



DATE: September 12, 2016

TO: Council Sustainability Committee

FROM: Director of Utilities and Environmental Services

SUBJECT

PG&E Community Pipeline Safety Initiative – Proposed Tree Removals

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee reviews and provides comments and policy direction on this report.

SUMMARY

PG&E's Community Pipeline Safety Initiative, which is being implemented to improve gas pipeline safety, includes removal of trees and structures that pose safety concerns or potentially impede access to pipelines in the event of an emergency. PG&E has identified existing trees within Hayward, on both public and private properties, that could present unacceptable safety risks and need to be removed. This report discusses PG&E's safety concerns, the specific public areas that will be impacted, and the proposed mitigation measures. The report also briefly addresses staff's outreach to private property owners.

BACKGROUND

PG&E is implementing a comprehensive program, known as the [Community Pipeline Safety Initiative](#), to improve gas pipeline safety and to ensure adequate access to pipelines in the event of an emergency. The program includes pressure testing, leak surveys and pipeline condition assessments. A component of this effort is identifying trees and structures that present emergency access or safety concerns, and then working with customers and communities on mitigation measures. According to PG&E, trees pose a risk when they block emergency access to pipes, which potentially could also impede first responders in their efforts.

PG&E safety specialists conducted an assessment of trees within public rights-of-way and on public property in Hayward, and a cursory review of trees on private properties, which are located close to or over gas pipelines. PG&E analyzed specific vegetation, such as the height and species of a tree and made a determination as to whether a tree is a manageable risk,

which can remain in place with regular monitoring, or an unacceptable risk that must be removed. The tree-by-tree assessment involved a number of factors, including:

- Ability to access the pipeline in an emergency
- Distance from pipeline to tree
- Tree species, diameter and general health
- Pipeline depth, installation date and coating
- Visibility of area above pipeline

PG&E provided staff with the results of their assessment survey, indicating that PG&E initially reviewed a total of 425 City-owned trees. After consideration of real risk potential and close review of the location of trees related to gas pipelines, the number was reduced to eighty-two trees which posed an unacceptable risk. A further 151 trees located on Skywest Golf Course, which land is leased from the City by the Hayward Area Parks and Recreation District (HARD), are proposed to be removed due to their proximity to gas pipelines. A total of 212 trees located on private property must be assessed to determine level of potential risk.

DISCUSSION

Given the importance of trees to the community's appearance, quality of life, and commitment to sustainability, as well as the importance of gas pipeline accessibility, City staff has participated in several discussions and field inspections with PG&E. Staff's objectives have been to confirm that only trees which pose an actual risk to gas pipeline safety are removed, to assess the health and appropriateness of the existing trees, and to negotiate tree replacement and remediation measures commensurate with the loss of mature trees in the community.

The City's Landscape Architect, along with a certified arborist, conducted inspections to verify the condition and the site-specific appropriateness of the City-owned trees proposed for removal, and to prepare recommendations regarding mitigation measures. Tree removal is proposed in several specific areas. In some instances, staff recommends that the trees be replaced with similar or location-appropriate species. In a few areas, site limitations prohibit replanting, and alternative remediation is proposed.

Attachment A summarizes the planned public tree removals and replacement/mitigation proposals. Attachment B includes area maps and photos to give the Committee a sense of the visual impacts. Staff will describe each area in more detail during the meeting.

It is important to note that, despite the best efforts of staff and PG&E, the removal of mature trees will impact community appearance, at least in the short term, even where it is possible to plant replacement trees. Over time, the overall appearance in some affected areas will be an improvement over the existing landscape, as existing trees are replaced with Bay Area and site-appropriate species and healthier stock. There is no question, however, that the changes will be apparent and may cause concern for some residents.

All tree removals in Hayward, whether on public or private properties, are subject to the provisions of the Tree Preservation Ordinance, which, for defined protected trees and other trees required as conditions of project approvals, requires City-issued permits for tree removals and replacement. The permits, in conjunction with City oversight, will ensure that the work is done in accordance with accepted practices.

Trees on Private Property

As noted in the Background section, PG&E has also identified 212 trees on private properties that must be assessed for potential risk. Before authorizing PG&E to contact each property owner, the City sent a letter to affected property owners to inform them that PG&E may request access to their properties to perform assessments. The City has also informed property owners that, in the event that a tree must be removed from their property, they have rights to negotiate a fair resolution, including requiring tree replacements of equal or greater value. A copy of the letter is included with this report as Attachment C.

In a small number of areas, it is not feasible to replace a tree removed from public right-of-way within the same location, and the best solution is to place a new tree on private property. In these situations, City staff will be involved in selecting the appropriate species and working with property owners on acceptable mitigation measures.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The costs of tree removal from public and private properties will be borne by PG&E. It is also PG&E's responsibility to obtain and pay for necessary tree removal permits. Costs for replacement or other mitigation will depend on agreements that property owners negotiate with PG&E; however, property owners have the right to a fair resolution.

FISCAL IMPACT

The costs of tree removal and replacement in the City right-of-way will be borne by PG&E. In addition, PG&E will pay to the City sufficient funds to pay for tree maintenance during the first few years, after which the City will assume responsibility. There will be no economic impact to the City beyond the normal cost of maintenance after the trees are initially established.

SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES

The removal of mature trees impacts environmental sustainability, community appearance, and quality of life. In the case of PG&E's program, these impacts must be balanced against emergency access and safety. Staff has worked to identify acceptable remediation measures, including replacement of like trees wherever it is feasible. In some areas, removing the existing trees provides an opportunity to improve the overall landscape by planting species that are more appropriate to the site and the surroundings. Even in those areas, removing mature trees will cause a medium-term impact on the community appearance.

PUBLIC CONTACT

As noted, affected private property owners have been notified of PG&E's plan to assess and possibly remove trees on their properties and their rights to negotiate a fair resolution. Owners were provided with City contact information for questions. No tree removals on private properties will take place until signed agreements between PG&E and property owners are in place.

Prior to removal of City-owned trees, PG&E will be required to communicate with nearby residents and business owners to inform them of the purpose and scope of the work. City staff will also be available to answer questions and address concerns. Staff has discussed the proposed tree removals at Skywest Golf Course with HARD staff, and PG&E will work directly with HARD to remove trees and plant replacement trees at that site.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to work with PG&E to ensure that tree removal and mitigation is performed in accordance with City policy, and Committee direction, and all agreements.

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