

# Potential landslide closes Hill Road at Lakeside Heights subdivision

**Leah DeAnda, Lakeport Record-Bee, 12-4-14**

LAKEPORT -- Long-awaited rains have spurred renewed concern over the catastrophe that is part of the Lakeside Heights subdivision, prompting the county to indefinitely shut down a section of Hill Road, the main entrance to Sutter Lakeside Hospital.

The hospital remains accessible through the Park Way exit or by taking Park Way from Lakeshore Boulevard. Detour signs will help drivers find their way and are part of a traffic control plan created by the Department of Public Works in advance.

The closure will be reevaluated after this particular rain event concludes county public information officer Jill Ruzicka said. District 4 Supervisor Anthony Farrington said the Board of Supervisors (BOS) is set to receive an update Dec. 16 on the imminent disaster that the subdivision has posed since land instability became noticeable in March 2013.

Since March of that year, the situation has caused nothing but problems for the county. Multiple homes have continued to slip down the slope that Hill Road runs along; seven mandatory evacuation notices and six voluntary evacuation advisories were sent out to homeowners following the initial landslide and two homes were demolished at the county's expense. The county's declaration of a state of emergency brought no help from the state or federal government.

To make matters worse, developers of the subdivision are nowhere to be found and the private property falls outside the county's jurisdiction for the most part.

To protect Hill Road, the county has spent at least \$425,000, though, including \$25,000 to analyze the situation, \$50,000 to bore holes into the slope to drain water and install casings to monitor the slope and \$350,000 in emergency loans from the county's building and infrastructure reserve fund to relocate utilities. That's not to mention the costs of an ongoing lawsuit filed against the county by the Lakeside Heights Homeowners Association (HOA).

For more than a year, the slope has been covered by tarps that are slowly deteriorating and discussions in February about replacing them ended as the price tag for the temporary band-aid was too high.

Since then, not much has been done and officials argue there's not much to be done. Some responsibility for the problem is spread out over different departments, including Public Works, Special Districts and Community Development. But the county can't use taxpayer monies on private property unless there's a true public benefit to doing so.

"I've been able to advocate expenditure of money thus far, arguing it's not a gift of public monies because there's a public interest at stake in keeping that roadway open," Farrington said. "Not being an engineer, the only major solution to the problem I see is putting in big metal pilings and creating huge retaining walls. But that would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and the county doesn't have that money for a project on private property."

When a property is a nuisance, the county would typically put a lien against the parcel. But the manner in which it was developed has made the property entirely unappealing to owners, banks or buyers, Farrington said.

In the lawsuit, the HOA claims the county is at fault for a leaky public water system located upland of the subdivision. But in its cross-complaint, the county denied any liability and pointed to a number of alleged leaks in the subdivision's private systems, as well as the HOA's failure to address malfunctioning storm drains. It also claims negligence was persistent in the development of the property.

"It's a chicken and egg problem in terms of what caused the actual slide," Farrington said. "Right now we're just in a holding pattern."

Director of Public Works Scott De Leon's concern is maintaining Hill Road and his crew is currently monitoring the situation from the road on a daily basis. His efforts, along with Special District's monitoring, have shown some recent movement, Ruzika stated.

"I think we're erring on the side of caution right now but while we're dealing with heavy rainfall we're going to keep it closed," De Leon said.