



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY GROUP
Of The Ventana Chapter
P.O. Box 604, Santa Cruz, CA 95061
<https://ventana2.sierraclub.org/santacruz/>
e-mail: sierraclubsantacruz@gmail.com

July 14, 2016

Mayor and Council Members
City of Santa Cruz
June 14th, 2016

Subject: Need for City Engagement on PG&E Pipeline Tree Removal Proposal

Dear Mayor and City Council members,

Sierra Club members are deeply concerned about the proposed heritage tree removals on city wide public and private property under PG&E's Community Pipeline Safety Initiative with 38 public trees slated for removal and 275 private trees under review, 122 of which are designated as heritage. Many counties including our own have expressed similar concerns. In response to their constituents' concerns, the county Board of Supervisors called for a halt to the project pending an agreement between the county and PG&E that addresses local and state environmental laws, requires scientific verification of the safety and access issues that are said to drive this Pipeline Initiative and requests an analysis for each tree listed for removal which demonstrates the tree poses a clear and verified safety concern that cannot otherwise be mitigated.

The Sierra Club is concerned that the Santa Cruz City Council has remained silent on this issue. It has not been agendaized for public comment, council deliberation and direction to staff. An agreement is currently being developed by staff with no input from council or the public and apparently with no intent to do so before its adoption. At the city/PG&E public meeting held on 7/6/16, the take-away-message from PG&E was that there is no data documenting problems affecting transmission gas pipelines from trees or tree roots.

Given the serious community/climate impact of this tree removal project and the apparent lack of scientific basis for its adoption, the Sierra Club requests that the city council begin a public process, agendaize this issue and direct staff to:

1. Research the legality of PG&E's claim for exemption from CEQA and the local heritage tree ordinance.
2. Research the scientific literature on the issue of problems with trees and transmission gas pipe lines and summarize those findings for council.
3. Request from CPUC their documentation on this issue and their directives to PG&E regarding the Community Pipeline Safety Initiative.

4. Request from PG&E the specifics of their pipeline valve upgrades, including automatic shut-off valves and remote control capability within the 60 miles of pipelines within the city and county of Santa Cruz.
5. Request from PG&E, that the slated for removal heritage Catalpa trees on Melrose St., the Corimbia Ficifolia (Red Flowering Gum) and Magnolia trees on Washington St. each receive a detailed profile including evidence of the pipe's location and evidence via GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) of the location of the tree roots. Should this project proceed, that this evidence be used to demonstrate that the trees pose a clear and verified safety concern that cannot otherwise be mitigated.
6. Ensure that PG&E has alerted city private property owners of their right to not have their tree(s) removed as was clarified by PG&E at the public meeting organized by Supervisor John Leopold.

The Sierra Club looks forward to your response and an assurance that this issue of wide public concern will be agendized at an upcoming council meeting prior to any formal agreement between the city and PG&E.

Sincerely,

Greg McPheeters
Chair, Santa Cruz Group, Sierra Club