

Public Comment 8/14/24 Environmental Commission

Alice Mansell <alice@mansell.com>

Wed 8/14/2024 1:59 PM

To:Public Comment - EC <ECpubliccomment@losaltosca.gov>

I am a signatory to the NE Grove permit appeal to prevent destruction of 30% of the historic orchard resource.

The reason The Crier had news last week of LALE being forced to pay for a historian was a LALE board member told me that in person right after the Library Commission meeting August 1. That hire is part of a mandatory CEQA process for impacts on a historic resource which was not begun until a tolling agreement forced City staff to insist on it. But, City staff has not yet made clear if that historian's work will be limited in scope to just the next proposed LALE library courtyard footprint or the whole historic Orchard resource. Regardless, any historic review as part of any CEQA process affecting the orchard should at minimum go for public review to both the Historic and Environmental commissions.

To date, as far as I know from City Hall the only CEQA project it has in process (not exempt from public review negative declarations for its projects with ground broken now at the Civic Center) for which it will do a full public environmental review is an Adobe Creek project. (See attachment for City's CEQA negative declaration for the EOC work and its tree statement therein and the dates.) No public CEQA process review so far for the \$5+M work being done now on the LACY conversion (\$4.5M), and EOC generator (approx. \$800K) with also Los Altos Community Center EOC interior upgrades and that project's extensive newly trenched utility lines. Nor any public discussions on City staff's "future" plans to expand the Police Department building and install new utility lines as some of its justifications to bulldoze 30% of the orchard. I urge the Commissioners to study a few pages each from the attached EOC and LACY building plans which I was told by City staff in June 2024 were copyrighted and thus not available for any public review. I obtained them in July by a public records request. Neither project had any public review for the "best use" of the open lands of each project now removing from public access such as land for the new and tall fenced private patio for the new City Managers' office to the tall fenced EOC generator and its fuel tank, nor the removal of two protected 50+" diameter oaks for the generator's new drainage field and part of the Dog Park. Trees removed after the attached CEQA exemption filing.

To date staff has only allowed the PRA&C in June 2024 and Council in July 2024 to discuss the Dog Park's removal of Library parking spaces but not to vote on which staff proposal each body prefers. Staff said at the June PRA&C meeting they prefer parking mitigation to include removing all the Police Department lawn and use some orchard lands by the Library and Police Department to pave over for parking as well as having new "staff reserved" parking spaces next to their new private offices at LACY.

How City staff calculate the size of a project to avoid all public review of their designs needs your input. LACY's "exterior" work does not count it says because staff deems it all to be "flat work" despite new concrete ADA ramps, new tall privacy fences, and a large new tall fenced utility yard. Staff deemed all interior work for the EOC at Los Altos Community Center to be exempt from that project's square footage as well as all its new utility line trenches. They rely on old staff discretionary "expert" powers to interpret laws, how to do math, and even how to define the word "flat."

Staff also told me in June 2024 all commissioners in the City have for LACY or EOC projects no "purview" to review their math or law interpretations, no power even to discuss those plans unless in their commissions'

work plans (which depend a great deal on staff time "availability") or at the express "behest" of City Council. How staff self-permitted and broke ground in May on its LACY remodeling without any prior public discussion at any commission of that building's "best" public use is astounding.

Now staff wants to remove more than 30% of the orchard and spend over \$6M on the LACY remodeling, new EOC, and the Dog Park (a \$1M project)with mitigation for its lost Library parking spaces - while also accepting approximately \$1M from LALE for a new Library courtyard encroaching into the historic orchard. How all that together does not affect the "environment" of Los Altos and needs no review by the Environmental Commission is mind boggling.

I ask the Environmental Commission to have a special session to discuss why City staff has not as required by California law a public review of all the "environmentally sensitive" impacts on our historic orchard resource given the \$8M of new buildings and plans for our Civic Center. Each of those projects must have public design review discussions before permits are issued, including a full historic survey and review of that historic resources, all as part of the mandatory CEQA process.

Alice Mansell
Los Altos, California

CEQA Exempt Los Altos for Emergency Ops Center ...

Commission Hillview Dog Park PPT 24.06.18 reduce...

EOC 50"+ trees Screenshot 2024-08-02 at 9.10.47 P...

EOC Approved Plan Set (1).pdf

LAYC Approved Plan set.pdf