

Flood Mitigation Hits Obstructions

by Sam Wilson

2008

“No news,” the old saying tells us, “is good news.” But when the subject is flood management in the Ross Valley, that bit of folk wisdom gets stood on its head. No news, or more to the point, no progress, is very bad news indeed. The threat of flooding certainly hasn’t gone away, and in some areas the risk might be more serious now than ever before. In the absence of measures to alleviate the flood-triggering effects of hydraulic constrictions at certain creek-spanning buildings and bridges, for example, the recent clearing of obstructions from stream channels and storm drains might actually have “greased the skids” for future flooding by accelerating flows to the constrictions.

Unfortunately many of the most critical aspects of the Ross Valley Flood Protection and Watershed Program initiative, which property owners more-or-less approved in last summer’s special balloting, are now in limbo awaiting final decisions on lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of the balloting. Local media, particularly the *Independent Journal* and *Ross Valley Reporter*, have extensively covered those suits; but now that the suits have entered the slow grind of the appeals process, the story has pretty much disappeared from the papers.

The watershed program is a collaborative effort of the governments of Marin County, Fairfax, San Anselmo, Ross and Larkspur. Its mission statement includes: reducing flooding and the damage it causes; maintaining natural creek functions; reducing pollutants passed along to the Bay; and improving fish passage. More detail on priorities, although not much on specific solutions, can be viewed online in the Solutions Framework at www.rossvalleywatershed.org.

Discussing the state of affairs before Thanksgiving, the Ross Valley’s representative on the county Board of Supervisors, Hal Brown, said “We’re hoping we can reach a point where we can start doing preliminary things. Certainly there have to be community meetings. We have to look at getting consensus, and we are planning on bringing in the communities on every single one of these programs.”

When asked about such potentially contentious and costly projects as dealing with the tight constrictions caused by creek-spanning structures in downtown San Anselmo, particularly what has been termed “bridge building 2,” Brown replied, “There is near-uniform agreement that that will have to be taken care of, there’s no doubt about it. Whether to do construction underneath or whether to



Fairfax’s Flood Mitigation Planning Project meeting on November 29 was attended mainly by property owners who had suffered flood damage. Photo by Sam Wilson

condemn the entire property, or whatever, that's still to be worked out with the entire community....We are waiting for a grant on the hydraulic study for the entire watershed, which will kick things off, but in the meantime the lawsuits are holding things up.”

Nevertheless, some progress is being made at the community and individual levels. At a workshop held by the Town of Fairfax on the Thursday evening following Thanksgiving, attendees viewed a power-point presentation by “natural hazards mitigation” consultant, Paula Schulz, and then discussed flood-related issues and experiences. Most of the participants had personal property losses, and some of them reported on successes in obtaining funding for remediation work, independently and in collaboration with town and county agencies, outside of the watershed program. The unexpected highlight of the meeting occurred with the announcement that FEMA will fund an extension of the hydraulic model up San Anselmo Creek to its confluence with Fairfax Creek and then up Fairfax Creek to the vicinity of 300 Olema Road. Although completion of the model will have to wait for additional funding, this extension will provide the tools needed to analyze flooding that occurs along most of Fairfax Creek– perhaps the first step toward the very kick-off that Hal Brown has been looking for.

Any use of text and photographs for other than personal purposes is prohibited without permission from Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed
Website design by Karen Peterson, San Anselmo
Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed P.O. Box 415, Larkspur, California 94977
phone: (415) 456-5052 info@friendsofcortemaderacreek.org