



TOWN OF FAIRFAX
STAFF REPORT
February 3, 2016

TO: Mayor and Town Council
FROM: Michele Gardner, Town Clerk *MG*
SUBJECT: Acceptance of Councilmember Weinsoff's Memorandum regarding flood control

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the attached Councilmember Memorandum.

DISCUSSION

Councilmember Weinsoff asked that this matter be added to the agenda and submitted the attached memo.

FISCAL IMPACT

None

ATTACHMENT

Council Memorandum



Town of Fairfax Councilmember Memorandum

TO: Mayor and Town Council
FROM: Councilmember Weinsoff
DATE: February 3, 2016
SUBJECT: Marin County Flood Control Zone 9 – Lefty Gomez Dual-Use Facility

Introduction

During the past year, I have regularly updated the Fairfax community during Council Meetings on the work of Marin County Flood Control Zone 9 (“Flood Zone 9”) to protect against flooding in the Ross Valley. This written Councilmember Report, accompanied by additional background materials prepared by the County, focuses specifically on the proposed use of Lefty Gomez field at White Hill Middle School as a “Dual-Use Facility” for both recreation and emergency flood control.

As I stated during my “Council Report” at the January Town Council Meeting, our homes, commercial districts, municipal facilities, roads and bridges, parks, and schools occupy the natural floodplain of the Ross Valley. When the ground is saturated and a heavy burst of rain falls, there is simply not enough capacity in our creeks to hold this rainwater within their banks. While we all wish we could resolve the flood threat this creates with easily implemented and inexpensive solutions, we have a very limited toolbox of flood control options available to protect the Town of Fairfax. The one program we can implement to ensure we do not flood again as we did in 2005 and 1982 is expanding the role of Lefty Gomez field to serve our community both for recreation and as a temporary holding pond for these potential flood waters.

An Overview of the Flood Control Program

Fairfax, along with the towns of San Anselmo and Ross, the City of Larkspur, and the unincorporated areas of the Ross Valley are joined together in the County’s Flood Zone 9. Following the December 31, 2005 flood, first under the leadership of our late-Supervisor Hal Brown, and now under the supervision of our current Supervisor Katie Rice, we are putting into place a broad coordinated suite of flood control measures. Funded with our local “Flood Fee” and supplemented with significant state grants, we are making creek improvements, undertaking bridge replacements, raising the Phoenix Lake dam, and at the top of the watershed planning to place at least one detention basin in the form of a “Dual-Use Facility” at Lefty Gomez field. This additional use of

Lefty Gomez field for emergency flood control will allow us to hold for a short period and then slowly release the significant rain from particularly severe storms.

It is now more than 10 years since our last flood, and a generation ago back in 1982 that we suffered the prior flood. Memories of these events can fade. But it is important to remember the dangers to personal safety, the families displaced by flooded homes, our downtown business community along Bolinas Road submerged, and the Town Hall knocked out of operation for months. It should be noted that the Town of Fairfax incurred several hundred thousand dollars in storm-related expenses not eligible to be reimbursed by federal FEMA.

Protecting Fairfax from Future Floods

The floodwaters that ravaged our Town during the early hours on December 31, 2005 required us to implement a comprehensive flood control program. That program is the Capital Improvement Plan ("CIP"), approved by the Flood Control Zone 9 Advisory Board (on which I sit as your representative) and adopted by the County. The CIP and accompanying studies analyze the hydrology of our watershed and every credible approach to controlling the flood danger. This flood control plan – based on a near decade of research at the considerable cost of more than 2 million dollars - is now being implemented. It is comprehensive, complex, and expensive - as it must be to detail how we will control a potential "100-Year" flood. In my opinion there are no simpler, cheaper, or more effective alternatives.

After years of study and progress, however, the road to flood control in Fairfax is now being challenged. And while reasoned discussion is always welcome, of particular concern to me as your councilmember is the manner in which specific objection is being made to the important role Lefty Gomez field will play in keeping our community safe from flood waters. Misinformation is being circulated in print and on-line asserting that detention basins generally are unsafe, and that the Lefty Gomez design in particular will result in toxic debris, environmental damage, and drownings. These are over-the-top claims without any foundation in fact and made before any formal design is proposed, CEQA analysis performed, or community review occurs. Such misinformation is corrosive to the widely-respected public conversation on matters of public policy we cherish in Fairfax and I ask again that those who are both disseminating and promoting it to stop.

Here are the facts as we begin the conversation. The Lefty Gomez Field project will:

1. Ensure the current field's current use as a recreational resource, both prior to and after any use to hold back floodwaters – with dedicated funding;
2. Ensure the design and construction fully protects public health and safety, and maintains the quality of all adjoining neighborhoods;

3. Ensure compliance with all local, state, and federal environmental laws and regulations;
4. Ensure maximum public participation in the design and construction (including improvements to the field and athletic facilities); and
5. Ensure current and enhanced “Safe Routes to Schools.”

Stay Informed and Participate

As the conversation on flood control moves forward, please:

Read the wealth of material on the “Ross Valley Flood Protection and Watershed Program” website - <http://www.marinwatersheds.org/rossvalleywatershed-org/index.html>.

Attend regular Flood Zone 9 Advisory Board Meetings, as well as special informational meetings such as the one on February 4th at 7:00 at White Hill School.

Contact me –dweinsoff@townoffairfax.org.

A Project of the Marin County Department of Public Works

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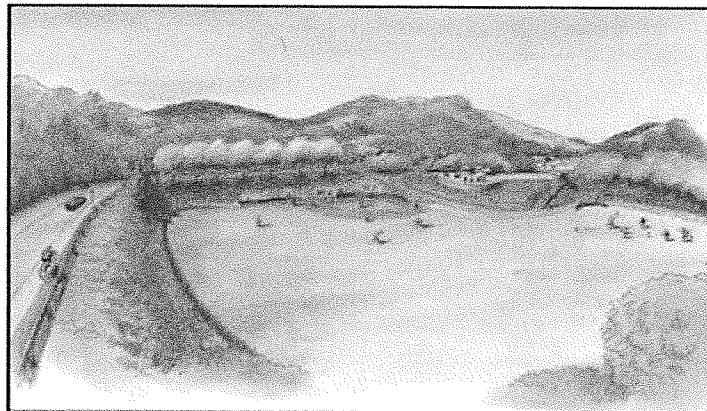
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Lefty Gomez Dual-Use Facility at White Hill Middle School



Most documents are pdfs and will require Adobe Acrobat Reader for online viewing.



Artistic Rendering of Conceptual Lefty Gomez Dual Use Facility



[Questions & Answers Document \(Coming Soon\)](#)

About the Project

This project would improve Lefty Gomez Field at White Hill Middle School in Fairfax to allow it to serve dual community uses: White Hill School and community recreation and flood flow detention. The improved field would provide much needed temporary water storage during infrequent, but severe, flood events such as the ones experienced in 1982 and 2005 that caused tens of millions of dollars of damage to private and public property in Fairfax and the lower Ross Valley. The limited in-channel capacity of Fairfax Creek causes flooding in Fairfax during flood events, and the improved field would provide temporary water storage, thereby reducing creek overflow and downstream flooding. The project would also pursue opportunities for preserving and improving the field's current function as a recreational resource both prior to and after its temporary use as floodwater storage.

Status & Next Steps

The project is currently in the Initial Feasibility Assessment phase. Project concepts are being developed in order to assess initial feasibility. Project design would begin as part of a community-driven process with multiple opportunities for public participation and input on different design alternatives. Design alternatives would be developed to:

- maintain the quality of adjoining neighborhoods;
- ensure field design meets school and community needs;
- ensure compliance with local, state, and federal environmental laws and regulations;
- provide opportunities for consistent public participation and input at key decision points; and,
- protect the public's health and safety.

A preferred design alternative would then be finalized for possible construction. A preliminary schedule and list of known upcoming meetings is provided below.

Preliminary Schedule (Pending Funding & Project Approval)

Project Phase	Typical Duration
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Initial Feasibility Assessment	6-9 months
Environmental Review	6-9 months
Selection of Preferred Alternative	1-3 months
Design Development & Final Design	18-24 months
Construction of Preferred Alternative	18-24 months
Total Project Duration	4-6 Years

Upcoming Meetings

February 4, 2016: 7:00p, Community Meeting, White Hill Middle School, 101 Glen Drive, Fairfax

Past Public Meetings

January 27, 2015: Approximately 25 residents gathered on Tuesday evening, January 27, 2015 at the Canon Swim & Tennis Club House to hear updates and provide input on the Loma Alta and the Lefty Gomez Dual Use Detention Basins concepts. There was excellent audience participation during the presentation, and there will be future meetings that will provide additional opportunities for public input. See slide presentation by clicking here.

May 19, 2014: Approximately 50 residents gathered on the evening of May 19, 2014 at White Hill Middle School to learn about the Ross Valley Watershed Program and conceptual detention basins near White Hill Middle School. See slide presentation by clicking here.

Cost & Funding

The project is preliminarily estimated to cost \$6.4 million (per the 2011 Capital Improvement Plan Study for Flood Damage Reduction and Creek Management for Flood Control Zone 9/Ross Valley). Further development of the project details and project feasibility may result in increased estimated cost. Possible funding sources include the Ross Valley Flood Control Zone 9 Storm Drainage Fee and other potential grant funding sources.

Implementing Agency & Partners

Marin County Flood Control & Water Conservation District in cooperation with the Ross Valley School District, & the Town of Fairfax.

Contact

The project manager for the Marin County Flood Control & Water Conservation District is Russ Eberwein, P.E., Senior Civil Engineer (REberwein@marincounty.org).

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