sonoma) provided a staff perspective, noting that city maintenance workers needed to clean the trash rack continuously during storms in order to prevent channel overflow flooding. This placed workers in a dangerous situation and, because workers were often needed in other areas of the city, resulted in flooding on First Street West and in the Plaza. Alternative 2 is city staff's preferred alternative because by closing the channel and eliminating the trash rack problem, it enhanced safety for city workers and the public. He also noted that the bioswale would provide environmental benefits and that the path would enhance safety for walkers and cyclists.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS: Below is a summary of the comments and questions provided by the community members who attended the meeting.

On Flooding:

A lifelong neighborhood resident noted that flooding on First Street West isn't bad. It is usually very shallow and vehicles can always pass. Leave the historic look of the non-sidewalk on the east side of 1st Street West.

On Bike/Pedestrian Path/Street Improvement:

Several people noted that a path isn't needed, and that people can walk on the other side of the street.
STAFF RESPONSE: Although safe sidewalk exists on other side of street, people use east side frequently. This is a safety concern for the city.

Will street improvements in Alternative 2 include parking?

STAFF RESPONSE: No. The improvements in Alternative 2 include bike/pedestrian path and bioswale, but no parking.

Would the City need to acquire land to build the path?

STAFF RESPONSE: No. The path would be built over the existing channel (which would be diverted into an underground pipe).

On Underground Detention Basin:

What is the footprint of the basin?

STAFF RESPONSE: The underground basin would be built under the existing paved parking lot, plus under the adjacent overflow (dirt) lot. It would not interfere with the site of future Veteran's Memorial. The basin would be 8-10 feet deep.

How long would it take to build the basin? (The parking lot is heavily used by youth and adult sports teams.)

STAFF RESPONSE: Several months. It is likely that construction could be staged to allow some of the parking to be used during busy time.

Concerns were raised about the diversion from the cemetery to the underground detention basin. People wondered whether it would cut through the redwoods, Infant Cemetery or Veteran's Cemetery.

STAFF RESPONSE: The diversion would not disturb the cemeteries or the redwoods, but would likely use the roadway in the cemeteries and would be located east of the redwoods.

For project with 6 acre feet of storage, can we expect similar amount of recharge?

STAFF RESPONSE: No. There will be some recharge, however the facility will be designed to detain water during peak storm events and most of the water will flow out through the system.

How will the flows at the diversion be split to go to the detention basin or to continue in the creek?

STAFF RESPONSE: An orifice will be used that will allow lower flows to remain in the channel. When flows are higher, they will be diverted with a weir to the detention basin. This is a passive system.

For parking lot, consider using permeable pavement.

STAFF RESPONSE: Yes, the City requires either permeable materials, bioswales, or filter strips. Will need to work with County General Services. The design is not developed to this level yet.

On Channel and Pipeline:

Several neighbors voiced opposition to undergrounding the channel into a pipe. Comments included the historic nature of the creek; the fact that the channel was once lined with winery stones which prevented erosion and resulted in a larger pedestrian area; the environmental benefits of the creek, including frogs, flowers and cattails; country ambiance and aesthetics; and the loss of restoration possibilities. Concern was expressed about the possible diminishment of property values if the channel was removed. It was noted that the existing channel is 130 years old, and is historic.

Another resident stated that many of the debris problems could be eliminated with the removal of the eucalyptus trees at Depot Park. He feels that the creek must be kept clear of debris to function and that the City's lack of management and changes in maintenance duties over the years has caused the dis-repair of the street and creek environs. He also noted that the city's use of backhoe has created erosion and widening of channel.

STAFF RESPONSE: STAFF RESPONSE: Staff noted that it would be challenging to enhance the channel to create a meandering creek and maintain flood carrying capacity, due to the lack of space for channel setbacks (the existing channel width is between 10-12 feet). Restoration would involve additional space for meander and require gently sloped banks for stability.

Is there an old redwood box culvert?

STAFF RESPONSE: There is a wooden box culvert at Depot Park, but it's made of railroad ties. It was discovered to be in poor condition when exposed during the Depot Park bike trail project.

Is it possible to create creek "meander" or bioswale/detention area in Depot Park?

STAFF RESPONSE: Using an area of Depot Park as a bioswale to slow down/sink water was proposed in February, but the community was opposed to converting a popular picnic/birthday party site into a detention area. That alternative was eliminated.

Can the trash rack simply be removed?

STAFF RESPONSE: No. If the trash rack was removed, people and animals could be swept into storm drain system. Also, lots of unwanted trash and debris would get into system.

Two residents expressed support for Alternative 1 or 3.

One former resident of the neighborhood lived near the trash rack, and stated that it was a safety problem. She almost lost her car during one of the storms, with no safe access to move her car, and had to be rescued by the Police Department.

On hydrologic modeling:

Does the modeling take into account climate change?

STAFF RESPONSE: No. It's likely that large storms could occur more frequently with climate change.

Other Issues:

Who is lead agency for project? Will there be CEQA review and compliance? When will this be determined?

STAFF RESPONSE: SCWA has been a lead thus far, with project partners, and will continue as the lead on the grant funding. Depending on what the project is, it may make sense for the City to be the lead. The

Agency implementing the project would be the logical lead. Once a preferred project concept is identified, the CEQA analysis would begin.

How will the alternatives effect city taxpayers?

STAFF RESPONSE: The \$1.9M grant contribution and 50% match from SCWA = \$3.8M. The City would need to fund additional costs, which would be derived from gas tax and general fund. Under Alternative 2, City funding would be primarily used for pavement rehabilitation of First St. West. If no City money is contributed, could revert to Alternative 3.

What is the City going to do to mitigate the flooding effects on businesses in this El Nino winter? We need to think collectively as a community.

STAFF RESPONSE: We have been cleaning all the drain inlets and swales around the City. City will supply sandbags and sand if we know a big storm is coming in. That's all we can do without capital expenditures. For future storms, we have the Storm Drain Master Plan Capital Investment Project list that we chip away at, but those won't be done in time to respond to this winter's potential problems.