

# Cypress

## Environmental and Land Use Planning

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### *Autumn Newsletter October 2015*

*This edition is dedicated to all those who lost their property, their homes and their lives in the recent wildfires that ravaged California and much of the West this past summer.*

In this edition of the newsletter:

- **[Cypress Helps New Townhouse Project in Scotts Valley Out of the Starting Gate and Across the Finish Line](#)**

One of the first housing projects in Scotts Valley since the end of the Great Recession was approved on October 21 thanks to the work of Cypress owner, Kim Tschantz. The City hired Kim to evaluate the project, negotiate with the applicant and present the project at multiple public hearings. How was this done responsibly on a site that was habitat for an endangered species and includes 56 City protected trees?



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- **[New Land Use Planning Ideas Can Reduce Devastating Wildfire Risk](#)**

Another unprecedented wildland fire season in the West should cause planners to re-think their rural development policies, especially in high fire hazard areas. California's "Valley Fire" was the second catastrophic wildfire in rural Lake County in 2 months! Fire suppression was the traditional policy in wildland management in the 20th Century. Now planners are realizing that it's more realistic to plan for the inevitability of wildfires than to try to prevent them from occurring; but are counties ready to adopt and implement these new ideas?



- **[Urban Streets aren't Meant for Bicycles?!](#)**

A recent article in the *Boston Globe* promulgates the idea that city streets and bicycles don't mix. While I don't agree, the article does make some interesting points. Read it below.

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***Cypress Mission Statement:***

*Creating project solutions for you while enhancing our environment.*



Cypress is certified as a sustainable practices business by the Monterey Bay Area Green Business Council.

Cypress has been a member of the Santa Cruz Construction Guild since 2010.



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## Cypress Helps New Townhouse Project in Scotts Valley Out the Starting Gate and Across the Finish Line



The Scotts Valley City Council unanimously approved the Terrace Townhouses project on October 21 after a lively public hearing; a previous energetic hearing at the Planning Commission and extensive Environmental Review that included substantial public input. The City hired Cypress last year (See [Autumn 2014 newsletter](#)) to conduct the Environmental Review analysis of the project and all permitting requirements rather than use the regular City staff.

The new "urban infill" project will provide 19 new dwellings in the core of the City that are easy walking distance to commercial shopping and similar services. A 1.5-acre common-owned lot will surround the townhouse lots and include a new street, parking and open space. New ideas recommended by Mr. Tschantz for the site design included pedestrian walkway connections to the nearby commercial area, a better vehicle

parking design and a 4,150 sq. ft. area of the common lot dedicated for outdoor recreational use for townhouse residents. These design features were adopted. Many other aspects of the project incorporate sustainable features.

Terrace developer, Chris Perri, volunteered to install solar panels on each dwelling and provide each dwelling's patio with a rain barrel for rain water harvesting. Storm runoff will be captured in pervious pavement that will be underlain with check dam-like sub-surface structures that promote deep vertical percolation of runoff into the underground aquifer. According to City Council member, Randy Johnson, "with this design, it's easy for me to vote in favor of this project".

The 2.6-acre site, while being in the middle of town, contained important environmental resources, including habitat for a endangered insect - the Mt. Hermon June beetle - which is endemic to Santa Cruz County; and 56 native trees that met the City's "protected" criteria due to their size. The loss of endangered species habitat will be mitigated by the developer preparing a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that must be approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before any site disturbance occurs. The HCP explains how June beetle habitat at a nearby preserve will be enhanced to promote better survival of the insect. The tree loss will be mitigated by implementing a biotic restoration plan on the site that replaces removed trees at a 2:1 ratio with native species. Biotic monitoring will follow for 5 years or longer until 80% of the planted trees are surviving in a healthy condition. Mr. Tschantz formulated 24 additional mitigation measures to address other environmental impacts generated by the project. These measures avoid or compensate for the project impacts while allowing the project to move forward to construction.



*This rendering of the Terrace townhouses shows the front view of the project with implementation of the project landscape plan at tree maturity. The landscaping will provide a substantial buffer between the dwellings and traffic on the arterial street while moderating the visual effect of development from off-site views.*

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## [New Land Use Planning Ideas Can Reduce Devastating Wildfire Risks](#)

### The Risk of Wildfire Catastrophes Grows



The threat of wildfire continues to grow across the western U.S. Fires are getting larger, causing more damage and costing more money to control and suppress. Several of the worst fire seasons in decades have occurred since 2000, with the problem accelerating each year. September's "Valley Fire" in Lake County, California, which burned over 76,000 acres, was the second huge wildland fire in that county this summer! [See incredible video](#). About 1/3 of Middletown was destroyed. Middleton High School, which served as a main evacuation center for the earlier fire in July, was completely destroyed in this most recent firestorm! Nearby, the historic 5,000-acre Harbin Hot Springs resort and spiritual center now lay in ashes. Over 700 homes in mountainous forested areas also completed burned. *And* this is just *one* of the wildland fires that occurred in the West this summer.

A number of fundamental factors contribute to the significant growth of wildfire threats. These include:

- Western forest lands are characterized by a significant and growing biomass that provides the fuels which sustain catastrophic wildfires. Decades of fire suppression activities have eliminated the natural cycle of smaller fires that have long kept the western landscape in balance.
- Residential development in rural forested areas has increased since 1950 resulting in several rural subdivisions and communities in former forest and chaparral wilderness lands.
- Changing weather patterns, such as the 4-year California drought, leave wildlands as dry tinder boxes within a few weeks of the start of summer.

The future growth of western population centers will create both challenges and opportunities in addressing the risk of wildfire. Development in what is characterized as the "Wildland-Urban Interface" has sparked significant debate regarding the wisdom of allowing development in fire prone areas.

### Planning Tools for Minimizing Fire Hazards

Federal fire policy has significantly changed since 1995 with a current recognition that fire plays a natural and essential role in the ecology of the West. A 2001 federal "Wildfire Management Policy" characterized fire as "as a critical natural process" to be "integrated into land and resource management plans and activities on a large scale, and across agency boundaries". Following this new federal fire policy, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) began efforts to reduce fire hazards on public lands using a combination of mechanical treatments (mowing grasslands and removing dead wood) and prescribed burning. However, smoke from prescribed burning often ignites complaints from residents in nearby rural subdivisions.

The "[Firewise Communities Program](#)," was created by the USFS and the Fire Protection Association with a mission to educate people and to protect property in communities at risk from wildfire. The Firewise Program includes public outreach, education, agency coordination efforts and the promulgation of specific building and development standards designed to minimize wildland fire risks. One such standard is requiring a "fuel reduction zone" surrounding dwellings that keeps the zone free of flammable vegetation and materials.

*A neighborhood in Middletown in the aftermath of September's "Valley Fire". Firefighters were able to save homes on the right side of the street, but everything on the left side was destroyed. Residents were evacuated to fairgrounds in neighboring Napa County. Now one month later, Lake County is experiencing a local economic recession as there are less local residents living and working there and purchasing goods and services.*



These efforts are directed towards existing development in wildland areas. However, land use planners should take stronger efforts to minimize future development in critical fire hazard areas by disallowing subdivisions or other large spread-out developments in remote areas that would be at risk in any wildfire season. *Although high-density developments can be damaged by wildfires, research has shown areas with low- to intermediate-housing density were more likely to sustain greater destruction due to intermingling with wildland vegetation or difficulty of firefighter access.*

Rural development in high fire prone areas should only be allowed under regulations that require adequate roads, water supply, density, setbacks, turnarounds and the positioning houses on their lots to reduce risk. Overlay zoning could be used in fire hazard areas to specify these type of development standards. Several California counties which currently allow huge rural residential subdivisions in isolated areas should rethink their land use policies to recognize fire hazards.

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### [Urban Streets aren't Meant for Bicycles?!](#)



Boston Globe journalist, Jeff Jacoby, wrote an article last month where he defends his opinion that "urban streets aren't meant for bicycles" and bicyclists. He provides some good points for his argument, including the rise of bicyclist deaths in traffic accidents. His view, however, is a complete antithesis of the "Green Streets" and "Complete Streets" concepts that have been sweeping many parts of the USA during the last 10 years. (See [Winter 2012 newsletter](#).) These concepts, which I agree with, are based on designing streets for a variety of users rather than restricting certain modes of transport.

Read [his article](#) to see what you think.

Please visit [my website](#) to better understand our various land use planning and environmental planning services that can help you and your project.

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