



SUNOL CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL

SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

March 8, 2021

California Department of Transportation, District 4
ATTN: Dina El-Tawansy, Director
P.O. Box 23660, MS 8B
111 Grand Ave
Oakland, CA 94612
dina.el-tawansy@dot.ca.gov

Subject: California Department of Transportation projects in Sunol

Dear Dina El-Tawansy,

In January, the California Department of Transportation cut down at least 13 beautiful mature trees, mostly oaks at the intersection of Paloma Way and Pleasanton-Sunol Road. The Sunol Citizens' Advisory Council (CAC) is extremely disappointed with the loss of these trees and with the lack of communication from the California Department of Transportation on their plans to remove these trees.

Sunol considers the mature trees to be an asset to the town and the egregious removal of the trees by California Department of Transportation is unacceptable. One of the 13 trees removed was the heritage oak tree in front of the Sunol Corners Little Market. The removal of this oak tree has left the business, its customers and employees vulnerable to vehicle impact. The tree had provided a barrier from vehicles losing control when making a left-hand turn in the intersection. Of no less importance, the tree also provided shade for customers and character to the Sunol gateway.

While loss of trees at the intersection of Paloma Way and Pleasanton-Sunol Road is unacceptable in itself, the cumulative impact to Sunol of the removal of almost a thousand trees is significant and unmitigated. In the first two months of 2021 alone, Sunol has lost more than 900 trees from California Department of Transportation projects (approximately 350 trees removed in the Alameda Creek bridge project, 100 trees removed for Niles Canyon improvement projects, 343 trees permanently removed and 786 trees temporarily affected in the 680-84 interchange project, and more than 100 trees removed in the 680 express lane construction). Please recognize that highways 680 and 84 are not located just between towns, but travel through the middle of the town of Sunol.

The Sunol CAC asked California Department of Transportation for their specific plans at this intersection and the plans to improve vehicle traffic safety through Sunol. The California Department of Transportation presented the status on November 20, 2019 and on September 16, 2020. Despite the Caltrans web page stating that the design would be completed in Spring 2020,

the presenters told the Sunol CAC that there are no specific designs for a roundabout or signal lights, that they could provide no details to discuss. Both presenters committed to return when they had more information to share and would keep us informed of the Department's plans. The California Department of Transportation did not keep their commitment to Sunol. Now, we have been informed that the California Department of Transportation plans to release a contract this month to construct a signaled intersection.

After the trees were cut down, the California Department of Transportation was invited back twice (February 17 and March 3, 2021) to present the detailed plans and the future plans for the intersection when the replacement bridge across Arroyo de la Laguna is constructed and the intersection is reconfigured. Detailed plans for the signaled intersection were provided on March 3. Sunol again made it clear that they would like a roundabout at the Paloma Way-Pleasanton Sunol Road intersection. At each of these meetings, Sunol residents have felt that their requests have not been taken seriously and that the California Department of Transportation has obfuscated its plans.

We ask that the California Department of Transportation look at its procedures and practices relative to communicating with the community and request better communication with Sunol at critical junction points in these projects. The California Department of Transportation has led Sunol to believe that the Department is committed to developing State highway main streets that invigorate the vitality of local communities and is committed to working with local communities to increase the appeal of walking and bicycling on main streets. Arriving at a shared vision for main streets requires a commitment to collaborative negotiation and shared responsibility.

The California Department of Transportation web page is now stating that the planned environmental document for the Arroyo de La Laguna bridge replacement project will be an Initial Study. Given the fact that archeological artifacts were unearthed at the eastern end of the bridge this month, that the site includes important cultural and historical features, that the bridge is surrounded by heritage sycamore trees, and that the project is of high importance to the residents of Sunol, the Sunol CAC requests that California Department of Transportation conduct a more comprehensive environmental review.

The Sunol CAC requests the following from the California Department of Transportation:

1. Conduct a more comprehensive environmental review. The Sunol CAC requests California Department of Transportation conduct an Environmental Analysis or Environmental Impact Report.
2. Immediately provide an attractive replacement barrier, such as decorative steel bollards, planter boxes, or heavy benches in front of the Little Market to protect the business and its customers and employees from vehicles. A concrete Jersey (K-rail) barrier is not attractive, will redirect pedestrians into traffic, and is not acceptable.
3. Provide written assurance that no more trees will be removed from this intersection and along Paloma Way, especially the trees immediately adjacent to the Water Temple gates, until the final alignment has been presented and a plan has been agreed to by the Sunol CAC.

4. A detailed plan and commitment to replace the trees removed from the intersection with a 2:1 ratio and to mitigate the cumulative effects of the tree removals in Sunol. The replacement trees are to be planted in Sunol.
5. A plan and a commitment to protect and preserve the Sunol Water Temple gates.
6. A written commitment to construct a round-about at the intersection of Paloma Way and Pleasanton-Sunol Road as part of or in conjunction with the Arroyo de La Laguna bridge replacement project.
7. Provide the Sunol CAC the following documents under the California Public Records Act:
 - o Any studies, reports, diagrams, correspondence, presentations and other documents relative to determining the feasibility of a round-about at the intersection of Paloma Way and Pleasanton-Sunol Road.
 - o Any studies, reports, diagrams, presentations and other documents relative to signal light-controlled intersections Paloma and Pleasanton-Sunol Road and at Niles Canyon Road and Main Street.
 - o Any contracts, directions, and diagrams directing the removal of any trees along Paloma Way, Pleasanton-Sunol Road and Niles Canyon Road between 680 and Brightside.
 - o Any correspondence, contracts, diagrams and other documents relative to easements or acquisitions of property along Paloma Way, Pleasanton-Sunol Road, and Niles Canyon between 680 and Brightside.

We request a waiver of the reproduction fee. Please send the documents within 10-days to the following address:

Sunol Citizen Advisory Council
C/o District 2, Alameda County Board of Supervisors
1221 Oak Street Suite 536
Oakland, CA 94612

Thank you for your attention to this important item to the Town of Sunol. We hope the California Department of Transportation will work with our community to fully realize its Main Street California Guide.

Sincerely,



Connie De Grange
Chair, Sunol Citizens' Advisory Council

Attachment: Photos of Paloma Way and Pleasanton-Sunol Road Intersection

cc: Assembly Member Bill Quirk, 20th Assembly District

Supervisor David Haubert, District 1
Supervisor Richard Valle, District 2
Jack Siau, California Department of Transportation
Brian Gassner, California Department of Transportation
Tim Ramirez, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
Each Member, Sunol Citizens Advisory Council
Sunol Corners Little Market