

Creekside Park Area: Possibilities for flood protection in the face of rising sea levels

The low-lying Creekside Park neighborhood is prone to flooding (and so designated on FEMA flood maps). The area is a former marsh, where a meandering creek and broad wetland formerly filtered runoff from a wide area to the adjacent Bay. Tides rise to today's Santa Clara Avenue. Fill and natural hills surround the neighborhood with higher land on all sides. Fill also forced the creek into two narrow artificial channels, which feed undersized openings at Pierce Street. These openings have little freeboard at today's highest tides.

Frequent flooding was the reason this area was long known as "no man's land," unwanted by either El Cerrito or Richmond. The Creekside Park ponds built in 1969 helped. **But flooding, usually minor, remains routine when storms and high tides coincide.** Friends of Five Creeks' removal of the channel-choking evergreen thornless blackberries in the main, south channel helped but did not remove all risk.

The city has recently recognized the threat, cutting trees and shrubbery along the main, south, channel. El Cerrito also seems to have recognized that the concrete channel west of Belmont, which feeds the north channel, is partly in the City of El Cerrito.

Rising sea levels will increase the threat. There also is increased awareness of California's unstable climate, including atmospheric rivers and superstorms, as well as recent flood disasters elsewhere. **All this calls for a coordinated, hydrologically sophisticated approach to adaptation and preparedness for this vulnerable area.**

Possibilities include:

- re-working of the flood control ponds (part of the Urban Greening Plan),
- retention in the Central Park area,
- thoughtful greening of the concrete channel edging Belmont (with development in Richmond),
- small local rain gardens,
- better connections among the various channels, and
- enlarged culverts under Pierce.

Although the greatest risk probably is to El Cerrito, Richmond and Albany have reasons to join in a coordinated approach. Floods could undermine the steep rubble-fill banks that support Albany's fire road. Businesses in Richmond have flooded in the past.

Money for this kind of coordinated planning is likely to become available with efforts to adapt to sea-level rise. Conversely, it seems unlikely that grants would be available for efforts such as a trail likely to be flooded, or naturalizing the Creekside Park ponds without dealing with future flood risk.

This kind of coordinated planning is one of the projects in Contra Costa County's draft stormwater plan. Friends of Five Creeks is nominating it as part of the [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's San Francisco Bay Coastal Resilience Assessment](#). (There is an outside chance of some planning money through this initiative) There will be more opportunities. **We hope that all departments will be on the lookout for possibilities and incorporate this important challenge into planning.**

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