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SUPES ALLOCATE \$1 MILLION TO CUT DOWN EUCALYPTUS

By CHRIS COUNTS

TAKING ON trees that many see as a nuisance, not to mention a fire hazard, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to spend nearly \$1 million to remove eucalyptus trees in North County.

District 2 Supervisor Glenn Church, who represents the area, reported that about 75 of his constituents have already expressed interest in the program. Church made a motion to pass the proposal, which was seconded by District 4 Supervisor Wendy Askew.

“Eucalyptus are one of the most flammable trees in the world,” Church said. “The only issue I can think of that would have more unanimity would be filling potholes, and I hope this can be expanded elsewhere in the county.”

‘Like matchsticks’

A number of North County residents told supervisors at the hearing that the program is needed to confront the fire risks posed by eucalyptus trees, which were introduced from Australia in the 19th century as a potential timber source and touted for their ability to grow quickly in many conditions. It turned out the trees were lousy for timber, but they adapted so well that, in a few decades, they dominated much of the California landscape.

“We have a stand of full-grown eucalyptus in a perfect row,” property owner Kate Edwards told the board of supervisors. “They’ve already started one fire, and luckily it was in the middle of winter. These are a real threat to my house and my neighbor’s house.”

A resident and an advisor for the Fire Safe Council for Monterey County, Robert Vitale of Aromas, warned that,

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PHOTO/KERRY BELSER

In 2019, a worker cuts down a giant eucalyptus tree on San Antonio near Fourth in Carmel.

Cal Am plugging away on desal plant permits

By KELLY NIX

WHILE THE effort continues to expand wastewater reclamation for the Monterey Peninsula, California American Water is forging ahead with plans to build a desalination plant — which it contends is the only way to ensure a drought-free water supply for the region.

Cal Am, which provides water service to 40,000 homes and business in the Peninsula, got approval from the California Coastal Commission Nov. 17, 2022, to build a desal plant in Marina with an initial capacity of 4.8 million gallons per day of purified water.

Company spokesman Josh Stratton said this week that the company is shooting for late 2025 to begin construction on the desal plant, slant wells, pipelines and other components. The work is expected to take a little more than two years to complete.

“There is still a false narrative out there that the desal project has not been approved,” Stratton said. “I want to make it clear that we have been approved by the California

Pastor, coastal commission agree on Rocky Point

■ ‘Everyone should be able to enjoy the spectacular views’

By MARY SCHLEY

PATRICE PASTOR’S plan to redevelop and reopen Rocky Point restaurant took a huge step forward this week with the release of a report from the California Coastal Commission setting out a plan for Pastor to undo extensive illegal work done by previous owners and provide permanent public access at the scenic and historic property, which is about 12 miles south of Carmel.

According to coastal commission planner Rob Modellmog, Pastor has signed a nearly 40-page agreement that is set for adoption by the coastal commission at its June 14 meeting.

Closed since 2020

Pastor told The Pine Cone this week that he’s pleased to have come to an agreement to settle the issues he inherited when he bought Rocky Point, that he’s been happy to provide public access since he acquired the property and will continue to do so.

“Everyone should be able to enjoy the spectacular views available from this beautiful piece of land,” he said. “It is one of the best views in the world.”

Pastor and his company, Esperanza Carmel LLC, purchased the 2.5-acre property, which includes the iconic restaurant and three attached

apartments, for \$8 million in November 2021 from the family of Peter and Grace Wang. Monterey County owns much of the land surrounding the Rocky Point property, including the driveway from Highway 1 to the parking area.

The Wangs purchased the property in December 2012 for \$4,550,000, and, according to Modellmog, their Coastal Act violations began a few years later.

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AERIAL PHOTO/MIKE BUFFO, HOUSE OF 8 MEDIA

With its stunning location and amazing views of the Big Sur coastline, Rocky Point has for decades been an iconic California destination.

County reduces housing target in Carmel Valley

■ More than 1,000 possible units cut

By CHRIS COUNTS

AFTER RESIDENTS pushed back against an attempt by Monterey County officials to identify sites for about 2,500 housing units in Carmel Valley to meet state housing mandates, the county this week eliminated several sites from the plan, included a large property that could accommodate more than 1,000 homes.

One property that was taken out of the plan was a 557-acre parcel just off Carmel Valley Road near the entrance to Palo Corona Park, where 1,020 units could conceivably have been constructed, including more than 800 market-rate homes, along with 62 units for very low-income residents. A total of 1,142 units were taken out of the plan, but that still leaves about 1,350.

Affordable housing was discussed at length during Wednesday’s county planning commission meeting,

which hosted another workshop on the effort to update the county’s housing plan.

The news was welcomed by the Carmel Valley Association, which has long pushed for fewer homes in the area — unless they are “truly affordable and well planned.”

“We think it’s moving in the right direction,” Walton told The Pine Cone. “We still have a couple more areas where we’re looking to reduce the numbers.”

Affordability crisis

Walton insisted the group isn’t against growth in Carmel Valley. Instead, she said they advocate for more affordable housing, which she calls a “critical need,” and less market-rate housing.

“We’ve already got enough market-rate houses,” she said. “We have to be responsible in making sure Carmel Valley exists as a real community that is accessible to the different socioeconomic levels of people who work here.”

At Wednesday’s hearing, Walton urged the planning commission and, ultimately, the board of supervisors, to focus their efforts on creating affordable housing. “That’s where the crisis in housing is,” she said.

Previously, planning commissioner Kate Daniels suggested that the county is relying on creating high-end housing to subsidize low-end units, and the strategy has failed to develop any meaningful cheaper dwellings.

While the reduction of sites identified in Carmel Valley was welcome news for many, county official Craig Spencer noted that there are limits to how many can be removed.

“You can’t remove all of the sites, and you can only remove so many before the numbers don’t meet the state mandates,” Spencer said.

Walton, meanwhile, in a message to CVA members, also said the strategy of using high-end housing to fund less expensive housing isn’t working. “A major shift in the methodology focusing on the delivery of affordable housing is required.”

‘A major shift in the method of providing affordable units is required’

Coastal Commission and are going through that process.”

Before ground can be broken, the company must satisfy the coastal commission’s 20 conditions of approval. While the conditions vary in complexity, one of the most involved is a permit that will allow the company to discharge brine via a 1-mile-long outfall pipe into the ocean, Cal Am engineering manager Tim O’Halloran said.

Handling the brine

“We have three teams of consultants and are doing this in partnership with Monterey One Water,” O’Halloran told The Pine Cone Thursday. “There’s a modeling effort to make sure the brine is adequately mixed and diluted as it discharges into the ocean,” so it doesn’t harm sea life.

The coastal commission also directed Cal Am to mitigate the damage to about two dozen acres of environmentally sensitive dunes at the well site, including habitat for the snowy plover and Smith’s Blue butterfly, by modifying

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