



# Public Education Session Summary

Date: November 8, 2022	Facilitator: RDG Team
Time: 7:00 -9:00pm	Note-taker: Consultant Team
Location: Albany Senior Center	

## Session Goals:

- Provide Community with accurate information
- Understand community interests and concerns
- Answer Questions
- Receive initial input

The evening began with an introduction and Land Acknowledgement by Margot Cunningham, and an introduction of the Consultant Team for the Albany Hill Forest Management and Habitat Restoration Plan.

**Restoration Design Group:** Anneke Swinehart, Natradee Quek, and Erik Stromberg  
**Nomad Ecology:** Erin McDermott  
**Creekside Science:** Stu Weiss

The consultants walked the attendees through the [PowerPoint presentation](#) with information on the following topics:

1. Albany Hill through time – and the history of Eucalyptus’ arrival.
2. Why is this project happening?
3. Eucalyptus – Health and Management
4. Fire Hazards and Public Safety – Jim Boito, Fire Chief for the City of Albany provided additional comments on the 6.26.2022 Fire.
5. Ecology of Albany Hill
6. Restoration Opportunities
7. Monarchs! Basic biology, migration patterns, needs, and utilization of Albany Hill
8. Next Steps and Project timeline

After the presentation, the [Site Walk](#) was announced, and the floor was opened for questions. Below is a summary of the questions answered live and the comments/questions submitted to the box at the back of the room.

## Public Questions & Answers

1. HOW ARE WE FACTORING CARBON SEQUESTRATION INTO OUR DESIGN PLANS?
  - o The team has carbon sequestration on the list of criteria to evaluate our options. Chipping and reusing the biomass of the removed Eucalyptus on site is part of the

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conversation. The City of Albany has already utilized a mobile mill via Bay Area Redwood to recycle recently removed Eucalyptus into boards used for erosion control and other construction uses on the hill.

**2. HOW FAST WILL OAKS GROW AFTER TREES ARE REMOVED?**

- Growth rates are determined by both the natural rate and form of the species in question, as well as available light, water, and nutrients. We anticipate that the removal of the Eucalyptus will change water availability on the Hill as well as more light. It will still take many years for new and young trees to reach their full stature.

**3. WILL THE HILL BE MORE UNSTABLE AFTER EUC REMOVAL?**

- Eucalyptus do not stabilize the hillside – their roots penetrate and crack the sandstone in their quest for water. Many of the stumps will remain in place, but the team is looking at native plants (perennial native bunchgrasses, other bioengineering stabilization techniques).

**4. WHEN WILL THE PROJECT GET CONSTRUCTED? WHAT IS THE TIMELINE?**

- We anticipate that this will be a multi-year phased project. We are currently in the very early stages of concept design development after an extensive assessment and study phase.

**5. WILL MONARCHS APPRECIATE NECTAR PLANTS IN LIEU OF EUCALYPTUS?**

- Monarchs currently fatten up on the January bloom/nectar from the Eucalyptus. They are opportunistic feeders, so if other (native) nectar sources are available, it is anticipated they would happily use them. Also, this project only involves the Eucalyptus on City managed property. There will still be Eucalyptus down slope from the project area.

**6. WORRIED ABOUT MY HOUSE ACROSS FROM LEANING EUCS. THERE IS AN URGENCY FOR SOME OF US!**

- The City is monitoring the most precarious trees in the project area, and there is a clear mandate for the consultant team to address the urgent safety issues first. If removals are needed prior to initiation of the first phase of the project, the City will attend to those removals on a case-by-case basis.

**7. TURKEYS ARE HAVING A STRONG INFLUENCE ON THE PLANTS, INSECTS AND AMPHIBIANS – WE USED TO SEE MORE AND THEY ARE ALL GONE.**

- Thank you for bringing this to our attention. The consultant team will look into the issue and find out what some potential options are for addressing the impacts.

**8. WHAT OTHER NATIVE TREES DO MONARCHS USE THAT WE CAN PLANT ON THE HILL?**

- Trees that would have been found on Albany Hill historically are not good Monarch habitat providers. See the comment card answer below – the team is considering various approaches to the long-term need to support Monarch populations, and how best to plan for that strategically.

9. WILL THE CONDO ASSOCIATION AND PRIVATE OWNERS DO SIMILAR WORK ON THE HILL TO REMOVE EUCS?
  - Hopefully the City project will serve as a template, and inspire other landowners to address the issues on their parcels. The City project may make it easier to apply for grants to address the private parcels.
  
10. QUESTION ABOUT MAPPING EXISTING NATIVE TREES AND NEW PLANTINGS, ALONG WITH WHAT WOULD BE THE SPACING OF NEW PLANTS
  - We would likely be addressing the native plants already on site by zone, and treatment or protection required in those areas, and by phase. On all plans, new plantings would include spacing and location information. As we progress on the design phase, we will be sharing plans and drawings with the public for comment.
  
11. ALBANY BULB IS DESIGNATED QUAIL HABITAT...CAN THIS HAPPEN AT ALBANY HILL?
  - The number of dogs and cats and other ground predators on the Hill would make establishing quail habitat a challenge. The team can look into what would be required and report back at the next meeting.
  
12. ARE THERE OWLS ON THE HILL? WHERE ARE THEY?
  - Neighbors attending the meeting reported to have seen 3 on site, on west side of hill behind towers, and on the North side along Jackson. The project intends to leave some dead snags on site for habitat where they don't pose a fire or safety hazard.
  
13. PRESCRIBED BURNS?
  - Jim Boito (Fire Chief) responded that they have considered it and are studying if and how it could be done safely in the future as a management tool. With the fire loads on the hill right now, it isn't a prudent technique at the moment, but that may change over time.
  
14. WHAT ANIMALS OR SPECIES ARE WE HOPING TO ATTRACT TO THE HILL?
  - We are not targeting specific species (other than preserving the amenities needed by the Monarchs) but the restoration of now-rare coastal prairie grasslands and native oak woodland habitat will provide resources for a large number of native species.

### **Comment Cards**

1. IS IT POSSIBLE TO BUILD A BRIDGE OVER CERRITO CREEK TO FACILITATE ACCESS TO THE HILL TRAILS?

The City of El Cerrito may be better suited to take the lead on planning, designing, and implementing a bridge project. A few years ago the City, with the help of consultants, looked at a crossing of Cerrito Creek in the vicinity of Belmont Ave. The City planned to use bond measure funds and a grant for the project. The City dropped the project when it realized that, except for a portion of the southern abutment, the bridge would be in the jurisdiction of El Cerrito and at that time there wasn't significant involvement from the

City of El Cerrito in the project. If the City of Albany participated in a bridge project in the future, it would likely need grant funding.

**2. IS THERE THE POTENTIAL FOR BETTER POISON OAK CONTROL ON THE HILL?**

Along trails, the City of Albany tries to keep poison oak cut back for public access. Although poison oak is a nuisance to humans, it is a desirable species on Albany Hill for several reasons. Poison oak is a native species that provides habitat for wildlife species. Animals are not sensitive to poison oak so they use the plants for habitat; the tangled leaves and stems provide good cover for birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects and small mammals. Several insect species, including a variety of butterflies and moths, feed on the leaves, as do deer and squirrels. Their flowers also serve as a food source for insects. The berries are an important food source for a variety of bird species since the berries are present in late fall and into winter. Poison oak is a native species and can outcompete invasive weeds so is valuable for replacing invasive weed cover with native cover.

**3. HOW DO YOU INTEND TO PREVENT EUCALYPTUS RE-SPROUTING?**

The City is practicing Integrated Pest Management guidelines and will not be using pesticides. Covering the cut stumps with tarps, and removing any stump sprouts over the course of a few years will eventually kill the stump. Many of the stumps that have been left from previous removals haven't resprouted. We will largely be deploying mechanical means of suppression.

**4. ARE MONTEREY PINES WELL SUITED FOR TOP OF HILL MONARCH HABITAT?**

Monterey pines would likely grow well on Albany Hill as there are established stands in sandstone substrates in the Berkeley and Oakland Hills. However there are some reasons that Monterey pines might not be a good choice for Albany Hill: their native range consists of very limited areas located in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Luis Obispo Counties; Monterey Pines are extremely flammable and create large amounts of duff that also create a fire hazard. Using them on a large scale isn't advisable, but because there are no suitable native tree substitutes, planting Monterey pines or other non-local native trees may be explored further during the planning phases of the project as structural alternatives to keeping Eucalyptus on the ridge.

**5. THERE WERE NO OAKS ON ALBANY HILL PRE-EUCALYPTUS, EXCEPT THE NORTH, BY THE CREEK. WHY DO YOU THINK OAKS WILL GROW ON TOP WHEN THE EUCALYPTUS ARE GONE. I DON'T UNDERSTAND. THANKS.**

During the restoration planning process, suitable locations for oak trees and oak woodland will be identified based on an analysis of existing vegetation and other conditions. The grasslands on Albany Hill were likely maintained by land management activities such as burning, so oak trees may actually be able to grow and survive in more places than only the northern most slopes. Young oaks are present in the understory of Eucalyptus on site, which suggests that oaks will grow well in these locations. Other areas of Albany Hill may not be suitable for oaks and the target plant communities in this area will be grassland or shrubland.

**6. WHAT VISION DO YOU HAVE FOR GRASSLAND RESTORATION AND HOW DO YOU INTEND TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN NATIVE NONINVASIVE MEADOWS/GRASSLANDS?**

The goal for grassland restoration on Albany Hill will be a matrix of non-native annual grasses with stands of native grassland species scattered throughout. This is the pattern we see in native grasslands on sandstone throughout the East Bay. The grassland restoration methodology will focus on maintaining and enhancing existing stands of native grassland species, as well as establishing new stands of native grassland species in areas where conditions will support them. Existing stands will be enhanced and maintained through weed control including timed mowing, mulching, tarping, hand weeding, and other methods, which will reduce the competitive pressure from non-natives. Native plants will be propagated via seed or vegetative propagule collection from Albany Hill, growing out of native plants into containers, and out planting, or in some cases direct seeding or planting of vegetative propagules. Plantings will be established and maintained through weed control. Weed control will be conducted by volunteers as well as Urban Tilth.

**7. PLEASE MAKE SURE TO CONSIDER PUBLIC SAFETY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POTENTIAL TREEFALL ON TAFT AND JACKSON ST RESIDENCES IN ADDITION TO FIRE SAFETY. THANK YOU!**

Please see answer above for Public Question 6.

**8. IS GOLDEN GATE HILL DEVELOPMENT CO. WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH THIS PROCESS? [11-acre property owner]**

The City expects the owners of the property to be engaged, but at this stage, it would be premature to ask the owners to make a commitment to implementing actions on private property. Please note that this is a plan for the publicly owned portion of the property, and not establishing regulations on private property.

**9. REMOVE EUCALYPTUS TREES YES BUT PLANT FIRE RESISTANT TREES TO SEQUESTER CARBON.**

Thank you for the request.

**10. NEED TO EXTEND SIDEWALK AND A RESTROOM.**

Thank you for the request. That may be outside the scope of this project, but we have noted the desire for more park-like amenities at the summit.

There are sidewalks along Taft to the entrance to the park. The City is working on clearing soil and rocks from the sidewalk on the west side of the street and installing retaining walls. We plan to use lumber milled from felled eucalyptus for this project.

To access the top of the hill from the north, walkers can come up the trail through the oak woodland, which starts at the eastern base of the hill and is accessible by walking north on the trail that starts at the far N end of Madison St.

Bathroom: There isn't the required sewer and water infrastructure on the open space areas of Albany Hill to support a restroom.

**11. TURKEYS ARE HAVING A TERRIBLE IMPACT ON THE HILL. DRYING OUT VEGETATION, REDUCING GROUND COVER, PUSHING OUT OTHER WILDLIFE. IS IT POSSIBLE TO WORK WITH USFWS/CDFW TO REMOVE THEM OR SOMEHOW ADDRESS THEM?**

Thank you for bringing this valuable observation to the study session! Please see the answer to live question 7 above. Short answer – we're looking into it!

**12. COGENT PRESENTATIONS, THANK YOU. I'M PLANNING TO DO THE SITE WALK. Q: ANY CHANGES TO THE TRAIL MAINTENANCE FROM RIDGETOP TO GATEVIEW AVE. IN A SW/DOWNHILL PATH? IT'S COMPLETELY RUTTED, SO AFFECTED BY RUNOFF.**

City staff will look into ways to improve the fire road on city property on the crest of the hill, but keep in mind that fire roads on the south end of the hill are on private property.