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REMOTE-CONTROLLED BULLDOZERS AT BIG SUR SLIDE

■ When the ground won’t hold still, send in the machines

By CHRIS COUNTS

KEEPING ONE of the world’s most scenic highways closed between Carmel and Cambria, the Regent’s Slide has blocked Highway 1 since February 2024, frustrating crews with dangerous and unstable conditions. But this week, Caltrans announced it has started using a pair of remote-controlled bulldozers to accelerate repairs — and keep workers out of harm’s way in case a new slide occurs.

“Bulldozer and excavator operators have been trained to use this remote-controlled equipment that can perform under certain adverse site conditions and at locations that may otherwise not be safe for crews to operate,” Kevin Drabinski of Caltrans reported. “The introduction of this equipment will allow Caltrans to take more risks than would be advisable with crewed dozers and excavators.”

A foot each day

Located about 5.5 miles south of Esalen Institute, the Regent’s Slide continues to move downhill at about a foot each day, which has slowed the state road agency’s work. “Caltrans continues to perform daily geologic assessments to determine if it is safe

to conduct repairs,” Drabinski said. Since new cracks emerged in August 2024, crews have been forced to work above the slide, making access to some areas difficult. The remote-controlled bulldozers will help. Caltrans “worked closely” with Caterpillar Inc. and

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PHOTO/CALTRANS

Due to safety concerns at Regent’s Slide, Caltrans is now using remote-controlled bulldozers.

‘Poster girl’ finally gets her metal roof

By MARY SCHLEY

JUST AS it did for Missy and JD Jensen last month, the Carmel City Council unanimously voted April 1 to overturn a planning commission decision denying a homeowner the right to install a metal roof.

Brandi Faia learned more than a year ago that her insurance company would no longer cover her ranch-style house at Torres and Second because it’s in a high-fire-hazard zone and has a badly deteriorating wood roof. So, she applied to replace it with a metal one, as recommended by her insurance agent, with vertical panels connected with raised seams.

But that solution was a nonstarter with the commission, which first told her last October to find a horizontally paneled metal roof and then, after she was unable to, told her to install metal shingles or some other product instead.

Find an alternative

In January, Faia filed paperwork asking the city council to overturn that decision, just as the Jensens — who own a contemporary home on Santa Lucia — did after the commission told them they could not have a metal roof, either, and needed to find an acceptable alternative. Last month,

the council sided with them and granted their request. The planning commission has been inconsistent in its rulings on metal roofs. At the January meeting, for instance, it fielded three similar applications. It approved one — for a home similar to Faia’s and located on the same street — but denied the other two, including the Jensens’.

‘Doing something wrong’

Citing a residential design guideline that states, “Metal, plastic and glass roofs are inappropriate in all neighborhoods,” associate planner Jake Olander recommended the council deny Faia’s appeal and uphold the planning commission’s decision. He also mentioned a municipal code section encouraging “the use of natural materials,” among several objectives. As a rule, staff recommends the council support a lower commission or board’s action.

Faia said she has “unwillingly become the poster girl for the metal-roof movement,” due to news coverage of her plight. She also quoted Mayor Dale Byrne telling her that ““if it ends up on the front page of The Pine Cone,

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Six-story home in C.V. turned down again

By CHRIS COUNTS

THE ATTORNEY for a couple who want to build a six-story home in Carmel Valley told the Monterey County Board of Supervisors Tuesday that it must approve the plan because it offers affordable housing or face litigation due to lack of compliance with state housing laws. But supervisors stood their ground, voting unanimously to send the would-be builders back to the Monterey County Planning Commission.

Amy McDougall and Rene Peinado want to build a six-story single-family dwelling at 10196 Oakwood Circle in the Oakshire subdivision near Carmel Valley Ranch. Plans also call for an attached garage, an attached accessory

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Rebuild for shoreline path between P.G. and P.B.

By KELLY NIX

THE MEANDERING and well-used oceanfront boardwalk between Pacific Grove and Pebble Beach is getting a complete redo about two years after winter storms wiped most of it out.

The Pebble Beach Company is replacing a 3,900-foot-long wooden pathway which has long allowed people to walk from Moss Beach at Spanish Bay to Asilomar State Beach in P.G.

“The boardwalk was washed out by the storms in January 2023,” company CEO David Stivers told The Pine Cone about the pathway, which is accessible to the public. “We needed California Coastal Commission approval to rebuild it.”

The coastal panel OK’d the walkway in December 2024 as part of the Pebble Beach Company’s complete redesign of The Links at Spanish Bay. Construction will

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Council tackles overlong meetings

■ Perhaps by having more meetings

By MARY SCHLEY

THE CARMEL City Council spent nearly two hours March 31 talking about ways to make its meetings more effective and efficient.

“I’m sad this went so long, but also really happy it went this long because of all the feedback,” Mayor Dale Byrne said toward the end of the discussion. Byrne had asked city attorney Brian Pierik and the council to review a policy on “city council meetings, orders of council, agenda packets, minutes of meetings and agenda distribution” that hadn’t been updated since 2020.

“We seem to be having a lot of long meetings,” Byrne said. “We’re going to try to figure out if there are some things we can do to make the meetings more effective, because we’re here to make decisions.” Making the meetings shorter is another goal.

Curtail public comment?
Adopt curfews?
Don’t talk so much?

“One way to do that is to have a lot more meetings, but it’s just a lot of work to do that,” Byrne said. Indeed, since Byrne and new councilmembers Hans Buder and Bob Delves took office, the council has held more meetings than the typical two per month, with nine sessions, some of them going on for several hours, between Feb. 3 and March 31.

Meetings could be shortened by eliminating staff presentations if the council opts not to hear them, Pierik and Byrne suggested. For instance, the mayor could read the agenda item aloud and then ask councilmembers if they want to hear the presentation or base their discussion on the staff report they presumably read beforehand. If the answer is “yes,” then a brief oral report would be given, followed by council questions for staff, public comment in chambers and online, then council discussion, and action, if any.

‘Disrespectful’

“If we’ve all read them and all the people here have read them, we could skip the staff presentation either completely, or the staff would come prepared to do a five-minute version,” Byrne explained. That suggestion received a lukewarm reception. If an employee is asked to prepare a presentation, the

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PHOTO/DAVID MULLALLY

The wooden esplanade that goes from Pebble Beach to Pacific Grove is being completely redone and relocated inland, a project that is set to take about three months.