

# Midcoast Community Council Newsletter

Summer 2023



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**Stormwater: Slip-sliding Away**



There was a common theme underlying our difficulties in the January storms. Whether it was trees smashing homes and downing power and communications lines, mudslides and boulders and sinkholes blocking our evacuation routes, or water flooding our homes and highways and almost knocking out our sewer plant, the theme was Stormwater. We had too much and we didn't handle it well. Stormwater saturated and loosened the soil and made it easy for winds to blow over the trees, it caused a one hundred-fold increase in Pilarcitos Creek flows, it burst sewer mains and caused spills worth \$40 million in fines.

As a result, the MCC is conducting a survey and preparing a report to forward to local and state government. We have "lead authors" in a work group for several neighborhoods, but **we invite your additional stories and pictures ASAP.** *[We can provide anonymity, but it would be better for report credibility to*

*include addresses, and optionally names]* Moonridge is one area where the resident contributions do not match the degree of obvious damage, so we could use help there.

The report will cover not only anecdotes about our travails as a community, but also delve into the science and current County management practices for stormwater, and contrast those practices with those of other jurisdictions. I don't want to spoil the ending, but it's clear we have a major problem in our area, and that we are adding to it with every house, carport, driveway, ADU and impermeable surface that we issue permits for. As we have done with Communications, the report will be distributed for comment, presented at the MCC, and have articles published in local media. We will then elicit support for the findings and discuss assessing, planning, funding, and building for a sustainable community. Flooding has been going on for years here, but climate change and the cumulative impact of building impermeable surfaces have pushed us past a "tipping point", and we need to recover our balance before something else falls.

For more information:

[The Storm of '23 – A Learning Experience?](#)

[Do you have a problem with Storm Water?](#)

## **MCC Documents Communications Problems; Requests Study**



The severe storms that affected San Mateo County in December, 2022 and January 2023, caused prolonged power and communications outages of up to 240+ hours. These outages significantly impacted the ability of residents and first responders to communicate with emergency services. During this period, falling trees destroyed power and telecommunication lines, resulting in extensive outages, including the complete loss of communications on the Coastside due to the lack of resilience of the power and communication systems in the area. Moreover, the entire Coastside was disconnected from Xfinity's services twice in one week, causing significant disruptions in areas where home fiber or analog telephone services were not available. These outages are not isolated incidents, and residents in rural areas of San Mateo County regularly experience extremely slow internet services and poor cellular coverage, leading to even longer power and communication outages.

Given the demographics in our area, with large segments of the population over

50 years of age, and the increased risk of heart attacks in that age group, the inability to call for help, as well as the blockage of our only emergency vehicle arteries, are life-threatening.

The San Mateo County Coastside has faced persistent issues with cellular and internet connectivity, ranging from an inability to browse the web to a lack of access to emergency services during power, fiber and cable outages. The root causes of these communication problems are multifaceted and include: a lack of fiber optic cable redundancy for Comcast/Xfinity Communications, a lack of backup generators and battery power at many Coastside cellular sites, gaps in coverage in certain areas, and poor service speeds.

In March, an MCC Communications Work Group, led by Leo Gomez of Montara, prepared a report on our communications vulnerabilities. The current report, as well as other updates are available under the "Learn" menu at this dedicated website: <http://www.connectedcoastside.com/>. The MCC's report has been endorsed by HMB, the Cabrillo Unified School District, Montara Water and Sanitary District, and the Sewer Authority Mid-Coastside. Those endorsements are relevant not only for the shared recognition of need, but also for the potential 'anchor clients' they represent in the formation of a Community Fiber Network, which is the MCC's proposal for how to establish fast, reliable internet connectivity on the coastside.

The MCC work group includes Mr. Gomez, MCC Chair Dieguez, the CERT telecommunications lead, and two managers of fiber networks in local government agencies.

Potential partners have been identified for analysis and operation of a community fiber network, but the process must start with formation of a legal entity, and a feasibility study of the market and the investments required. The

MCC has requested funding, together with the City of Half Moon Bay (HMB), to undertake the study.

More details are available in these articles:

[Improving Coastside Communication Resilience – Part 1: the Problems](#)

[Getting Real about fixing Coastside Telecommunications](#)

## **Supvr. Mueller Gets CRISP Funded**

Ray Mueller followed through on a campaign promise by getting \$200,000 from the San Mateo Emergency Services Council to fund the San Mateo County Coastal Resilient Infrastructure Strategic Plan (CRISP). That money will fund the development of a priority list of infrastructure needs. This effort was driven in part by our dire experiences with flooding, trees crushing homes, power and communications failing, our evacuation route being blocked, and the sewer plant almost failing in the Dec 31/Jan 1 and subsequent storms. However, Supervisor Mueller's idea for this plan existed well before that, when we finalized the acronym last December 2nd. He has seen this need for some time. By finding that funding, he avoided a lot of delay in trying to get funds through the deliberate pace of SMC annual budgeting and Measure K funding. At that meeting, concerns were raised about the study scope presented in [the staff report](#). The missing ingredients in the staff report were: Evacuation, Stormwater, Wildfire, and Fiscal Sustainability, which will be covered in depth in upcoming MCC reports. Further, the MCC is requesting that the County involve the MCC in: a) drafting the RFP for consulting services (*thus, defining the scope of the planning effort*), b) selecting the consultant, c) having a seat on the CRISP working group formed to work with the consultant, and d) helping steer Coastside planning efforts on an ongoing basis. CRISP could also provide a foundation for an ongoing financial management (e.g. budgeting) process which has not existed to date.

For more information: <https://www.coastsidebuzz.com/mueller-gets-crisp-funding-started/>

## **Montara Mountain Damage**



What started out as an understandable emergency priority may have turned into a lasting disaster. Early in June the San Mateo County Department of Emergency Management conducted emergency road repairs on Montara Mountain for a valid reason (supplying fuel to back up generators for a critical telecommunications installation). However, members of the community are



incensed at the degree of earth movement and vegetation removal. The MCC was notified of that work shortly before planned efforts and the scope is documented in this article: <https://www.coastsidebuzz.com/emergency-on-montara-mountain/> ... and in attachments therein.

The MCC held a hearing on June 28<sup>th</sup> to discuss the condition of the mountain. Prior to the meeting, Council Member Scott Bollinger toured the mountain by bike and prepared a presentation. Residents expressed concerns about the degree of sensitive habitat destroyed, the potential for erosion from the newly exposed surfaces, and the excessive damage compared to the apparent access need. The MCC will revisit this issue to determine what allowed this to occur, what can be done to prevent another such occurrence, and what can be done to restore the mountain.

For more information: <https://www.coastsidebuzz.com/damage-to-montara-mountain-again/>

## **New Moss Beach Fire Station**

## Current Station



Gary Burke, Board President of the Coastside Fire Protection District, attended the MidCoast Community Council Meeting on May 24th to discuss the proposed new fire station in Moss Beach.

Mr. Burke stated that there is \$15 million in reserve to fund the building of the new proposed station. The 3 stations that the CFPD owns (Half Moon Bay, El Granada, and Moss Beach) respond to approximately 3,500 calls per year. Mr Burke did not give the breakdown of calls per station. The CFPD contracts with CalFire for fire protection services.

The proposed new firehouse design for the station in Moss Beach comes with potential negative health concerns for neighbors. The proposed new design will significantly increase the footprint of the station and move it from the center of the parcel to the property line on the south, uphill end of the property, placing the truck bay right next to home owners and potentially causing hearing loss and expelling diesel exhaust (a known carcinogenic according to the World

Health Organization) into homes. Significant light pollution is also a concern.

In addition, the noise that would be generated by the new station is a serious concern. A standard diesel engine produces 100 decibels of noise. Fire sirens produce approximately 118 decibels. According to OSHA, exposure to noise levels of 80 decibels for more than 15 minutes a day can cause long term hearing loss. Light sleepers can awaken from sleep at 40 decibels, particularly the elderly, children, and the chronically ill. Average sleepers awake at 70 decibels. Being awakened from sleep abruptly causes the body to react in flight/fight response. Sleep disturbance can have many deleterious effects for healthy individuals and is particularly dangerous for the elderly, children, and the chronically ill.

Definitive need for a substantially larger firehouse has not been established at this time. Future meetings and careful evaluation will be needed.

## Improvements at Coastside Schools



Children on the midcoast are looking forward to exciting changes at their schools.

In April Cabrillo Unified School District Superintendent Sean McPhetridge updated the MCC on major remodeling plans at our two local elementary schools, El Granada Elementary and Farrallone View Elementary in Montara. The elementary school in Half Moon Bay, Hatch, has already been upgraded.

Work at both schools is already underway and students will be in all-new surroundings for the 2024-25 school year. Each site will spend a little more than \$25 million dollars from bond issue money allocated to it. Some temporary arrangements will be in place during construction. El Granada will replace its aging portable classrooms with a new wing housing 7 classrooms. A new gym/multipurpose room will replace the existing one. And students will see new landscaping, playground equipment, security fencing and gathering areas.

At Farrallone View, the school will enjoy a new covered gathering area and the buildings will be extensively modernized with upgrades to the kitchen, airflow system, lighting, and mechanical and security systems.

It is hoped that attractive up-to-date facilities will make education of midcoast kids a joy for teachers and families and that the new schools will offer opportunities for the whole community to gather and proudly support one other.

**Help Improve The Midcoast By Serving On The MCC**



Our community faces important issues, as we can see from this newsletter. This is your opportunity to help influence the direction of our community. Join the Midcoast Community Council! There will be 3 seats available in the 2024 elections. Residents can immediately help by serving on a variety of topical work groups (as the articles above describe).

To serve on the MCC, you must be a resident of the unincorporated Midcoast, that is, living in El Granada, Princeton, Moss Beach, Montara or the part of Miramar that is NOT in the Half Moon Bay City limits.

Interested residents should write the MCC at [midcoastcommunitycouncil@gmail.com](mailto:midcoastcommunitycouncil@gmail.com).

## Get Involved

- Attend a virtual **Midcoast Community Council Meeting**, scheduled on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month, or watch [past meetings](#).
- Attend or [live stream](#) a virtual **San Mateo County Board of Supervisors Meeting**.

- Let us know how we can improve this newsletter by **providing feedback and ideas** [here](#).



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