

FOUNTAINGROVE II GAZETTE

OPEN SPACE MAINTENANCE ASSOCIATION

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Spring 2010

New Tree Regulations Approved for OSMA

On April 15, 2010, the City of Santa Rosa approved, after more than a year of writing, rewriting and conferences, some necessary alterations to the original Fountaingrove II Design Program for Open Space Management enacted under Ordinance by Santa Rosa in April, 1992. The changes centered on how OSMA could manage trees in our open space for safety reasons without having to get a tree permit before doing necessary work.

The new document also refines the details of the environmental guidelines that were in the original plan for habitat, native plant species and concerns about erosion. The City and OSMA contacted California Department of Fish and Game, Biologists, Botanists, Pre-Fire Specialists with several Fire Departments and obtained information on the web to support the new procedures. As part of the approval process, approximately 800 property owners adjacent to OSMA's 50 parcels were notified in October, 2009 of OSMA's safety request, and then again in April, 2010 when OSMA requested formal approval of its Management Plan.

The Design Program continues to be the main legal document governing the OSMA, but it no longer prohibits OSMA from cutting "any" tree, regardless of the reason, in the open space. The original guidelines made sense for nesting animals and birds, and were written before introduction of Sudden Oak Death or the many new

fungal diseases and beetle infestations our forests experience today.

Over the years, there have been numerous trees that died within our firebreaks that posed dangerous threats to the lives and property of Fountaingrove II homeowners or other adjacent property owners, as well as passing pedestrians or vehicles. In addition to this personal and property liability from falling trees, the fuel for fires has increased significantly from the lack of naturally occurring forest fires. The Douglas-fir population exploded, and this has created many problems in our open space due to the fact Douglas-firs ignite easily and burn very hot and quickly.



Without natural fires, the Douglas-fir reproduced prolifically, as compared to the native oak, Madrone or bay trees. The fir also grows taller than other trees. This means the Douglas-fir soon becomes the dominant species in the forest by crowding out and disfiguring other species. So, where oaks and Madrones were once prevalent, the Douglas-fir now stands alone in excessive proportion and quantity, and it has become a dominant bully. Why is this a problem? First, it is always best to have a variety of plant life within our open space, for it better serves the wildlife habitat and its critters.

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Annual Firebreak Work In Progress

It's that time of year again - the time when the busy buzz of weed whackers drifts through the spring breeze. **For homeowners, the deadline for weed and grass cutting was June 1st.** The OSMA, through an agreement with the Santa Rosa Fire Department, had until June 14th to complete the first of two passes through the firebreaks in our open space. Santa Rosa Fire has stated that inspections will start June 14th and homeowners not in compliance can be fined. The weed abatement obligation is to keep weeds below 4" from the start of the fire season to the end of it, which is usually the beginning of November. OSMA's second weed whacking of the 65 acres of firebreaks and trails will start sometime after July 4th.

Marizco Landscaping Management was awarded the weed whacking contract, and has been doing the work in excellent fashion since 2006. Please cheer them on as they pass through your area. The work is terribly difficult, as the crew must wear protective suits from head to toe, along with protective masks and eyewear. It's hot, physically demanding - and treacherous over the steep, rocky terrain we have in our open space. This year the grass and thistles grew to over 7 feet high due to the continuous rain. This made the work even tougher than normal, and more dangerous because of slippery slopes.

Not long after the first weed cutting, our contractors will be working on trimming re-growth in the open space behind Rocky Knoll, Fox Hill, Sedgemoore, Rincon Ridge, Shelter Glen and Heathfield.

Propagation

Last year, the OSMA contracted to have our rare native Ceanothus and Manzanita propagated for planting in our irrigated open space parcels. The Rincon Manzanita and Rincon Ridge Ceanothus, rare because of ever increasing development, love to live in exactly the same places we love to live - on the eastern Santa Rosa slopes with magnificent views. Earlier this year, those small but thriving propagated plants were installed in several areas in Fountaingrove II. It's exciting to see an increasing population of endangered plants placed in exactly the area they are meant to live - in rocky clay soils with waterless summers.

Next fall, the OSMA Landscape Committee will have even more propagated plants to use in our irrigated open space. Many more Rincon Ridge Ceanothus and Rincon Manzanita are being grown, along with Coffeeberry, Wavy Leaf Ceanothus and Sonoma Manzanita. And because these natives are meant to live without summer water, eventually the OSMA will save on its utility bills as we turn the water off.

New Fire Gates

The OSMA Board recently had two vendors cooperate to manufacture and install three new fire gates at key open space access points. The gates will either replace currently chained access points (not to fire code) or are brand new installations. The fire department was consulted as to the design of the gates, which will be wide enough through which a large fire truck can enter in the event of an emergency, and will provide security from rogue four-wheel drive vehicles at all other times.

OSMA also installed two bollards (steel posts), that will prevent non-emergency vehicles from crossing open space between Parker Hill Road onto the adjacent Darlington Court, which has been a problem recently.



Fountaingrove II Achieves Firewise Community Status



We reported last year that Fountaingrove II had submitted an application to be recognized as a "Firewise Community," and we were - the first in Sonoma County!

In order to be recognized as such, several objectives had to be met, which OSMA did and will continue to do.

Fountaingrove II OSMA hopes that designation as a Firewise Community will alleviate homeowner insurance coverage problems, encourage neighboring fire-hazardous communities to follow our lead, and perhaps qualify us for potential grant funding for vegetation management in the future.

The OSMA also believes that continual and elevated communication of firewise practices will make us all more dedicated to do our part to make our community safer.

Maps

Late last year, the OSMA Board decided to update its mapping practices. Our maps were the same ones we had used from the opening of Fountaingrove II. Any additional notations were made by hand using colored pencils or markers - very low-tech and not entirely accurate.

Enter Max Bridges, a homeowner who volunteered to take on the time-consuming task of acquiring any and all maps and drawings relating to Fountaingrove II, and working with Carlile Macy to create an accurate set of current maps that can be updated as time passes.

Now OSMA has maps that show many layers of information including streets, addresses, scaled firebreaks, irrigated parcels, swales, fire and access roads, elevation changes, along with a satellite image map that gives quite a birds-eye view of the vegetation mass. Irrigation details and GPS interfaces are expected to follow.

This mapping project greatly enhances our ability to provide accurate information to maintenance contractors, fire services and others.

Tree Regulations, continued from Page 1.

The new guidelines in our amended Design Program for Open Space Management will help fix liability and fire safety issues, while at the same time ensure our open space continues to be a haven for the wildlife it supports. The OSMA will be able to cut trees, but only after professional consultation with arborists or similar licensed forest professionals. Biologists or ornithologists must also be consulted when tree work is done during the nesting season. There are provisions for emergency approvals from appropriate City Departments such as Fire, Parks or Community Development. No tree will be cut for the benefit of a view, and at least two dead trees per acre must remain standing as snags for wildlife habitat.

By February 1st of each year, OSMA must submit a certified Annual Report to the Community Development Department that outlines the actions it took under the plan in the prior year, and what it plans to do in the current year. This report must be made available on our website for public viewing, and will be accompanied by: (1) a fee equal to a multiple tree permit, (2) a log of all trees cut or altered, and (3) copies of all arborist or habitat biologist reports or recommendations, which will include their statement, under penalty of perjury, that the work they performed or recommended is in compliance with the most recent Fountaingrove II Design Program and Use Permits. The rules are many, and the consequences are severe if the rules are ignored. But the operating leeway gained to manage trees and our safety far exceeds the hoops through which we must pass to do our work. Our on-site review of issues with an Environmental Scientist of the California Department of Fish and Game summed it up well, in that we will probably be able to address most of our fire or safety concerns; we will just have to work within the rules.

Although OSMA was able to get a Use Permit to manage trees in Open Space, the Fountaingrove II homeowners must still follow the rules of their CC&Rs, which state that a tree permit from the City is needed to cut or alter a tree over 4" in diameter.



Summit Update

The Summit housing development, located at the top of the parkway, was the last area to be developed in Fountaingrove II. Although the homes there have been complete for a couple of years or more, the developer, Creekbridge Homes, has been extremely slow in finalizing its obligations to the City and Fountaingrove II OSMA before officially turning over the open space parcels and exiting.

Presumably, financial hard times are mostly to blame for the delay. What once seemed to be a promising project nearing completion came to a screeching halt over a year ago with little or no progress since then.

The OSMA Board has made sure to keep the lines of communication open with the City so that the landscaping and utility hook-ups required along the parkway in that area are not ultimately dropped into the lap of the OSMA homeowners to fix. So far, our talks with the City have been productive, and the Board is encouraged that Creekbridge's obligations will be met one way or another.

In the meantime, it has been OSMA's top priority to see that the weeds are taken care of as fire season approaches. With the City's cooperation, the OSMA will assure that its homeowners' safety will be addressed.

Official OSMA Plant List Approved

Throughout the decade that OSMA has been in existence, the "official" planting list for plants approved for installation in our irrigated open space has been altered several times. There were even times when no list was consulted at all when installing new planted areas. The result is a wide array of drought-tolerant and thirsty, native and non-native, appropriate and inappropriate plants dotting the landscape throughout Fountaingrove II.

Since the recent lucky acquisition of some of the original landscape designs for Fountaingrove II, and after studying the original Design Program documents, the Board decided earlier this year that the only plants that are, or ever should have been, legally approved for planting in Fountaingrove II's irrigated open space are those on the original plant list in our legal documents. All homeowners received a copy of the plant list through their title company when they purchased their homes. Every plant on the list is a California native that either already exists in the Santa Rosa hills naturally or can thrive here as they do in other nearby areas of the state.



Fountaingrove II East ARC Reminders...

If you will be adding plants to your yard this spring and summer, Fountaingrove II recommends using native plants, but most importantly, please make sure you do not use plants that are on the "Invasive Plant List." This is a list of plants that can spread, not only to your neighbor's yard, but into the open space. For a list, please call Leslie at Focus Real Estate and Investments (544-9443).

Street parking overnight is not permitted! The CC&Rs require that you park in your garage (not use it for storage). If you have additional vehicles, they can be parked in your driveway. The Committee relies on homeowner assistance in reporting violations. Please contact The ARC East's management company (Focus Real Estate and Investments) for this issue or any other CC&R violations in your neighborhood.

We hope residents of the West and Summit areas will activate or reactivate their Architectural Review Committees to monitor the CC&Rs in their portions of Fountaingrove II and help keep our community attractive and a more desirable place to live with higher resale values.

City Work on Park Property

Recently, the City of Santa Rosa secured the Cal Fire inmate brush clearing crew and worked several days in the City park open space properties in Fountaingrove II. City park open space parcels include acreage along Fountaingrove Parkway on both sides of Sedgemoore, Park Gardens Drive and Repton Way, as well as property along Parker Hill Road.



The work, supervised by Cal Fire and the City of

Santa Rosa, was done specifically because of the overgrowth and high fire danger it presented. The crews aimed to save Manzanita, Toyon, Ceanothus and Madrone plants while cutting back Coyote Brush (which will grow back healthier), poison oak and invasive broom and blackberry. They also removed several dead or too densely packed live Douglas firs, and limbed up remaining trees.

New Website!

Terry Sanders spent many long hours re-developing the Fountaingrove II website after our original web mistress moved away. His help and dedication are greatly appreciated! The Board has decided, however, that the time has come for a professional update to our website as the amount of information OSMA must now make available has become too much for a volunteer to be expected to handle.

Stay tuned for our new website in the coming weeks. We are excited at what our homeowners will see and find at the click of a mouse in the very near future!

The new website will be an excellent resource for finding documents and procedures, and it will be an effective means of communicating timely information to homeowners that is currently limited to distribution of about 250 names of those who signed up for e-mail updates. Not only will it be an information resource, but a required one. Effective February, 2011, OSMA must publish its Annual Reports on its website so they will be available to all its members.

Coming soon - New website, new website address. Just click on www.FountaingroveII.com and watch the information grow!

Prickly Thistles

Thistles have become an increasing problem and the OSMA Board is taking action. Last year the Board approved spraying a broadleaf weed killer on thistles in open space as a trial, and it was successful. This year the Board allocated funds to continue the program, but the heavy and continual rains only allowed one day of spraying before our weed whacking started in the firebreaks.

The re-growth of thistles will be monitored, and spraying of thistles will be done later this year if their re-growth warrants action. The chemical used does not harm surrounding grasses. It has been applied by Marizco Landscape Management using a backpack arrangement where the application targets the individual thistles and does not create an overspray to harm our native vegetation. Moreover, spraying is not done on windy days.



Could Your Home Survive a Wildfire on its Own?

We live in a beautiful setting, for sure, but we also live in a designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. Not just "high," but "very high."

The OSMA uses many of the funds you supply through your monthly dues to help lessen some of the fire fuel load around the perimeter of our open space, but no homeowner should feel "safe" thinking that managed firebreaks and concrete roadways will do the trick in the event of a disastrous fire. Most homeowners who back to open space are aware of their responsibility in reducing the threat of fire, but if you live on an interior lot, you are responsible as well.

Everyone loves to have an attractive, well-landscaped property. But are the plants you love going to doom your home when embers blow into your neighborhood? Take a good look at your property after reading this information and you may see your surroundings in a different light.

California state law requires a 100-foot 'defensible space' around your home, which consists of two zones - the immediate 30 feet around the structure the state calls 'Lean, Clean and Green Zone,' and a further 70 feet is referred to as a 'Reduced Fuel Zone.' Extending that defensible space even further if you're high on a hillside (which we are) is prudent since fire travels much faster up hill.

The close-in zone is meant to prevent the spread of fire from plant to plant, and then to the house. The code requires that all flammable material within this zone be removed, with the exception of individual trees and shrubs that are 'well-spaced and well-pruned.' This means that things such as firewood, compost piles, building materials, woodpiles, and the like cannot be within 30 feet of the house. Some of the worst culprits can be items that we don't think of as dangerous, such as empty plastic nursery pots or vines on fences. Plants within that zone should be well spaced, not too tall, and selected from plant types that are higher in moisture and lower in oils than normal.

What you don't want to do is provide a 'fire ladder' to your eaves and roof. Dense plantings of increasing height toward the house will lead a fire right up to your doorstep. Lower plants closer to the house are best. You can increase some plant height as you move further away from the house. Tree branches must be pruned 10 feet back from any chimney and remove any dead branches hanging over structures. Hardscaping close to your home such as gravel, decomposed granite, stone patios and water features helps increase your fire safety.

In the Reduced Fuel Zone, protective measures include: removing lower limbs from trees to reduce the 'fire ladder', keeping trees spaced at least 10 feet between the tips of their branches, and removing all shrubs from around the base of trees. Keep shrub spacing in this zone wide, as well. Space shrubs at two times the height of the plant in relatively flat areas (0-20% slope); 4 times the height if the slope is 20-40%; and 6 times if the slope is over 40% (this is very steep).

What you plant matters as well. Any plant will burn with enough heat. But some, known as pyrophytic plants, burn much more readily. These plants are high in volatile oils, waxes or resins, contain a lot of fine, twiggy dry material, may have loose or papery bark, or have stiff, woody branches and fine or lacy leaves. They burn much more readily than others, often tending literally to burst into flame. Examples of such plants to avoid include eucalyptus (on our no-plant list), cypress, Douglas-fir and other conifers and needle-leaved evergreens, especially juniper, among others.

"Fire-safer" plants tend to have a higher moisture content and be lower growing. Of course succulents are very fire-safe, due to their very high water content. Many fire-safe plants can also be relatively drought tolerant, and provide a very attractive palette as well. In fire-scaping, the open spaces are more important than the plants. Appropriate manipulation of the landscape can make a significant contribution toward wildfire survival.

Visit www.firesafesonoma.org for more info!



The Acorn Woodpecker

Get to know one of your neighbors – the Acorn Woodpecker! He, along with other family members, may make frequent visits to your backyard bird feeder, but his name is indicative of one of his main food sources.

When acorns are ready to harvest, a single bird may drill hundreds or thousands of holes in a tree and fill each one with an acorn. Very industrious (and easy to see why dead trees are vital in our open space)!

Acorn Woodpeckers nest in colonies, laying 4-5 white eggs in a hole in a tree. All members of the colony share in the excavation, and in raising the young. Oddly, it has been suggested that the massive food storing habits of these birds are merely meant to preserve the life of the colony in case of emergency - Acorn Woodpeckers are largely insectivorous, but in case of a cold, harsh winter, they are quite prepared to survive on nuts.



Honey Bees!

The Enemark family of Fountaingrove II wanted to share their excitement about their new backyard beehive. They have been a certified backyard wildlife habitat for several years (by the National Wildlife Federation), and recently purchased their own beehive from a man in Red Bluff who is committed to propagating the honey bee and providing homeowners with their own hives. He maintains the hive, checks on the health of the bees, and eventually collects and bottles the honey for the homeowners. The Enemarks are thrilled with their new "pets!" If anyone wants more information, the Enemarks are happy to provide it. Just send an email to glynn@sonic.net and you'll be put in touch.



Be Alert - We Still Live in Wild Spaces

Recently, there has been a reported sighting of a mountain lion with two cubs in the Fountaingrove II area. This is just a reminder that we live among wild things. Mountain lions, rattlesnakes, hawks, owls and other wonderful creatures share this beautiful place with us. Keep your small pets indoors, particularly at night, and never let your children (or yourself) go skipping through the open space alone.

Love Where You Live?

We are very lucky to be in such a wonderful area. Your \$58 monthly dues, however, doesn't provide all that Fountaingrove II needs to keep this place running smoothly. It takes hundreds of volunteer hours to get all the work done. As has been said before, many hands make light work, and OSMA is always looking for volunteers! Be a sport and help make your neighborhood a better place to live. Contact Dennis Searles at dennis@bpfinance.com or 528-6636, or Kim Nielsen-Glynn at glynn@sonic.net or 544-7871 to find out where you can lend a hand!

The Fountaingrove II Gazette

The Fountaingrove II Gazette is published quarterly by the Fountaingrove II OSMA. Any submission information/requests may be directed to the OSMA Board through its property management company: Focus Real Estate & Investments, Inc. 3936 Mayette Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95405
Phone: 707-544-9443, email: focusre@sonic.net
Kim Nielsen-Glynn, Newsletter Editor, glynn@sonic.net

Stay Informed - Via Email

Be sure your name is on our email update list! Join the nearly 250 neighbors already receiving valuable information. You, too, can get timely and important neighborhood notifications. Your name and email address will not be shared with anyone else, and it will be hidden in group emails. Simply send an email with your name to: glynn@sonic.net and state that you wish to be on the email update list.

Contacts

See a problem? Illegal dumping or unauthorized use of open space? A broken irrigation pipe?

Contact Focus Real Estate & Investments at 544-9443.

2009 OSMA Board

President, Dennis Searles
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OSMA Board meetings are usually held at 3:30 on the third Wednesday of the month at Focus Real Estate & Investments, 3936 Mayette Ave. Call 544-9443 to confirm.