

### July 14, 2023 Cambria Forest Committee Meeting Summary

Prior to the beginning of the meeting a brief discussion took place regarding the potential Lodge Hill emergency evacuation route through Rancho Marino southward, as the topic had been discussed at yesterday's CCSD Board meeting. Rancho Marino Reserve Director Keith Seydel commented that SLO County engineering would need to survey the area to see if the project were even possible, as right now it is, "literally a cow path", and would cost several million dollars to create a road useable in an emergency. Fire Safe Focus Group Chair David Pierson agreed on the cost of the project, that presently approval for construction of the road was being sought from the property owners on whose land the road would be built, and if this happened, somehow the money would become available.

Ultimately the meeting began at 10:07AM. In attendance were Chair Crosby Swartz, Treasurer Laura Swartz, Secretary Christine Heinrichs, PROS Commissioner Shannon Sutherland, California Native Plant Society local area representative Neil Havlik, FSFG Chair David Pierson (who left the meeting around 10:30), Rancho Marino Reserve Director Keith Seydel, and CCSD Board Director and CFC liaison Harry Farmer.

Under Public and Director Comments, Laura spoke with serious concern as to invasive grasses, especially orchard grass, becoming more prevalent on Fiscalini Ranch, and that while weeding takes place close to the bluff trail, the forested/wooded areas are being overrun, presenting both a visual problem and a fire hazard.

Crosby informed us the minutes of the June 2nd CFC meeting are not yet available.

In the Treasurer's Report, Laura reported no new revenues or expenses since last month. Due to the extension of the tax filing deadline, our accountant plans to file our tax return in October.

Under Sub-Committee Reports, Crosby remarks that today, Friday, July 14th, is the deadline for Cambria Fire Department Fuel Reduction program to have been observed by property owners, and from now on the District would hire a contractor to do the needed weeding and then bill the property owner. This includes District property in the Conservation Easement.

Crosby added that the search for a Supervisor for the Facilities and Resources Department to replace Carlos Mendoza, who recently resigned, was taking place. Crosby remarked that the job requirements were fairly extensive, more so than in the past. Laura added that perhaps more than one person could be hired to fulfill the needs of the position, including local experts such as a Forest Arborist/Ecologist, and perhaps various contractors or consultants could be utilized to do needed work, especially regarding forest health. Crosby suggested that perhaps a test case could be temporarily hiring a Forest Ecologist/Arborist to assess the health of the Strawberry Canyon area.

An observation was made that our recently hired General Manager Matt McElhenie did not necessarily have forest health as a priority, and perhaps a meeting could be arranged with him by interested parties such as Crosby Swartz from the CFC, and Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, to address the issue. It was noted that Mr McElhenie has already met with representatives of the Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve.

At this point Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) representative Shannon Sutherland addressed the importance of the health and utilization of Cambria's open space, how these areas should be

managed, and the possibility of bringing various interest groups under one umbrella to help provide input and oversight. Laura suggested that perhaps someone from the Forest Committee be a member of PROS. A discussion also took place as to the CCSD Board of Directors soon changing PROS from a Commission, as it's been for many years, to a Standing Committee serving in the same capacity as the Resources and Infrastructure, Finance and Policy Committees. How this would affect the functioning of PROS is not quite understood at this time. Shannon spoke as to the various 501(c)3's in our community with their own special interests, and how this has hampered efforts to get more accomplished, especially in working collaboratively with the County in getting projects initiated. It was pointed out that the relationship between Greenspace the Cambria Land Trust, and Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (FFRP) that has been difficult in the past was now much improved, and Greenspace had many informed, motivated and well intentioned members whose talents need to be taken advantage of. Laura pointed out the importance of getting all the various environmental groups in the area working together, and consensus was that ultimately organizations could work together with the common goal of doing what is best for Cambria's wooded, forested areas and open space.

At this point a meaningful discussion took place regarding wooded areas that in decades past were available for hiking, the enjoyment of the natural environment and the beauty of nature for emotional well being, and how these areas have become more recently become inaccessible. Also noted was that, while most folks have treated the environment with reverence and respect, other folks have, and still, pollute and therefore spoil the experience for everyone.

Winding down, Crosby reported that, at their June meeting, the California Coastal Commission approved four Forest Management projects nearby and in Cambria that will be implemented by Cal Fire and the Fire Safe Council of SLO. He expressed his disappointment that written comments provided by himself and representatives from Greenspace and the Native Plant Society were somewhat ignored, and that probably in the future clear and credible scientific data needed to be included to further enhance more pro environmental viewpoints. He pointed out that Las Padres Forest Watch has been quite successful in voicing their opposition and preventing various fuel reduction projects that ultimately do more harm than anything else.

A brief discussion then took place regarding the use of prescribed/controlled burns in limiting forest fires.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 AM.

The next Cambria Forest Committee meeting will be Friday, August 11th at 10AM via Zoom.

This summary written and submitted by CCSD Board Director and liaison Harry Farmer