



SAN MATEO, SANTA CLARA & SAN BENITO COUNTIES



March 15, 2022

San Mateo County Parks
455 County Center, 4th Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063-1646

RE: Old Growth Oaks in Flood Park

Dear San Mateo County Parks Director Calderon,

Our organizations represent more than one hundred thousand members and supporters in San Mateo County and the San Francisco Bay region who appreciate parks, open space, nature, and the historic and cultural value of our natural landscapes. We also support both passive and active recreation for the well-documented mental and physical health benefits. Therefore, we appreciate the need for a ball field as well as access to nature.

We ask that you prioritize the regionally scarce and irreplaceable cultural and natural history of the old growth Coast Live Oak, Valley Oak and California Bay trees. The community expressed its desire to **preserve trees instead of creating a secondary ball field** with this plan that has many active elements. Please re-evaluate the layout of pathways in order to minimize the number of oaks removed. Please continue your efforts to seek opportunities for ball fields with fewer impacts to our natural heritage at other sites in the region.

The overwhelming desire and highest priority expressed by the community regarding the reimagining and realization of Flood Park has been to preserve trees. *“At five meetings, and with input from more than meeting attendees & 220 online survey participants, priorities are determined: **preserve trees & a natural park character**, promote health, create community gathering places, and expand uses of the park.”*¹ Additionally, thousands of individuals have signed the petition, “Save Flood Park native trees.”²

¹ San Mateo County Parks, “Concept and Community Engagement”, p.1, <https://parks.smcgov.org/sites/parks.smcgov.org/files/Flood-Timeline-Dec-16-2021.pdf>

² <https://www.change.org/p/save-flood-park-native-trees?redirect=false>

Please appreciate the very rare remnant of our natural and cultural history that we have in these few acres of valley floor oak woodland and savanna in Flood Park. Before the California Gold rush, nearly all the lands from the Bay wetlands to the Santa Cruz Mountains, the whole of the Santa Clara Valley, were oak woodlands and savanna. We've done a fair job of protecting the natural landscapes of mountains and foothills, but today Flood Park, a few acres of the Guadalupe Oak Grove Park in San Jose, and a sprinkling of small public lands elsewhere are all that remain in public open space of these once widespread magnificent valley floor oak woodlands.

*"Many California cities were established in oak woodlands and savannas. In Santa Clara Valley, oak ecosystems were the defining feature at the time of European contact, covering thousands of acres from what is now Palo Alto to San José (Beller et al. 2010). These woodlands were also home to indigenous people, who lived in high densities in the valley for thousands of years (Keeley 2002)."*³

*"The vast majority of these oaks – as high as 99% in some parts of the valley – were cut down in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to make way for orchards and expanding cities (Whipple et al. 2011)."*⁴

Please recognize that oaks are very slow growing. Many of the native trees in Flood Park are likely 200 to 300 years old or more and clearly predate the "historic" adobe building in the park, for example, yet the trees have not been included in the historic or cultural considerations of the park plan. Many of these original old growth oaks, including some slated for removal, were here when James Flood first purchased this land with his Gold Rush wealth in about 1863. This natural and historical resource is simply irreplaceable.

Please honor your land acknowledgement pledge which recognizes that these were once indigenous peoples' lands. Respect indigenous peoples by implementing education that engages the community in celebrating these natural resources. Engage the community in restoration of the oak woodland ecosystem for the next century.

Today, some neighborhoods near Flood Park are fortunate to have a lush oak canopy on private residential properties. However, maintaining oaks in a residential setting is difficult and as house sizes grow and housing densification occurs, the canopy of oaks on private residential

³ San Francisco Estuary Institute, "Re-Oaking of Silicon Valley", p.28, https://www.sfei.org/sites/default/files/biblio_files/Re-Oaking%20Silicon%20Valley%20SFEI%20August%202017%20med%20res_B.pdf

⁴ San Francisco Estuary Institute, "Re-Oaking of Silicon Valley", p.28, https://www.sfei.org/sites/default/files/biblio_files/Re-Oaking%20Silicon%20Valley%20SFEI%20August%202017%20med%20res_B.pdf

properties will decline. Moreover, as a matter of equity, many in our underserved communities tend to live in dense housing communities with less tree canopy so more access to nature in public spaces is important. We all need exposure to and education about our natural history and the critical role ecosystem services play in meeting our urban needs. Our natural resources in *public* parks will only become more precious with time.

The Flood Park reimagining plan is quite expansive even without the secondary ball field that is the primary threat to the most valuable and regionally scarce old growth woodland of the park. The amenities include an inclusive playground, promenade, 2 gathering plazas, 7 group picnic and event spaces, demonstration garden, adventure play, basketball, amphitheater, pump track, sand volleyball, tennis, trail with exercise stations, baseball/soccer/lacrosse ball fields, 3 restrooms, and large reservable picnic area, Figure 1. With all these activity areas, it will be difficult to provide the peaceful and natural restorative experience of visiting the park; with oak woodlands removed for a *second ball field*, it will be impossible.

Again, we ask that you

1. Please prioritize the regionally scarce cultural and natural history of the old growth Coast Live Oak, Valley Oak and California Bay trees.
2. Please honor the community expressed desire to preserve trees over the *secondary* ball field with this plan that has so many other active elements.
3. Please re-evaluate pathways to minimize the number of oaks removed.
4. Please continue your effort to seek out opportunities for new ball fields with fewer impacts to our natural heritage at other sites in the region.

Sincerely,

David Poeschel
Open Space Committee Chair
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

Charlene Nijmeh
Chairwoman
Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area

Linda Ruthruff
Conservation Chair
Santa Clara Valley Chapter
California Native Plant Society

Lennie Roberts
Legislative Advocate
Green Foothills

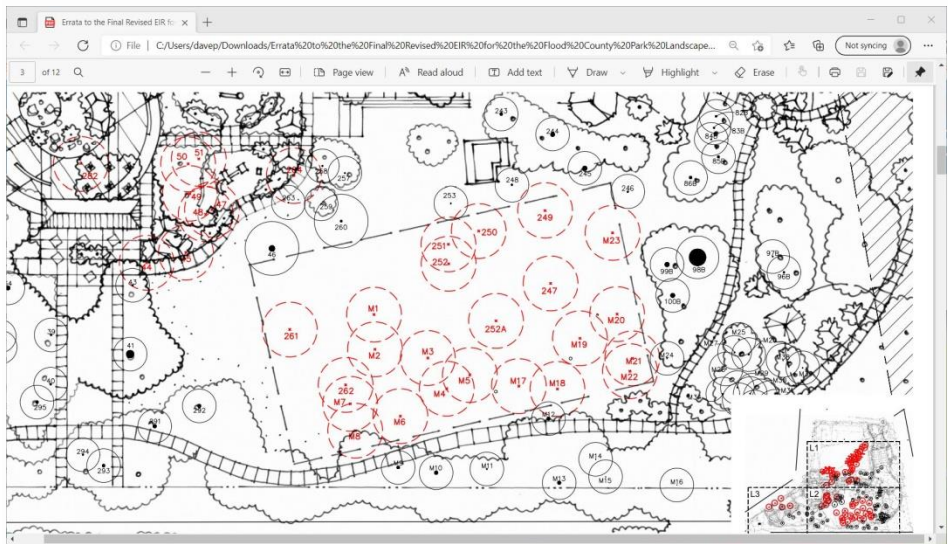
Figure 1. Errata to the Final Revised EIR for the Flood County Park Landscape Plan, p. 2
Secondary ball field is labeled #16

County of San Mateo Parks Department
Flood County Park Landscape Plan

Figure ERR-1 Proposed Landscape Plan



Errata to the Final Revised EIR for the Flood County Park Landscape Plan, p. 87



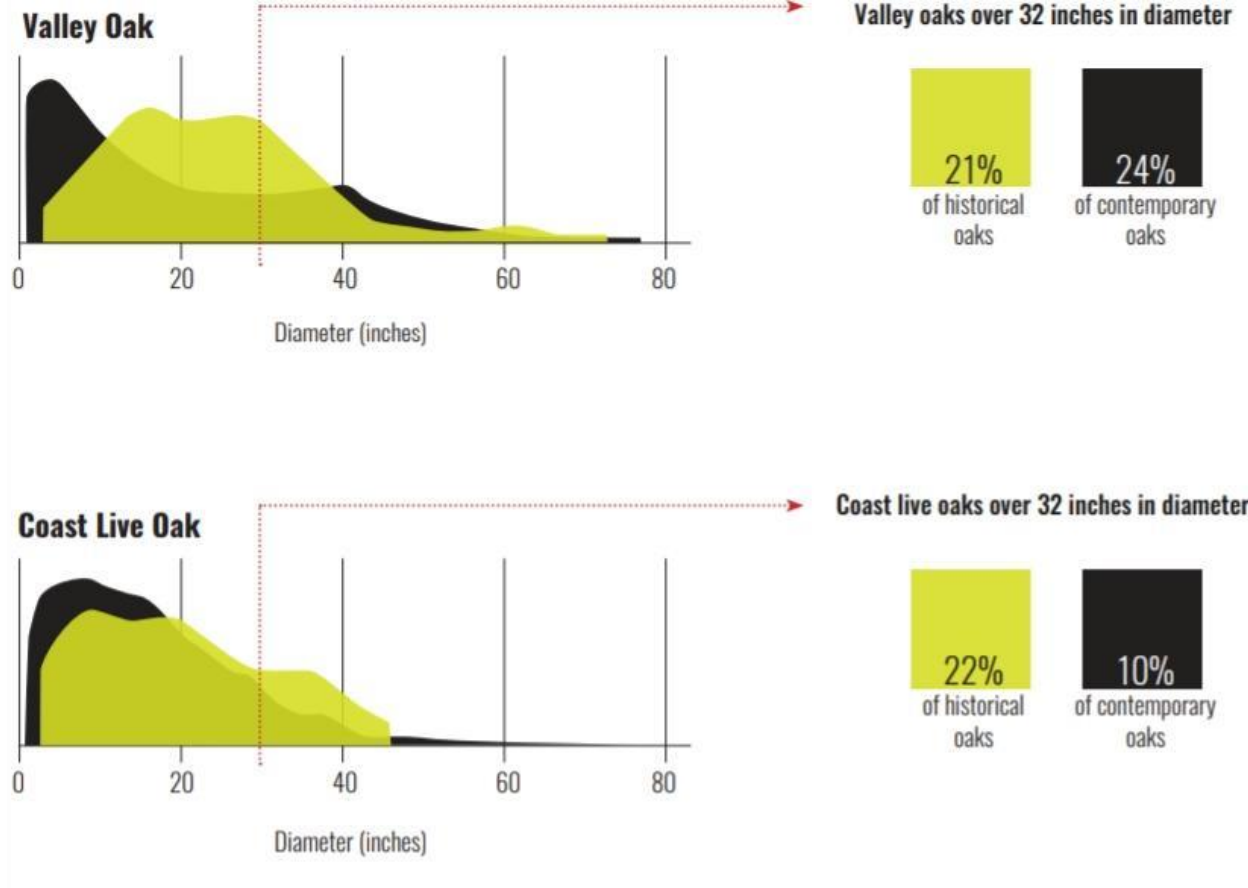
Red denotes trees slated for removal. These are primarily mature and old growth oaks.

sierraclub.org/loma-prieta ~ 3921 East Bayshore Road, Suite 204, Palo Alto, CA 94303



Red X denotes trees slated for removal.

Oak Tree Historic and Contemporary Sizes, "SFEI Re-Oaking" p.31

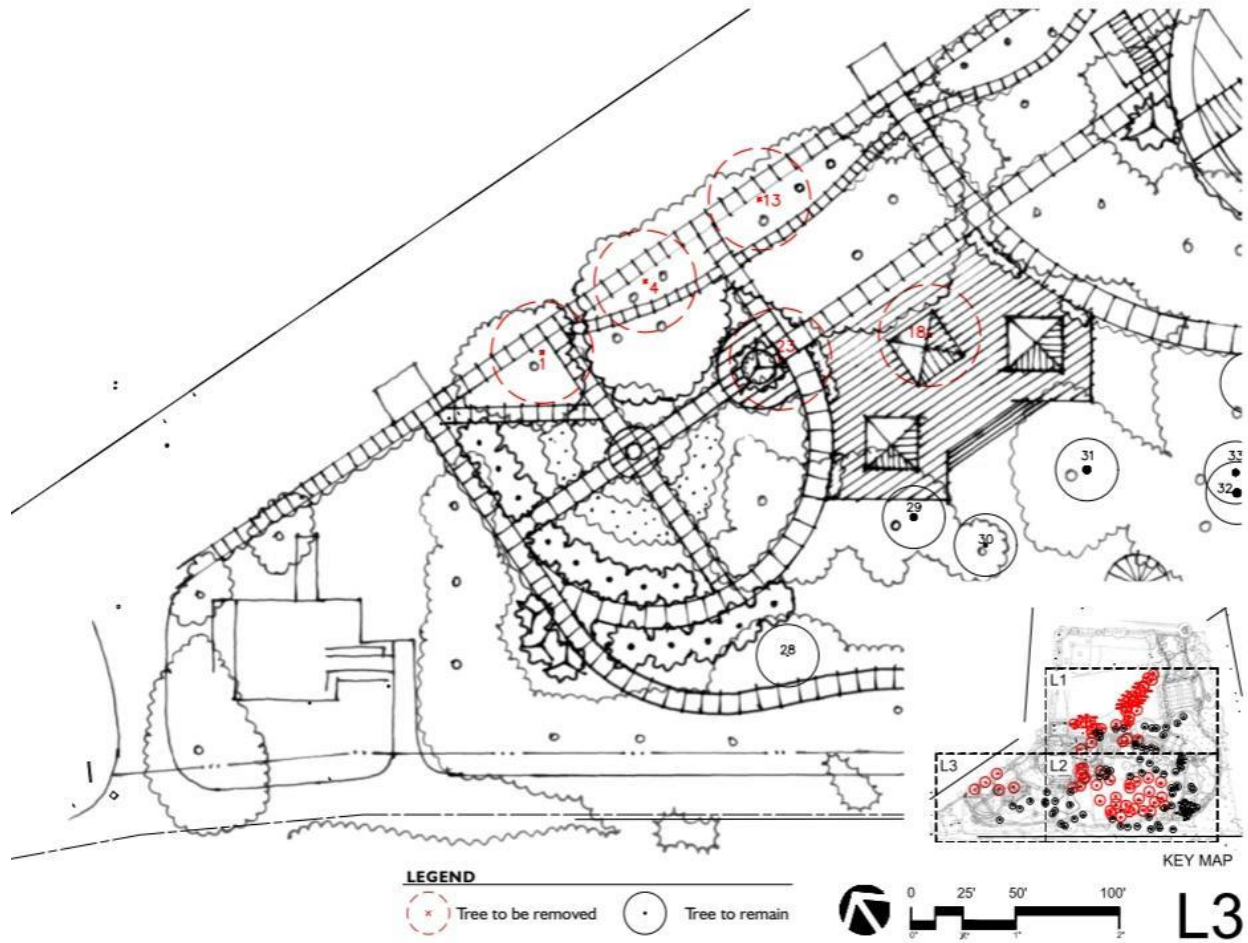


The 32 valley and coast live oak trees slated for removal average a mature 21.3" d.b.h. (diameter at breast height), nearly a 2 ft. diameter trunk measurement. 7 are 30" d.b.h or greater. 3 of these are greater than 40" d.b.h with the largest coast live oak slated for removal at 48" d.b.h, a 4 ft. diameter trunk. Several California bay laurel and other native trees are also among the 72 trees slated for removal.

Errata to the Final Revised EIR for the Flood County Park Landscape Plan, p. 86



Red denotes trees slated for removal. The northern ball fields will require removal of many trees and a couple small oaks but they are not old growth oaks.



Red denotes trees slated for removal. There are several oaks slated for removal on the west end of the park that could be saved by minor adjustments to sidewalks.



Red X denotes trees slated for removal.