



City Manager Lorie Tinfow contributes a monthly column to the *Pacifica Tribune* to connect with local residents and keep Pacificans informed on issues that are of current interest in the City of Pacifica. Below is the submission for the February 3, 2016 edition of the *Pacifica Tribune*, which focuses on storm damage in Pacifica.

Storm Damage in Pacifica

By now, you have probably seen the dramatic drone video that shows the cliff under the apartments on Esplanade Avenue collapsing, a scene dramatic enough to garner national media attention to the situation in which we find ourselves today.

Storm damage in Pacifica is not a new problem. The latest round to which the City of Pacifica is responding began December 15, 2015, when the Pacifica Pier was damaged by powerful waves that caused one of the wall sections at the apex of the “L” to break and fall inward. We fenced it off to protect the public and planned to get to repairs after the storm season concluded.

The next week, we found that those same waves, along with a storm that followed, had undermined a 7 foot diameter outfall pipe and it’s even larger concrete headway support structure located just south of the RV Park on Palmetto Avenue. The waves had scoured the rocks and sand beneath the structure to the point that the pipe and it supporting structure are in danger of failure. This pipe is critical because it drains the stormwater from the entire Milagra watershed. Should it fail and the flow of water be impeded, flooding could occur upstream, including a stormwater drain on Highway 1. City staff began evaluating options for temporary repairs until the storm season was finished and a permanent fix could be made.

Then, on January 17, 2016, a hole opened on the sea wall near where Beach Blvd. intersects with Santa Maria Avenue, causing the collapse of the adjacent promenade and leaving an opening approximately 40 feet long and 8 feet wide. City staff responded with temporary steps to stabilize the opening with large boulders to limit further erosion beneath the promenade and brought in a structural engineer to assess a permanent repair. On Friday 22, 2016, storm #11 hit, bringing with it powerful waves once again. The temporary fix was no match for the storm and the sea wall cap that had remained in place gave way leaving an open gash in the sea wall. This additional failure caused me to issue the declaration of local emergency that the City Council confirmed on January 25.

This same system of storms also affected private properties along our coastline and City staff responded to news of bluff loss as it came in. Two single family houses have been yellow- or red-tagged (meaning they cannot be inhabited) and local businesses and other property owners took steps to shore up their cliff base.

The City also yellow-tagged the apartments at 310 Esplanade Avenue. This action may have seemed sudden but in reality was inevitable given the private property owner’s lack of action to reinforce the bluff. The City has been monitoring the erosion at this site for years and for at the least the past two

years have alerted the tenants and property owner prior to storm season of the need to be prepared to evacuate the building should conditions change. In January 2016, we stepped up our monitoring, sending our geotechnical consultant and building officials to visit the site frequently, including twice per day for the final two weeks. During that time, we contacted the tenants in every unit to warn them that we were increasingly concerned about the integrity of the cliff and the building, and reminded them that they might be required to evacuate on short notice. When that time came, we lined up resources to help with the tenants' relocation needs including setting up a temporary shelter and working with the Pacifica Resource Center to channel other financial resources to them. The initial surprise and resistance expressed by the tenants and reported by the news media had diminished by this past weekend.

It's been a tumultuous couple of weeks. The declaration of local emergency makes the City eligible for County, State and Federal resources to help with the response and the repairs, and representatives from every level of government responded immediately. San Mateo County's Office of Emergency Services sent their staff to work with City staff in setting up the process for reporting damage to both City and private properties and requesting financial assistance. We escorted representatives of the offices of elected officials County Supervisor Don Horsley, Assembly member Kevin Mullin, State Senator Jerry Hill, Senator Barbara Boxer, and Senator Diane Feinstein, to the damage sites. All pledged their support.

Congresswoman Jackie Speier brought representatives from California's Office of Emergency Services and FEMA to Pacifica to tour the damaged sites and Mayor Sue Digre and I joined a press conference where Congresswoman Speier called for the Federal government to direct funds already allocated for California to help us with our emergency.

The rapid, caring response from other government agencies has been amazing. At every level, we have received help and resources needed to begin to address the losses. Even the California Coastal Commission staff has reached out to us to offer letters of support for grants we will need.

As we complete damage assessments now, we are keenly aware that the threat is not over. In the past, our greatest damage has come during storms in the month of February.

What is clear to me, and what Congresswoman Speier also recognized, is the need to begin to proactively plan for Pacifica's future related to climate change and sea level rise. Although storm damage isn't a new issue in Pacifica, what does seem different now is the way the damage is occurring. Pacifica is being battered by an unrelenting barrage of storms (12 so far this season) that may be a harbinger of the new normal in terms of weather, at least during our periodic bouts with El Nino. Saturated soil from rain, high winds from storms, and large, powerful waves enhanced by warmer oceans and increased King tides, are a combination that we can't respond to on our own. In that respect, Pacifica may be the proverbial "canary in the coal mine" when it comes to climate change damage to coastal communities, a problem that is far bigger than our city alone.

The City Council and I will be discussing how to create a plan for the City's future. In the meantime, we have created a new webpage to share information about the City's storm response and resources available to those affected at http://www.cityofpacific.org/el_nino_storm.asp.
