



The Greenbelt



Volume 207, January 2021

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

- Board Meetings—Jan 13, 2021, Feb 10, 2021 (via Zoom 7pm)

OHHA 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

By Tom Dominy

This year has been extraordinary by any measure for our community. Starting from the earliest part of the year before the pandemic stuck to the present, your Board has accomplished many things, some invisible to you and others quite visible.

Earlier in the year the Board approved an upgrade of the security system. The Board also approved the replastering of the pool and spa which was completed during the pandemic. And finally, the Board voted to reopen the pool through November, and the weather was perfect until mid-November when we closed for the season.

For several years, the Board has had fewer members than the maximum of nine, so it is appropriate to mention the addition of our members who have been so helpful to fulfilling our goals: Fernando Munoz, Michael Kelly, Todd Fridey and Dana Suverkrop. There was also a change in the top office of President with Cathy Garza retiring from the Board after extraordinary service and Tom Dominy taking over the reins for a second term.

Rod Karg, our Vice President and Chairman of the Greenbelt and Landscaping Committee, gathered volunteers to plant 40 new trees along the area parallel to Highway 156 west of the tennis courts. Our new maintenance person, (we call him the new “Pete”), Mitch Lemus, was of tremendous help in the planting and has done an extraordinary job with all activities related to our infrastructure.

Once the state health department allowed parks to reopen, Mitch was instrumental in making the playground compliant with COVID-19 guidelines.

When I rejoined the Board 5 years ago, my mission was to complete the approval of the CC&Rs and By-laws. After many fits and starts, the Board finally accomplished what was considered impossible given the hurdle of getting 75% approval of the total 269 membership. They are easier to read and give guidance to the Board in much clearer language. That is in all our interests.

Finally, I want to recognize two Board members who have decorated their homes with awesome Christmas lights and decorations. Todd Fridey and Jackie Lonero are to be thanked along with other members of our community making our community such a wonder in which to live.

A ROADWAY, THREE ROUNDABOUTS, A POT OF MONEY AND A SALAMANDER....

By Cynthia Suverkrop

Long awaited improvements to our neighboring roadway, CA Highway 156, just a got a bit closer to reality with critical funding coming from the State of California in the last month. Construction is set to begin in 2022.

The Pot of Money The project's \$29.5 million price tag will be covered chiefly by California SBI and STIP funds with Monterey County's voter approved Measure X money and developers' fees providing the rest of the balance.

The Design Named the Castroville Blvd Interchange Project, the work will be done to the west of our Cathedral Oak Rd. entrance and Monte De Lago and just east of where the current traffic light is positioned at Castroville Blvd and 156. The new interchange will include a bridge allowing traffic on the highway to flow east and west uninterrupted; there will be two offramps on either side for access to and from Castroville Blvd where there's now a stoplight. Instead of traffic lights at the base of the each offramp, there will be a roundabout. The third roundabout will be the connector between Castroville Blvd and 156.

Will it help us? The project's chief engineer, Rich Deal, has stated that "the roundabouts will keep traffic running slowly and smoothly. During heavy traffic periods when a left out of Oak Hills is near impossible, the roundabouts will allow Oak Hills residents to turn right onto Hwy 156 toward the bay, exit the new Castroville Blvd Interchange, turn left around the first roundabout, cross the bridge, and turn right at the second roundabout, and onto the eastbound on-ramp toward Salinas."

The Castroville Blvd Interchange Project segment is just one of the larger Highway 156 Corridor projects which will eventually include a new 4-lane expressway that will run parallel to our existing route. The current 156 would then become a frontage road for North County residents. Other changes will include a new US Highway 101/State Route 156 Interchange as well.

Extra Money According to TAMC, The Transportation Agency of Monterey County, the State pitched in more money than expected. This created a bonus, freeing up some money from the Measure X project list. In this specific case, it allowed TAMC to also fund the related Blackie Road extension project, a plan that will connect Castroville's industrial area to the new Castroville Blvd interchange and allow truck traffic to avoid both Hwy 183 through downtown Castroville and the interchange at Highways 101 and 183. This project will also be able to move forward and will begin in 2022.

And a salamander As if getting the funding weren't enough of an obstacle, there were other hurdles to overcome as well. There is the case of the Santa Cruz Long Toed Salamander, a little guy native to our wetlands and an endangered species. For years, any improvements to 156 have been stalled as people tried to figure out how to accommodate the highway and the habitat. In October, legislation authored by retiring state Sen. Bill Monning and signed by Gov. Newsom, allows the interchange project to move forward, provided certain conditions are established to benefit the salamander.

The Transportation Agency for Monterey is now turning its attention toward finding an organization that will help the agency identify parcels of land used by the salamander and create a mitigation plan. TAMC's goal is to coordinate with a known habitat management entity so that they together can help the species by improving the quality of its habitat and increasing the species' habitat acreage.

2020 HOLIDAY DECORATING WINNER

Congratulations to Larry, Callie and Danica Deguzman at 9899 Brookgrass Pl. for winning the contest. The Grinch tried to steal their lights but did not steal the judge's appreciation for unique hand-made decorations.

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