

BUSINESS

Santa Cruz city staff provides West Cliff Drive update

Next update planned for August



Traffic and pedestrian diversions fill West Cliff Drive between Columbia Street and David Way where erosion from winter storms made significant impacts. (Shmuel Thaler – Santa Cruz Sentinel)

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SANTA CRUZ — City staff presented updated plans at the Santa Cruz City Council meeting Tuesday for repairing and re-armoring West Cliff Drive after a series of relentless winter storms took out portions of the roadway over the winter.

“Our tagline is a resilient and accessible West Cliff for all,” said Santa Cruz Assistant City Manager Laura Schmidt at the meeting. “We are continuing with all of our hearts and might to pursue that with an integrated citywide team as well as looping in a very educated and expert consulting firm.”

Immediately following the damage to the oceanside roadway and pedestrian path this winter, Santa Cruz Public Works created temporary fixes for the worst-hit portions of West Cliff Drive, which include only allowing one-way westbound vehicular traffic between Columbia Street and Woodrow Avenue, and allowing local traffic only between Almar Avenue and the bridge east of David Way.

At the [meeting](#) Tuesday, Santa Cruz Public Works Director Nathan Nguyen said that the city is working with teams from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration to receive substantial funding for the road and path repairs, which are mostly along the 900 and 1000 blocks of West Cliff Drive.

“The estimated damages in those locations is roughly \$17 million at this point,” said Nguyen. “With the riprap that was displaced, we’re looking at about \$1.8 million.”

Nguyen said that Public Works had first imagined it would re-arm the damaged areas on the 900 and 1000 blocks with additional riprap, or large boulders, but after further consideration and consultation, decided that constructing an infill wall in this stretch may be the best and least expensive solution in the short and long term.

“That’s not necessarily a full seawall,” said Nguyen. “What the infill wall allows us to do is that we can tie it into a future seawall should we pursue that avenue as our long-range planning process continues. What we also found was, based on the estimates we got from the riprap that was recently placed, is that the infill wall actually may be less expensive by about 10%, in that range.”

With about \$20 million needed for repairs, construction and armoring at the most damaged portions of the cliffside drive, city staff is working to have some or all of those funds reimbursed by the Federal Highway Administration . However, staff has done what it



Wave and storm erosion has undercut a large area of the bluff at Lighthouse Point. (Shmuel Thaler – Santa Cruz Sentinel)

needed to on its end to acquire the federal grants and is just waiting to hear back.

“We’re under a tight timeline,” said Nguyen. “If we can essentially get all of these repairs done by the middle of October there is a potential that we can get 100% reimbursement, but we are still waiting for (the Federal Highway Administration) to respond to our damage assessment forms. Again, we’ve had initial contact, we’ve submitted those forms and now we are waiting for that process to continue to play out.”

The timeline for the federal grant in question is 270 days after the emergency declaration, or about mid-October. If the application and repair process exceeds that timeframe, the city would then have to pay about 12% of the total repair costs.

“That’s also still very enticing but we’re all working to see if we can accelerate these projects,” said Nguyen. “We’re trying to get construction going later this summer or in the fall.”



Erosion and other storm damage on West Cliff Drive has forced the city to examine the future of the iconic oceanside road. (Shmuel Thaler – Santa Cruz Sentinel)

Nguyen highlighted the extensive damage sustained by the bridge at Bethany Curve, which serves as both a culvert and a seawall and could also be repaired with grant funding. Nguyen said that the bridge, which is more than 100 years old, may need to be demolished and replaced.

“We are looking at potentially extending the actual culvert and seawall approximately 20, maybe 50 feet on each side and raising the actual roadway in elevation,” said Nguyen. “It would still be the low point on West Cliff, but again, with less likeliness of wave action on the roadway.”

With repairs in the works, city transportation staff has continued to study and manage the seaside traffic flow, which has shifted inland into neighborhoods on the Westside of the city causing headaches for residents.

“We’ve heard a lot from the impacted residents in the area about the changes that these travel patterns have had on their neighborhood,” said Santa Cruz Transportation Manager Matt Starkey. “This is an evaluation process that we are going to refine more and bring back in August where we can really provide a menu of traffic calming options that we could do in the area.”

Starkey said that community engagement is ongoing and traffic patterns over the holiday weekend will be studied in detail. However, the potential one-way pilot program and other traffic management strategies won’t be solidified until August.

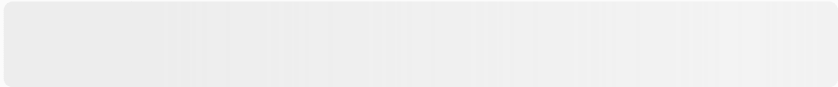
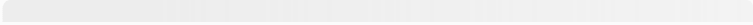
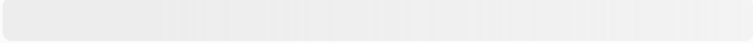
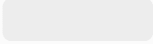
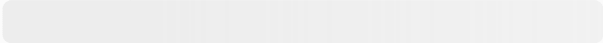
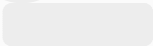
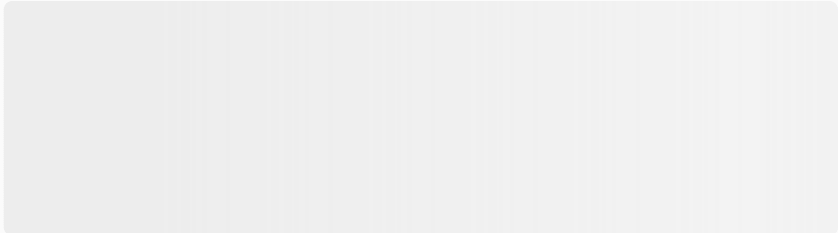
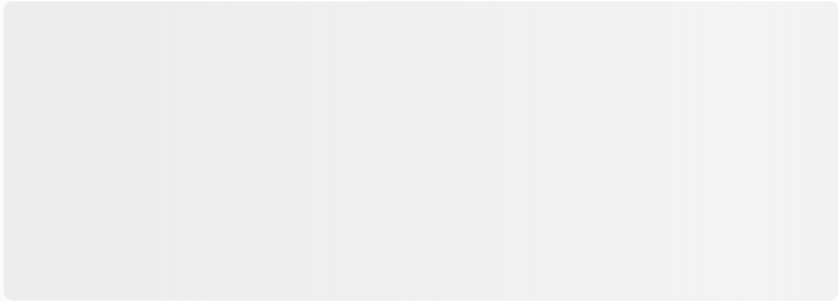
After a presentation of the still incomplete [West Cliff Drive roadmap](#) document by Michael McCormick of [Farallon Strategies](#) and public comment, Councilmember Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson added an amendment to the [original motion](#) to develop a 50-year plan for West Cliff Drive by the end of 2023. The motion passed unanimously.

For updates regarding West Cliff Drive, visit cityofsantacruz.com.

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