



# Local Community vs. Government Agency

The Necessity in Finding  
the Happy Medium

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On February 2, 1998 (15 years ago) with the arrival of El Nino, cities of the peninsula reached a 45-year flood. Cities impacted included East Palo Alto, Palo Alto and Menlo Park





There are vast differences between these cities including race, economic security and size. There is one thing these cities have in common, San Francisquito Creek. San Francisquito Creek is a creek that flows into southwest San Francisco Bay. The creek and its Los Trancos Creek tributary define the boundary between San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. San Francisquito Creek moves into the Gardens neighborhood on the east side of Highway 101 and the Woodland Avenue area on the west side.

# Newell Road Bridge






"Plans" to address flooding in these jurisdictions have been "underway" since the formation of the JPA. In recent years, it has been able to receive federal and state funding to structurally address creek levees and build out a 100-year flood protection plan. Phases of this plan include improvements to roadways and bridges that cross San Francisquito Creek. Intersections include between Highway 101 and El Camino Real, including the modification of several in-channel constrictions such as the Highway 101, Newell Road, Pope-Chaucer Streets, and Middlefield Road Bridges.



# If the locals “had their way...”

- Late 2012, the JPA began to host public hearing/ community meetings seeking feedback on it's 100-year flood protection plan. One of the initial phases included improvements at the Newell Road Bridge.
- In Dec. of 2012, we were reminded of the need of these improvements as East Palo Alto was once again flooded. The city declared a state of emergency to receive funding to make improvements.
- At these hearings, what started out as a conversation about flood control, quickly turned into a conversation about pedestrian and children safety, traffic and crime.
- Plans for the 100-year+ old obsolete bridge was quickly named the "Superbridge" promptly calling for the advocacy of Palo Alto residents to kill the project. At planning meetings hosted by the JPA, most Palo Alto residents opted to tear the bridge down all together with claims that it addressed flooding and concerns about safety.
- The JPA is faced with a unique problem for funding of improvements of other intersections of the creek is contingent upon improvements to the Newell Bridge. Simply, tearing down the bridge is not an option if to successfully address flooding in other parts of the city and county.
- So how does the JPA proceed? Two neighboring cities, historically at odds with one another, to build a bridge that would be brought up to ADA standards, allowing for two cars to safely pass, bike lanes for children and residents to utilize, and sidewalks for parents and pedestrians to cross.
- When do we determine that the "Not In My Backyard" mantra can be a destructive tool to further separate communities? Isn't the bridge suppose to unite us?



When there is  
too much  
government...

... little could get done.

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# Federal vs. State vs. City







- All of these homes are in the 100-year flood zone – the levees are somewhere around the 30-year flood plain
- This pond has been labeled Wetlands and Waters of the US, under the Army Corp.
- This pond is federally permitted and requires a NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) clearance
- Section 7 lists consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service AND National Marine Fishery Service before the City can conduct any maintenance work on the pond.
- This is a fresh water and salt pond – because of this – the habitat transitions; this requires permitting as to evaluate and not disturb wildlife
- East Palo Alto is home to the federally protected Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse and the largest concentration of the Clapper Rail
- Permitting can take years and cost thousands to obtain – costs the city incurs
- If there is no maintenance performed on the pond – the plant life could prevent drainage impacting the pumps in the pump station that allows the flow of water to prevent flooding



## What is the Happy Medium?

- Currently YUCA is working in partnership with the Red Cross, MPFD, EPAPD and EPA Faith-based, health and CBO's to develop a communications plan in the event of an emergency.
- This plan will also be tied into the larger county-wide emergency communication plan
- This model allows for agencies, government and community to devise a plan in conjunction with one another for the good of the whole. Residents also receiving training – the more people trained, the safer our communities.
- Everyone's expertise is valued and necessary to create this inclusive plan
- Can it work everywhere?