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STORMS 2023: ROAD TO RECOVERY

# Cul-de-sacs and long-term erosion: Citizens, city staff take up gnarly issues of 'saving West Cliff'



BY MAX CHUN

Source: [Lookout Santa Cruz](#)



The City of Santa Cruz’s first in-person community meeting about the future of West Cliff Drive on Thursday showed some direction for the area. Most notably, the Oxford Way cul-de-sac is a go. And more community meetings driven by residents group Save West Cliff are slated for this summer as locals grapple with the options.

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The City of Santa Cruz's first in-person West Cliff Conversations meeting Thursday evening surfaced some of the next moves for the damaged West Cliff Drive and its surrounding streets. The major takeaways: The city is moving forward with converting Oxford Way to a cul-de-sac, and Save West Cliff — [a resident group](#) aiming to galvanize locals to preserve the beloved coastal road — will be hosting Q&A meetings with residents and local scientists to discuss viable options for the road.

More than 60 Santa Cruz residents gathered at the downtown London Nelson Community Center to hear the latest developments as recovery pushes forward and changes are made. City staff split the attendees into three groups that rotated among three rooms, where public works personnel, transportation planners, climate strategists and Save West Cliff leaders were stationed. Attendees could approach any of them with questions, comments and concerns.

City transportation planner [Claire Gallogly](#) said many residents on streets adjacent to West Cliff Drive have raised complaints about increased traffic volume on their roads since the city converted the stretch of West Cliff Drive between Woodrow Avenue and Columbia Street to a one-way in January because of winter storm damage.

Those same complaints had [previously prompted city staff to discuss turning Oxford Way](#) — one of the main streets experiencing



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significant traffic increases — into a cul-de-sac. Now, said Gallogly, the city is moving forward with that plan. The city has ordered the necessary construction materials, and the cul-de-sac is set to be completed by the end of May.

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"We were hearing concerns about traffic speed on Pelton [Avenue], while we heard a lot more about the volume on Oxford," she told Lookout.

"Surrounding streets saw about 300 cars per day while [Oxford] saw about 2,500."

When attendees asked Gallogly about what direction city staff is taking with West Cliff Drive itself, she said they are still exploring a variety of options. Those include no cars, one-way traffic, two-way traffic with no parking, one-way with parking, and keeping it as is. She emphasized that all are options. No decisions have been made, nor does the city favor any specific scenario, she said.



City transportation planner Claire Gallogly fields questions from attendees Thursday at London Nelson Community Center.

(Max Chun / Lookout Santa Cruz)

"It doesn't have to be a single solution, it might be a mix and match," she said. "There is a whole variety of things we could do, and this is just illustrative to say this is what it could look like."

Gallogly and other transportation planners are collecting data to determine how residents use the road, as well as total travel to and from the area. That includes information on walking, biking, driving and where people could be going while traveling the road. She said transportation planners will give an update to the Santa Cruz City Council on May 23 to determine next steps.

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Meanwhile, [Save West Cliff leader Al Ramadan](#) presented a visual history of erosion along West Cliff Drive, showing how rapidly the cliffs have been erased by coastal activity — nearly 350 yards of bluff gone in 100 years, with much of that happening in the years following the 1982 storms.

"There was a guy in the audience from my first session who sort of said, 'That's not right, it can't be 350 yards,'" Ramadan said. "That's the kind of reaction everybody has — they don't realize it's that bad."

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Citing that increasing erosion, he added that the issue at hand is larger than just traffic impacts and a possible one-way street. Inaction and ongoing back-and-forths waste time, which could lead to losing West Cliff for good, he said — and Santa Cruzans need to understand that.

"That is a real thing that's happening, and in my neighborhood as well. I feel it, too," he said. "But it's just part of the problem."



As Ramadan wrapped up his presentation, many of the attending residents echoed familiar, uncertain questions, beyond the immediate ones of traffic: What do we do and what is the most feasible solution? To discuss those questions, Ramadan said Save West Cliff will be organizing community meetings in May and June, to allow residents to ask local marine and climate scientists how they see the future of the road, and what might be possible. He hopes to bring local experts such as UC Santa Cruz earth sciences professors [Gary Griggs](#) and David Revell to the meetings.

"There's now 500-something people that are now seeing what we see," Ramadan said of the number of residents signed up for Save West Cliff updates. He also said that a number of people raised concern about finding a long-term solution before the next big El Niño weather event. "We've struck a chord, people love this place and don't want to see it fall into the ocean."



MAX CHUN



Max Chun is a locally grown reporter with an eye for community activism, human interest stories, and anything Santa Cruz.

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