The Hillside Natural Area—El Cerrito’s Urban Wilderness

Right in the middle of El Cerrito, in an area that includes the recycling center, is the Hillside Natural Area (HNA)—an urban wilderness of native plants, natural environments, and amazing views. The approximately 102-acre area is home to deer, gray fox, opossum, raccoons, and rabbits—and popular with hikers and dog walkers, too. Unfortunately, this beauty is also a high fire risk, and makes devastating fire loss a serious possibility for our City.

Managing the high fire risk is a top priority for the Fire Department. Accordingly, it maintains a year-round vegetation management and fuel reduction program. The Department primarily hires outside contractors for maintenance and removal of brush, Scotch broom, and eucalyptus sprout, although staff and volunteers play a critically important role, too. Friends of Five Creeks and their leader, Susan Schwartz, is one such example. They have done an outstanding job of cutting and pulling Scotch broom throughout the HNA.

In 1994, El Cerrito created the Hillside Natural Area Fire Hazard Reduction Plan. While developing this plan, the City went through an environmental review process to assess the impacts of fire reduction actions, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act. The plan has held up well over the years but regulations have changed and the HNA has also increased in size and popularity. The City has realized it must overhaul its existing plans for the area in response to the needs of diverse stakeholders such as the Friends of Five Creeks, the El Cerrito Trail Trekkers, the El Cerrito Mountain Bike Team, other active community groups, individual visitors, and the owners of surrounding homes.

Funding is currently unavailable for an updated plan, so the City is continuing to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire by using existing plans as a guide for vegetation management. General fund support, grants, and cost shares have underwritten this essential work so far. Additionally, internal and external partnerships have successfully expanded fire reduction efforts. The Public Works Department works closely with the Fire Department to identify and remove standing dead and dying trees, and they continue to investigate opportunities to partner with other agencies. Currently, the Fire Department is in discussions with PG&E to expand vegetation management in the PG&E right-of-way area on Moeser Lane.

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The City of El Cerrito serves, leads and supports our diverse and transit-rich community by providing exemplary and innovative services, public places and infrastructure, ensuring public safety and creating an economically and environmentally sustainable future.
UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, December 5
OUT LOUD AT OFF THE GRID
Join City Poet Laureate Dani Gabriel for Out Loud at Off the Grid. Hear featured poet Rohan DaCosta and participate in an open mic and writing activities. All ages encouraged to participate! No experience necessary. For more information, visit www.el-cerrito.org/poetlaureate.
When: 5–8 p.m.
Where: 6159 Fairmount Ave.

Saturday, December 8
PANCAKE BREAKFAST
and TOY DRIVE
Enjoy a pancake breakfast, a visit from Santa, and a special performance by Puppet Art Theater Co. The event raises money for the David Hunter Memorial Scholarship Fund, and the toys and books donated at the event support the El Cerrito Fire Department Toy Drive. To purchase tickets, contact the Recreation Department at 559-7000 or go online to www.el-cerrito.org/recreation.
When: 9–11 a.m.
Where: El Cerrito Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane

Saturday, December 15
to Wednesday, December 26
SHADI HOLIDAY DISPLAY
The Shadi Holiday Display is a beloved tradition in El Cerrito. See the elaborate handmade pieces that have been delighting generations for more than 65 years! The Shadi Holiday Display is hosted by the Shadi Display Committee and the El Cerrito Community Foundation.
When: Nightly, 5–10 p.m.
Where: 7501 Moeser Lane

Wednesday to Friday, December 26–28
Wednesday to Friday, January 2–4
HOLIDAY BREAK CAMP
Open to students in grades K–6. Campers will enjoy holiday activities, gift projects, and more. For more details and registration information, contact the Recreation Department at 559-7000 or go online to www.el-cerrito.org/recreation.
When: 7 a.m.–6 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane

Sunday, January 20
CRACKING THE CODES:
THE SYSTEM OF RACIAL INEQUALITY
Screening of a new documentary film by Shakti Butler
This year’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Day activities include a documentary and community conversation.
When: 4 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito High School
Performing Arts Theatre
540 Ashbury Ave.

Monday, January 21
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. HOLIDAY
City offices, including City Hall, the Recreation Department office, and the Recycling Center, will be closed. Curbside collection of recycling, green waste, and garbage will take place on their scheduled days.

Monday, January 21
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. RALLY & PARADE
Join El Cerrito’s annual Martin Luther King, Jr. rally and parade. See the details on page 5 then make a plan to attend and enjoy the celebration.

Saturday, January 26
CRAB FEED
Join your friends and family to enjoy generous servings of fresh crab along with salad, bread, pasta, and dessert. Proceeds benefit the David Hunter Memorial Scholarship Fund. $50 per ticket. Please call the Recreation Department at 559-7000 for more information.
When: 5 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane
Saturday, February 2
FAMILY SWEETHEART DANCE
Put on your dancing shoes and bring your little someone special to the Family Sweetheart Dance! Open to all ages. Dancing, refreshments, and photo booth included. Tickets are $20 for a family of four or $6 per person. For more information or to purchase tickets, contact the Recreation Department at 559-7000 or go online to www.el-cerrito.org/recreation.
When: 6–8 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane

Saturday, February 9
rECexpo SUMMER CAMP FAIR
Come get a sneak peak of the 2019 Summer Camps offered by the El Cerrito Recreation Department. Receive a 10% discount if you register that day! Camp counselors and instructors will be at the fair to show you firsthand what their camps have to offer. Plan your summer early and save!
When: 10 a.m.–1 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane

Monday, February 18
PRESIDENTS DAY HOLIDAY
City offices, including City Hall, the Recreation Department office, and the Recycling Center, will be closed. Curbside collection of recycling, green waste, and garbage will take place on their scheduled days.

Fire Department Holiday Toy Drive
It's that time of year again! This year, the El Cerrito-Kensington Fire Department will once again participate in the U.S. Marine Corps Toys for Tots program. On November 1, fire stations will begin accepting new, unwrapped toys, games, books, and sports equipment for all age groups. Last year, with your generosity, the El Cerrito-Kensington Fire Department collected over 2,000 toys! We are excited to continue this amazing effort to help bring a little holiday cheer to overlooked families in our community.
To make a monetary donation, you can take a check to any of the three El Cerrito-Kensington fire stations or mail it to ECFD, 10900 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito, CA 94530. Please make the check payable to “Toys for Tots.”

HNA: Continued from page 1
Should more funds become available, the City can undertake additional work in the HNA and update the 1994 Fire Hazard Reduction Plan. Meanwhile, it continues the ongoing work of risk reduction.
In addition to roadside clearing and preparation for the HNA festival, recent projects include brush and Scotch broom removal or mowing at the old EBMUD site, the Julian Fuel Break, Motorcycle Hill, the northern entrance of the South Pine area, south of the Kerr property, Potrero Hill, the Memorial Grove, the Ken Smith Grove, west of the Kerr property, south of Wildwood, west and south of Kent, west of the Regency Trail Head, the Upper Fire Trail above Quarry, and behind the homes on King Court.

Staff from the Fire Department and the Public Works Department are available to meet with residents to discuss how they can help. Anyone interested in organizing an Earth Day work party in the Hillside Natural Area should contact Maria Sanders, OESD Manager, at msanders@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

Sign Up for CERT Training
The El Cerrito-Kensington Fire Department is pleased to announce that dates for the 2019 Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) classes are now available online.
Classes begin Monday, January 7, at 6:30 p.m. and continue for eight consecutive Mondays. All classes will be held at the Arlington Community Church, located at 52 Arlington Avenue in Kensington. Preference is given to residents of El Cerrito and Kensington, but class size is limited to 25 students per session so sign up early. There will be a waiting list once the class fills up.
Please visit www.el-cerrito.org/CERT to see the full 2019 schedule and find out which class works best for you.
Questions: Contact the Fire Department at 215-4450.
Trash Can Visibility

**Did You Know** that El Cerrito has a Municipal Code? The code includes rules for safe construction, as determined by the Building Department, and for property use, as decided by the Planning Department. The overall objective is to promote and maintain a safe, pleasant, and orderly community.

One part of the code that is often overlooked is the section entitled *Nuisance Conditions* [ECMC 8.34.040 (j)]. It states that garbage cans should not be kept in front or side yards where they are visible from the street. Please make sure that your cans are not visible from the street in order to maintain the beauty of our City.

The complete Municipal Code is online at [www.el-cerrito.org/municode](http://www.el-cerrito.org/municode).

If you have questions or concerns, call or email the Building Inspector and Code Enforcement Officer at 215-4363 or codeenforcement@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

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The Right Way to Recycle

**Take Extra Care** with your recycling to make sure that your items don’t wind up in landfills. Before placing items in the recycling container, *Empty, Clean, and Dry* everything. Dirty or wet materials will contaminate the recycling stream and go to landfills—along with anything they might have damaged. For example, when water or food waste mix with clean paper, they create mold and destroy the paper fiber, rendering the paper unfit for recycling.

Taking these extra steps to keep everything in your bin *Empty, Clean, and Dry* will help the City divert waste from landfills and ensure that recyclables are actually turned into new products. For more tips on how to reduce, reuse, and recycle, contact the City’s Recycling + Environmental Resource Center at green@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4350.

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El Cerrito Wins Spotlight Awards for Sustainability

**This Past September**, Mayor Quinto and Assistant City Manager Karen Pinkos accepted three Beacon awards at the League of California Cities’ Annual Conference in recognition of the City’s accomplishments in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through agency energy and natural gas savings.

These awards are sponsored by the Institute for Local Government’s Beacon Program, which provides a framework for local governments to learn and share best practices to create healthier, more vibrant, and sustainable communities. The program honors efforts by local governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adopt policies that promote sustainability.

The Beacon Program currently supports more than 140 jurisdictions, representing over 35% of the state’s population that are implementing effective climate action practices and modeling leadership at the local level.

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City Webpage for Financial Transparency

**Have You Ever** wondered how much the city spends on public safety? To answer that question and others like it, El Cerrito has launched a new webpage at [www.el-cerrito.org/financialtransparency](http://www.el-cerrito.org/financialtransparency). The purpose of the page is to inform residents about the basics of the City’s budget and how the City spends public funds.

The financial information is presented on the OpenGov.com platform, used by over 1,900 city, county, and state governments, special districts, and schools.

In addition to engaging the community, the site will give City staff easier access to data for making better decisions. You cannot “break” the site, so please use it and experiment with it.

For more information, contact Maya Williams, Assistant to the City Manager, at mwilliams@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4318.
LimeBike Pilot Program Extension

The City has agreed to extend its pilot program with LimeBike, a dockless bike share program, for six more months. The new agreement requires LimeBike to do additional user education and to incorporate a small number of electric pedal-assist bicycles into their fleet.

El Cerrito’s LimeBike program averages about 2,000 trips per month. In recent months, the program has received relatively few complaints, as users are learning how to park properly, and residents are becoming more comfortable seeing them around the community.

There remain challenges with parking places. LimeBikes should only be parked near bike racks or in areas designated specifically for bike parking and not where they will block pedestrian traffic or ADA access. LimeBikes may NOT block driveways, entryways, crossroads, bus stops, wheelchair accessible areas, or be left on the ground. Responsible bike parking is a key to bike-sharing success. Report improperly parked bicycles to LimeBike’s 24/7 customer service team at support@limebike.com, or by calling or texting (888) LIME-345.

Bike riders under 18 years old are required by law to wear a helmet but all other riders are strongly encouraged to do so as well. Helmets are not included with LimeBikes, so riders must supply their own.

LimeBike has worked with City staff to educate the public at multiple events, including Bike to Work Day, a lunchtime event at Korematsu School, and the Summer Bike Fest hosted by the El Cerrito Library and the El Cerrito Police Department. For more information on bike-sharing, contact Will Provost, Management Analyst, at 525-7622 or wprovost@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us, or visit www.el-cerrito.org/LimeBike.

MOVING THE WISDOM OF OUR PAST FORWARD TOWARDS JUSTICE

30th Annual Celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

JOIN THE El Cerrito community for a historic 30th year celebration honoring the life, work, and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Together we will celebrate our collective values of compassionate humanity and social equity. Events are free. Everyone is welcome.

Sunday, January 20
DOCUMENTARY SCREENING OF “CRACKING THE CODES” WITH COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Cracking the Codes is a documentary film that suggests that we must understand racial inequity before we can address racial and socio-economic barriers. Join the conversation as we discuss how to build a society that provides equitable, sustainable access to the resources that all people need to thrive.

When: 4 p.m.
Where: El Cerrito High School
Performing Arts Theatre
540 Ashby Avenue

Monday, January 21
RALLY, PARADE, AND CELEBRATORY PROGRAM

A rally on Monday will feature student speakers and entertainment. This will be followed by a parade starting at City Hall, continuing down San Pablo Avenue to Moezer Lane, walking around Cerrito Vista Park to Ashbury Avenue, and ending at El Cerrito High School.

The Performing Arts Theater at the high school will open to the public at 10 a.m. and a celebratory program will begin at approximately 11 a.m.

To participate in the parade, complete the online Parade Registration form at www.el-cerrito.org/MLK.

When: Rally, 8:30 a.m.
Parade, 9:30 a.m.
Program, 11 a.m.

Where: Rally and Parade Starting Point
El Cerrito City Hall
10890 San Pablo Avenue

Celebratory Program
El Cerrito High School
Performing Arts Theatre
540 Ashby Avenue

The El Cerrito Human Relations Commission is producing this event, which is sponsored by the City of El Cerrito, St. Peter Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the El Cerrito Branch of the NAACP, and the West Contra Costa Unified School District.

There are several ways to support the event. To make a monetary donation, to volunteer to help, or for more information, go online to the event website at www.el-cerrito.org/MLK.

Program details and announcement of the 2019 keynote speaker will be available in January. For more information, call Patricia Durham at 234-2518, or contact Kristen Cunningham at kcunningham@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4304.
Keep the Bay and Local Creeks Clean

Here are some ways to protect our municipal and regional water quality by monitoring what enters the storm drain system.

- Make sure only rain enters the gutter and storm drain system. Litter, chlorinated water, soap, and even leaves can harm the environment.

- Properly dispose of pesticides. Take unused and leftover pesticides (and other chemicals) to hazardous waste collection at the El Cerrito Recycling + Environmental Resource Center, 7501 Schmidt Lane, on Tuesdays, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Never pour hazardous chemicals down a drain (inside or outside) or throw them in the trash.

- Find environmentally-friendly pest management products. Use traps and products that minimize possible harm to people as well as the environment.

- Wash your car at a car wash. Dirty car water often contains oil, grease, and toxic metals, as well as soaps and detergents that can harm the environment. If you do wash your car at home, make sure the water does not enter the gutter or storm drain and instead flows onto the grass or other landscaped area.

- Divert roof water to lawns or gardens where it can soak into the ground. Allowing rainwater to soak into the ground reduces runoff and helps to improve water quality.

- Clean gutters and storm drain grates of debris. Make sure the gutters and grates in front of your business or residence are clear of anything that could divert storm water.

- Check storm drain grates frequently during heavy rains.

Call the City at 215-4369 if a catch basin is not draining or needs to be cleaned.

- Keep debris and vegetation out of any creeks on your property. A creek on private property is the responsibility of the property owner. Contra Costa County provides maintenance guidelines for creeks at www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/5754/Private-Creeks.

- Use sandbags. To prevent flooding from the street, the City provides bags and sand for up to ten (10) sandbags per household at the Recycling Center. You must fill the bags yourself. Available to El Cerrito and Kensington residents only—bring proof of residency to the office.

- Make sure your home drainage system is functioning properly and that surface run off and roof downspouts are not causing erosion or flooding on your property or in your neighbors’ yards.

For more information, contact Will Provost, Clean Water Program Coordinator, at wprovost@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 525-7622.

Discount Compost Bins

To encourage home composting in El Cerrito, RecycleMore is offering a $40 discount on purchases of Soil Saver Compost Bins, Wriggly Wrench Worm Compost Bins (each $47 per bin after discount), or a Compost Tumbler ($119 after discount).

By composting at home, you can reduce waste and create healthy soil for your plants without much additional time, space, or effort. Compost is a natural fertilizer, returning nutrients such as phosphorus, potassium, nitrogen, and many trace minerals to the soil and contributing to healthy plant growth.

For more information or to place an order, go to recyclenore.com/compost-supplies.

Serve on a City Board, Commission, or Committee

Would you like to become more involved in your community? Consider serving on a City board, commission, or committee. Members provide an invaluable service, advising the City Council on a variety of subjects and making recommendations on policy matters. Find an advisory group that addresses your issues. We have groups for the arts, crime prevention, senior issues, the environment, planning and building design, economic development, parks, urban forest, recreation programs, finance, street oversight, and human relations.

Email cityclerk@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or call 215-4300 for more information. To download an application, go to www.el-cerrito.org/boardvacancies.
The Public Works Department is in the process of updating the City’s Storm Drain Master Plan. In 1992, the City Council adopted a master plan that identified deficiencies in the City’s storm drain system, set drainage improvement goals, and recommended a priority list of improvements. A year later, voters approved the issuance of bonds to finance the first phase of a storm drain system reconstruction (Measure J). As a result, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the City was able to make major investments to repair and replace its facilities. In Fiscal Year 2013–14, the City made its final debt payment to the 1993 bonds.

However, deficient pipe segments still exist, and there have been no significant changes in recent years. The City continues to maintain the current system, meeting Clean Water requirements, but makes only emergency and minor repairs to the storm drains.

To begin a comprehensive rehabilitation of the City’s storm drain system, the City selected Schaaf & Wheeler Consulting Civil Engineers to update the Storm Drain Master Plan. The updated Master Plan is intended to serve as a long-range planning document that will provide an inventory of the City’s storm drain assets, an assessment of its risks, and an outline of the financial investments it must make to repair, rehabilitate, and improve its assets. The consultants recently completed their review of City storm drain documents and plans, performing surveys and conditions assessments of several existing storm drain facilities, and conducting hydraulic and hydrology modeling to identify necessary repairs and capacity improvement projects.

In June, the Public Works Department hosted a meeting to share these findings with the public, answer questions, and solicit public comments. Everyone is encouraged to visit the City’s website at www.el-cerrito.org/StormDrainMasterPlan to view the June meeting materials. Interested individuals can help improve the plan by sharing their comments. Please contact Ana Bernardes, Senior Engineer, at abernardes@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or call 215-4385.

**Ways to Connect with the City**

**DID YOU KNOW** that you can receive news and meeting notifications by email from most City departments? Or connect with the City through social media? Sign up and sign in to stay informed.

**EMAIL NEWSLETTERS**

**rECnews:** information about Recreation Department programs, classes, and events, plus facility updates for the Swim Center, parks, and other news. Subscribe at www.el-cerrito.org/recnews.

**Environmental E-news:** upcoming environmental activities, events, and volunteer opportunities. Subscribe at www.el-cerrito.org/esd/emails.

**Community Development E-news:** receive updates on development, building, and housing projects. Subscribe at www.el-cerrito.org/cdnews.

**TWITTER**

Follow us at @cityofelcerrito, @elcerritopolice, or @elcerritorec. Don’t have a twitter account? You can still read the City’s tweets online!

**FACEBOOK**

Follow us at @cityofelcerrito or @ecrecreation for recreation activities.

**INSTAGRAM**

More recreation news at @ecrecreation.

**NEXTDOOR**

Join NextDoor to connect with neighbors and with us!

**MEETING NOTICES**

Go to www.el-cerrito.org/notifyme on the City’s website to sign up for notices about meeting agendas, events, Red Flag days, bid postings, and more. You’ll need to create an account if you haven’t done so already.

**POLICE DEPARTMENT RESOURCES**

**ECPD Nixle Alerts:** receive news and information about criminal activity, public safety, traffic hazards, and community events from the El Cerrito Police Department. Register for these bulletins at www.nixle.com. Visit www.CrimeReports.com to see crime trends in your neighborhood.
The minimum wage in El Cerrito will increase in 2019. Starting January 1st, the City’s minimum wage will go from $13.60 per hour to $15 per hour. The City Minimum Wage Standards, established by the City Council in November 2015, require all employers to pay their employees no less than the new minimum wage for work done in the City of El Cerrito, regardless of where a business is headquartered. (Employees who work less than two hours a week within El Cerrito are exempt.)

As of January 1, 2020, and each year thereafter, the wage will continue to increase based on changes in the local Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Employers and workers with questions about the El Cerrito Minimum Wage Ordinance can visit www.el-cerrito.org/wages or contact Maya Williams, Assistant to the City Manager, at mwilliams@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or 215-4318.