

MEMORANDUM



TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: Karen Pinkos, City Manager
DATE: March 5, 2021
SUBJECT: City Manager's Update

On March 13, 2020, the City Council of the City of El Cerrito declared a local emergency due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. It is hard to believe that we are approaching that anniversary. Our lives have changed so much. There has been resilience and compassion in our community, and there has also been hardship and loss. We've all adapted, and yet we've all struggled. As we come up on one year under this crisis, I want to especially acknowledge all the lives that have been lost to this pandemic. El Cerrito has lost ten lives this past year, and we grieve for their families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. I would dare say most of us have lost someone in our own lives or know of someone who suffered a loss or became ill due to this awful virus. My heart goes out to all those who have had to deal with sorrow and sadness. I hope that you are able to find comfort and light in knowing that your El Cerrito community is behind you.

Our City team has also suffered a recent loss, one that has also been felt throughout the community. The City Council meeting of March 2, 2021 was adjourned in memory of Maria Sanders, a longtime employee of the City of El Cerrito, who passed away on February 27, 2021 after a long and brave battle with cancer. Since 2009, Maria was a big part of the City of El Cerrito in leading our residents, businesses, and City employees toward being an environmentally sustainable, resilient and healthy community. She began with the City as an Environmental Analyst and eventually became the Operations and Environmental Services Manager. Maria expertly and tirelessly led efforts in advancing climate protection policy and programs for the City, including developing the City's Climate Action Plan, overseeing the City's first municipal solar project on some of our City buildings, and implemented comprehensive lighting retrofits in all City buildings and the Ohlone Greenway. She also managed municipal energy efficiency and clean energy projects, worked on improving the maintenance of public landscapes, parks, natural areas, facilities and infrastructure, and sustained integrated waste and recycling services. But more than that, Maria was a wonderful person and devoted friend. She was incredibly smart and talented, and respected and valued co-worker. Maria's work ethic, creative problem solving, attention to detail, and positive interactions with co-workers, residents, and the public have been key to the City being known as an environmentally focused and forward-thinking community.

Maria made the Public Works Department and the entire City team a better organization, and she made El Cerrito a better place to live. Her El Cerrito family is devastated by her loss, and we will miss Maria terribly. For those of you who knew her and wish to honor Maria, you may consider donating to Hopalong Animal Rescue in her name:

<https://www.hopalong.org/donate/>.

Hopalong had a challenging year taking in injured and orphaned animals from the west coast wildfires in California, Oregon, and Nevada, and just this past Christmas, Maria donated her own car to Hopalong. The entire El Cerrito family offers our sincerest condolences to Maria's

husband Dan and her family, friends, co-workers, and all those who knew her and loved her. May we all seek to honor Maria's memory by cherishing the good times we have with each other and, like Maria, seek every opportunity to make our world a better place.

As ever, please stay safe, wear a mask, and take care of yourselves and each other.

Karen Pinkos
City Manager



COVID-19 UPDATES

COVID-19 Information & Vaccine Availability

Contra Costa County remains in the Purple Tier. Health guidelines regarding physical distancing and use of face coverings outside the home still remain in effect, as do occupancy caps for indoor businesses and requirements limiting close-contact gatherings of people from different households. Contra Costa County is currently vaccinating individuals in Phase 1B. This includes people over the age of 65, and essential workers in emergency services, agriculture/food and education/childcare.

For more information about how to get vaccinated, please visit:

<https://www.coronavirus.cchealth.org/get-vaccinated> or call 833-829-2626 between 8am to 8pm seven days a week.

Resources

- Mass Quarantine Order exempts quarantine for those who have been fully vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine (2/25/21): https://813dcad3-2b07-4f3f-a25e-23c48c566922.filesusr.com/ugd/84606e_162ac8248db442b1b767579271d85fe7.pdf
- Contra Costa Extends COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility to Essential Workers (2/18/21): <https://cchealth.org/press-releases/2021/0218-COVID-19-Vaccine-Eligibility-to-Essential-Workers.php>
- COVID-19 Vaccine Dashboard: <https://www.coronavirus.cchealth.org/vaccine-dashboard>

For up-to-date information from Contra Costa Health Services, please visit:

<https://www.coronavirus.cchealth.org>

CITY CLERK

Recent City Council Meeting Highlights

[February 16, 2021 \(Regular Meeting\)](#)

1. *Congratulations* to El Cerrito Police Department Professional Staff Member of the Year **Elizabeth Lopez** and to the Office of the Year **Corporal Stephanie Ware!**
2. Received the [FY 19/20 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report \(CAFR\)](#) along with a presentation from the City's independent Auditor.

3. Received an update on City revenues and expenditures for the first half of FY20/21. Staff presented options to achieve the targeted \$664,000 fund balance as originally adopted in the budget and an alternate scenario with \$1 million in reductions across all departments. **Action:** Authorized amendments to the FY20/21 Budget to achieve \$664,000 fund balance.

[March 2, 2021 \(Regular Meeting\)](#)

- *Thanks* to outgoing Poet Laureate Dani Gabriel and *Congratulations* to the City's new Poet Laureate, Evelyn Mitchell!
- Received presentations on the City's CalPERS Retirement Plan, Year one Rental Registry Data, and Tenant Protections Task Force Recommendations.
- Received an update on FY20/21 General Fund Budget through January 2021.

Upcoming City Council Meeting(s)

Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at 7:00 pm

- 5-Year Budget Forecast

Tuesday, April 6, 2021 at 7:00 pm

City Council meetings are held virtually using Zoom Webinar. Agenda materials and public comment instructions are available online at www.el-cerrito.org/CouncilMeetingMaterials as well as video archives. For more information, please contact the City Clerk at cityclerk@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or (510) 215-4305.

NEW Online Application for Boards, Commissions & Committees

In an ongoing effort to create efficiencies and increase paperless solutions, the City Clerk has implemented a new electronic form to submit interest in serving on a City Board, Commission or Committee (Advisory Bodies.) El Cerrito residents can now complete and submit the form online at www.el-cerrito.org/CommissionsApplication. Accessibility needs may be addressed by contacting the City Clerk at cityclerk@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or (510) 215-4305.

Current Vacancies on Boards, Commissions & Committees

Vacancies arise when a member of an Advisory Body resigns, no longer meets the requirements to serve, or when sufficient applications are not received to fill term expirations. The City Clerk's office is currently seeking interested applicants for several vacancies including Arts & Culture Commission, Economic Development Committee, Human Relations Commission, and Urban Forest Committee. A full list of current vacancies is available [online](#). Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis and will be held for future vacancies if none exist at the time the application is received.



For more information about Advisory Bodies, please visit www.el-cerrito.org/Commissions or contact the City Clerk at cityclerk@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or (510) 215-4305.

CITY MANAGEMENT

Evelyn Mitchell Selected as El Cerrito Poet Laureate

At the March 2 City Council Meeting, El Cerrito resident Evelyn Mitchell was introduced as El Cerrito's Poet Laureate through December 2022. Born and Raised in El Cerrito, Evelyn is an active committee member of the El Cerrito Martin Luther King, Jr. Day March and Rally and the El Cerrito NAACP Branch. In October 2015, the Arts and Culture Commission established the Poet Laureate Program funded by the City's Art in Public Places Program. Poet Laureate was established create and lead activities that will raise the status of poetry in the everyday consciousness of El Cerrito residents and inspire writing and performances of poetry among all age groups. To learn more about Evelyn, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/y3jnv62e>.

El Cerrito Library Signage Gets a Refresh



With support from the Arts and Culture Commission, signage on the El Cerrito Library building has been refreshed at 6510 Stockton Avenue! A large thank you to Library Manager Heidi Goldstein for leading this effort. The library is currently open for Front Door Service only. Visit www.ccclib.org for more information. To access information about upcoming events at the El Cerrito library, visit: <https://ccclib.org/location/el-cerrito-front-door-service-only-events/>

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Cannabis Operating Permit Public Meeting

On March 9 at 5:00pm, the City will host a public meeting regarding an application for a Cannabis Operating Permit at 10764-10770 San Pablo Avenue. The City Manager intends to take action on the Cannabis Operating Permit on or after March 15, 2021. Comments may be submitted up to March 15, 2021. The purpose of this public meeting is to present information regarding the proposed business and receive comments. The application materials and information about the permit process are available here: www.el-cerrito.org/cannabis.

San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Update Public Meeting

On March 31 at 7:00 pm, the City will hold a Special Joint Meeting of the Planning Commission and Design Review Board to discuss the *San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan* update. Information on the meeting can be found here: <https://www.el-cerrito.org/calendar.aspx?EID=6425> At this meeting, the Planning Commission and Design Review Board will review focused areas within the scope for the *Specific Plan* update that has previously been reviewed by the Planning

Commission, Design Review Board, and City Council. For information on previous *Specific Plan* update meetings please visit: www.el-cerrito.org/SPASPCurrent

Affordable Housing Waitlist Opportunities



The Housing Authority of the County of Contra Costa will be opening the Project Based Voucher Waiting List for one property located in the City of Richmond. This opening is from 10am on March 22 to 4 pm on April 1. The opening will only be an electronic format and no paper applications will be available. Please visit www.contracostahousing.org or download the flyer in [English](#) or [Spanish](#). [March 2021 Affordable Housing Opportunities](#) – All Bay Area Counties (Courtesy of [Openhouse](#))

FIRE

Fire Incident Report

The Fire Department responded to 270 calls in the month of February including 21 fires, 98 medical emergencies and 61 calls for assistance. There have been a total of 570 incidents for 2021.

Vegetation Management

Seasonal rainfall for the City so far is less than 10” with a bleak forecast in the future. Fuel moistures are already extremely low and while the annual grasses may still be green, they will be drying out sooner than normal. The Fire Department will be starting the annual vegetation inspection process earlier than normal this year to try and beat the potential critical time period. We are urging residents to cut weeds, trim bushes, and prune up limbs to develop a defensible space around their homes and property. Early spring cleanup of residents property will make the Fire Department’s job easier and help everyone avoid inspection fees and abatement costs. Vegetation Management Information is available at the Department’s website at: <http://www.el-cerrito.org/402/Vegetation-Management>.

Fire Agency Operated COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics

The Fire Department in conjunction with all the Contra Costa County fire agencies continue to work closely with law enforcement agencies, County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and the County Office of Emergency Services (OES to support) County Health Services with fire-service-hosted public vaccination clinics throughout the County. These drive through clinics are continuing to be held in the West County in the parking lot of the Valley Bible Church on Willow Avenue in Hercules. Additional clinics are being held at Los Medanos College in Brentwood and Bishop Ranch parking structure in San Ramon. The Fire Department is working with the County and State OES as well as FEMA to obtain reimbursement for the costs of staffing these clinics.

POLICE

Use for Force Options

During 2020, the Police Department began evaluating additional options for securing combative subjects. Department Staff identified a promising product known as Bola Wrap. The Bola Wrap is a handheld restraint device that deploys an eight foot Kevlar tether to momentarily disable a subject. The device has been deployed at some agencies in Contra Costa County and in our neighboring city, Albany. Early results from those agencies appear very positive. The device has helped agencies safely restrain knife wielding subjects without resorting to significant uses of force.

The Department is sending some instructors to train in the use of the device and has purchased several devices for evaluation. If the Department decides to deploy the devices on the street, they will add another option to help officers safely restrain violent subjects.

For community members that are interested in reading about the product from the manufacturer, additional information can be found at www.wrap.com.

PUBLIC WORKS

Carlson Boulevard and San Diego Street Crosswalk Improvements Project

The Carlson Boulevard and San Diego Street Crosswalk Improvements Project was advertised for construction bids on January 26 with bid opening occurring on February 23. Engineering staff anticipates requesting that the City Council award the construction contract to the lowest responsive and responsive bidder at the March 16 regular meeting.

The project implements pedestrian improvements identified in the City Council adopted El Cerrito Active Transportation Plan (ATP) (www.el-cerrito.org/ATP) specifically the installation of rapid rectangular flashing beacons and associated equipment in the median and roadside at the busy intersection of Carlson Boulevard and San Diego Street. The curb ramps and median noses at the intersection were reconstructed in 2019 to provide clear and accessible paths of travel.

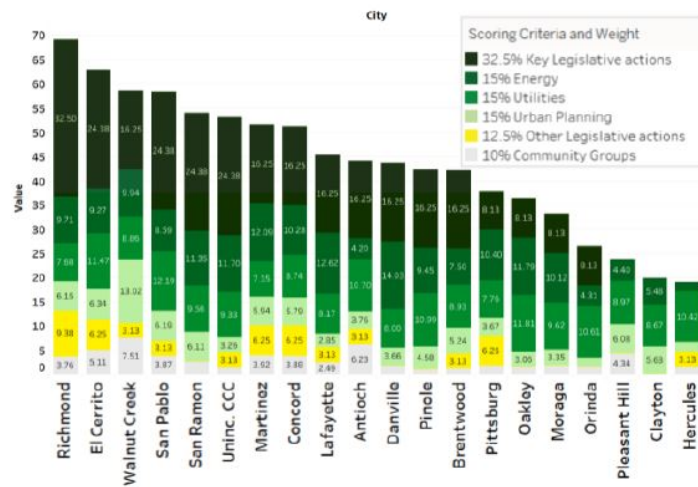
The improvements at this intersection are part of the Cerrito Creek Trail/ BART to Bay Bicycle and Pedestrian Route in the ATP, which is in the highest priority category in the ATP. The project will enhance an existing high-visibility crosswalk on one of the busiest streets in the City. Carlson Boulevard is a multi-lane major arterial with Class II bike lanes connecting to the neighboring City of Richmond. San Diego Avenue is a local residential street that provides direct pedestrian and vehicular access to the Pacific East Mall, a regional shopping center located in Richmond that attracts many visitors, access to the weekly Off the Grid food truck event held on Wednesday evenings, and serves a high-density residential area.

The project is largely funded by a Transportation Development Act Article 3 Pedestrian and Bicycle Project grant funding in the amount of \$80,000 with additional funding from SB 1 Local Streets and Roads Program. Project updates including construction schedule will be provided in future City Manager's Update report. If you have any questions about the project, please

contact Ana Bernardes, Engineering Manager, at abernardes@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

El Cerrito Ranks 2nd in Contra Costa County Climate Report Card

A new report and [Climate Report Card](#), released this month, tracks the progress of Contra Costa County communities and the steps they've, the Report Cards are a reminder for community leaders and residents of the hard work we're collectively doing to address climate change, while also encouraging residents and communities to do more. The City of El Cerrito ranked 2nd on the Report Card, with the highest share of participation in the MCE Deep Green program which provides



100% renewable energy, and for the City's all-around leadership on environmental issues ranging from waste reduction to tree protection. El Cerrito also received recognition as a jurisdiction that has already declared a Climate Emergency. Learn more about the new Report Card and the City of El Cerrito's progress at: <https://cccclimateleaders.org/report-card/>. [Contra Costa County Climate Leaders](#), the Report Cards are a reminder for community leaders and residents of the hard work we're collectively doing to address climate change, while also encouraging residents and communities to do more. The City of El Cerrito ranked 2nd on the Report Card, with the highest share of participation in the MCE Deep Green program which provides 100% renewable energy, and for the City's all-around leadership on environmental issues ranging from waste reduction to tree protection. El Cerrito also received recognition as a jurisdiction that has already declared a Climate Emergency. Learn more about the new Report Card and the City of El Cerrito's progress at: <https://cccclimateleaders.org/report-card/>.

Take the East Bay Sanitary Customer Survey!



East Bay Sanitary (EBS) is the City of El Cerrito's franchised hauler, collecting garbage and green waste from El Cerrito residents and businesses. EBS is conducting a survey intended to collect feedback from customers on the collection services, customer services, and programs they offer in the City of El Cerrito. Please take this survey to provide valuable input and feedback to EBS and the City. Also note, collection of recycling is completed by City of El Cerrito Staff and this survey strictly focuses on the services provided by EBS. [Click here](#) to take the survey and provide your input!

Arbor Week is March 7-14

On Sunday, March 7, at 1:30pm, join the Urban Forest Committee (UFC) in kicking off Arbor Week 2021! The El Cerrito Garden Club will host a virtual "Ask the Arborist" Q & A session with

the El Cerrito City Arborist Stephen Prée. Participants will learn about the City's Public Tree and Shrub Ordinance and get answers to questions regarding tree care and tree culture. Pre-registration is required at [this link](#). After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. During Arbor Week, the UFC will promote a new Instagram account created by community members to feature local trees, visit @ElCerritoTrees on Instagram, or tag your own using #ectrees.

Baxter Creek Gateway Work Party



On Sunday, March 7, from 10:00am to 12:00pm join City staff and other volunteers at Baxter Creek Gateway Park to clean and enhance this jewel on the Ohlone Greenway. This recurring event is back and moving to the first Sunday of each month. The work will include litter removal, invasive plant removal and native plant care. Attendance is limited and masks and social distancing are required. All ages are welcome (under 18 with guardian). All participants must complete a Volunteer Registration Form before working.

Please wear long sleeves, long pants, and closed-toe shoes. You may also want to bring a water bottle to use while you are working. Bring your own work gloves, the City will provide tools and sanitizer, and please note that there are no bathrooms at the park. Volunteers will meet at 10am at Conlon Ave. and the Ohlone Greenway. During the pandemic, RSVP is required to (510) 559-7685 or green@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

Free Compost Giveaway for El Cerrito Residents and Businesses

Beginning Saturday, March 20, compost will be available free to El Cerrito residents and businesses at the El Cerrito Recycling + Environmental Resource Center, while supplies last. When visiting, please bring proof of residency. There is a limit of five cubic feet of compost per El Cerrito household/business and during the pandemic, customers are asked to please bring their own containers and a shovel. **Also note, face masks are required at all times when visiting the Recycling Center and users should socially distance with a six foot minimum whenever possible.** If you have any questions about the compost giveaway or other environmental programs, please contact the City at greenassistant@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or by phone at (510) 215-4350.

Hidden in Plain Sight – What is Green Infrastructure?

You've probably walked past Green Infrastructure and didn't even realize it! "Green infrastructure" is a term for nature inspired methods of managing stormwater. Things like rain barrels, rain gardens and bioswales are all considered green infrastructure, and they're found all over our beautiful county. Not only does green infrastructure manage stormwater, but it also provides other environmental benefits by reducing smog, improving air quality, and improving habitats for local critters!



What Does Green Infrastructure Do?

Green infrastructure reduces and treats stormwater at the source. When it rains, any water that hits the ground is called “stormwater” – stormwater runs across the roads, yards and urban areas (collecting pollutants as it goes) and travels into the storm drain system, a network of pipes that funnels extra water into nearby water bodies. Since stormwater isn’t treated, all those pollutants picked up along the way travel into the local waters. That’s where green infrastructure comes in! Nature-inspired management methods can reduce the amount of stormwater traveling into local water bodies and filter out some of pollutants traveling with it.

What Does Green Infrastructure Look Like?

Have you ever seen or heard of a rain garden? That’s green infrastructure! Rain gardens are vegetated areas of grasses and other plants that collect and absorb stormwater runoff. Since excess water is absorbed into the ground of the raingarden, less polluted runoff is sent into our local waters. Other forms of green infrastructure you may have seen are things like rain barrels, which collect excess rainwater for later use, or bioswales, which transport stormwater from one area to another while filtering out pollutants. Some forms of Green Infrastructure blend right into the urban environment, like permeable pavements and green parking lots. Learn all about them at <https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/what-green-infrastructure#bioswales>.

How Does Green Infrastructure Impact Our Environment?

Since many forms of green infrastructure are nature-inspired, they have other environmental benefits besides stormwater management! Rain gardens and bioswales are vegetation based – they improve air quality by absorbing and filtering particulate matter that may be in the air. While rain gardens and bioswales often aren’t very big, they can be home to a variety of insects, birds and small amphibians. Keep an eye out for a friendly frog the next time you see a rain garden!

Green infrastructure is everywhere, often hidden in plain sight. But it can only do so much when it comes to protecting our local water quality. You do your part to keep our creeks and Bays clean and free flowing by picking up litter and pet waste and using eco-friendly yard products. Learn more about stormwater, green infrastructure and reducing pollutants at www.ccleanwater.org.

RECREATION

Spring Break Camp and Session 5 Childcare Registration

We have reached the grand finale to a year of looking at childcare in a whole new light. The fifth and final session of the 2020-21 school year youth programs will run from April 12-June 3. Enrollment starts with priority registration for currently enrolled families beginning on Monday, March 8. Registration will open to new families beginning on Wednesday, March 10. Families wanting to enroll in Spring Break Camp will have the option to sign up for camp within their pod if there is enough interest. Decisions will be made for each pod based on enrollment on

Monday, March 15. Additionally, with Session 5 will come a major program policy update: students will be allowed to attend their in-person school cohort in addition to their Recreation care pod.

Summer Camp 2021 Registration Coming Soon!

Summer Camp 2021 registration begins Monday, March 29 at 8:00am.

Registration will be online only at www.el-cerrito.org/onlinereg. Similar to

the summer 2020 program, the Department will continue with their pod model that prioritizes good hygiene, social distancing and stable cohorts that run for three weeks at a time to help prevent and contain potential viral spread. Three camp sessions will run from June 14 through August 12, and a variety of programs will be offered including half-day and full-day City-run and Specialty options. Families can stay up to date by visiting the camp webpage at www.el-cerrito.org/summercamp. Information will be added to this page as it becomes available including the camp schedule, parent handbook, and FAQ.



Increased Youth Scholarship Assistance

During the COVID-19 Pandemic the City's scholarship criteria has been temporarily changed to increase the number of scholarships granted, allowing families and children to receive additional financial assistance. Scholarships are offered in the form of a reduced payment for recreational camps, classes, programs and childcare. For more information and application please visit www.el-cerrito.org/scholarship.