

Pacifica's Landslides and the importance of a proper General Plan Update

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Source, 1997 USGS article [“Debris Flow Hazards in the San Francisco Bay Area Region”](#)

Exactly 40 years ago, on January 4, 1982 unspeakable tragedy took place in Pacifica when three children, asleep in their beds, lost their lives when a landslide engulfed their home. How can we possibly honor these lives and ensure this does not happen again?

A series of storms drenched our city that winter and turned our clay soil to mud. Where the mud was on a hillside, it flowed, gathering momentum as well as trees, boulders, retaining walls and even homes in its path. There was not one landslide but **475(!)** that occurred all over Pacifica that year. According to the February 3, 1982 Tribune, hundreds of homes were also evacuated, primarily in Linda Mar and Park Pacifica, but also in Fairmont, Manor, East Sharp Park, Vallemar, Rockaway and Pedro Point.

After that horrific El Nino winter, Pacifica commissioned a study from Howard Donely and Associates (HDAI) to better understand these landslides. The HDAI report specifically told us that Pacifica's landslide maps were inaccurate as they did not capture these shallow “debris flow” landslides and it called for new maps to be drawn. As I was researching the Vista Mar project on Monterey Road in late 2020, a project on a steep site with a history of landslides, and read these documents, I realized that our landslide maps and General Plan Safety Element had still not been updated, almost 40 years later...

My neighbors and I, along with a new coalition of Pacificans, CPUP, filed a lawsuit against this project to compel the city to finally update the General Plan so that future projects can be properly reviewed. (The developer is responsible for the city's legal fees.)

So, what is a General Plan? It is a city's constitution for long range policies that guide future development and conservation. It looks at our city's character, resources and economics, environment and open spaces, traffic and infrastructure, and safety issues like landslides and flooding, along with projected population growth. A good General Plan should be a forward-looking vision for our town's growth. As our current version is over 40 years old, one of the oldest in the entire state, so much is missing and basic public safety issues, exacerbated by climate change, are not addressed.

This week Pacifica is set to release the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and General Plan documents for public and state agency review. For all of us this is an important opportunity to participate to ensure the plan is reflective of our community's desires. Currently, the city proposes the minimum 45 days to review and comment on hundreds of pages of technical documents. We need your help to ensure we have a proper update to guide us for the next decades!

In memory of Michelle, Melissa and Billy, and for the thousands of Pacifica's children today who fortunately don't yet understand the very real environmental risks we face, I urge you to get involved by signing up for updates on the city's website, www.planpacific.org and/or by emailing YouArePacifica@gmail.com