

Rancho Palos Verdes approves first step in San Ramon Canyon stabilization

Melissa Pamer, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 3-3-11

Rancho Palos Verdes is moving toward its largest public works project ever, prompted by an eroding canyon that threatens to undermine switchbacks on one major road and causes regular flooding on another.

The City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to select a "preferred alternative" for stabilizing San Ramon Canyon, in part by diverting runoff from its crumbling walls.

The project - estimated to cost \$19.2 million - would funnel rainwater from the upper part of the canyon through a 1,900-foot underground tunnel and 1,700-foot pipeline to a drain outlet at the oceanfront bluff.

Though it remains unclear where the money would come from, city staff and consultants are pursuing federal and state funding.

The tunnel would remove some of the runoff that causes erosion in the canyon, sending road-blocking mud, debris and rainwater onto 25th Street in San Pedro. The flooding threatens residents of the Palos Verdes Shores mobile home park, south of the canyon's mouth.

Another major problem: The erosion is encroaching on the edge of curving Palos Verdes Drive East, where one switchback is just 86 feet from the widening embankment.

Complicating matters is a small landslide that is putting pressure on the canyon directly across from the switchbacks.

And, to make matters worse, city staff recently discovered an 8-inch sanitary sewer line that runs between the canyon and the switchback.

"The last thing we need is that sewage getting into the canyon and ... the ocean," Public Works Director Ray Holland said.

The council moved to have staff members begin crafting a plan to relocate the sewer line at an estimated cost of about \$212,000.

In choosing the tunnel project, the council rejected a different option estimated at a cost of \$17.9 million. That alternative would line the canyon with a pipe that would filter into an existing, potentially inadequate Los Angeles storm-drain system.

The canyon runs through three jurisdictions: Rancho Palos Verdes, Los Angeles County-owned Deane Dana Friendship Park, and private property in the city of Los Angeles. The project given the initial nod Tuesday would be located solely in Rancho Palos Verdes, simplifying the paperwork needed for its approval.

Also approved was a design for an "early action" plan to reinforce the Palos Verdes Drive East switchbacks with a caisson wall - similar to work that Palos Verdes Estates recently completed at Bluff Cove.

That smaller project would soon be ready to go in case planned land-movement monitors show it is needed. The

work would cost about \$2 million and take three months to complete, Holland said. It could be paid for from city coffers, but it's possible that outside funding would be found, he said.

City staff now will solicit bids for a final design of the tunnel project. It could be several years before the ground is broken.

In the meantime, Holland said Rancho Palos Verdes and Los Angeles officials are creating a written agreement to solidify what's been an informal sharing of cleanup duties during rainstorms.

City lobbyists have continued to seek funding in federal highway and water resources bills. Several city staff members including Holland recently went to Washington to make their case.

Councilman Steve Wolowicz expressed frustration that the project has not already been identified for federal funding.

"When Mother Nature steps in, she's not waiting for committees or different types of bills or ... how (congressmen) feel about earmarks," Wolowicz said.