

Live Oak braces for inevitable flooding

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When it rains it floods.

Live Oak residents, contending every winter with overflowing culverts and drainage pipes that turn lawns, streets and parking lots into ponds, live by this maxim.

"It's going to happen. It's guaranteed. After the first heavy rain there's going to be flooding," said Rob Bremner, of the Live Oak Community Assn. "It's hard to get away from it. It's so flat around here."

The area's drainage problems grew so severe that in the early 1980s neighbors formed the Live Oak Community Assn. The group now fights for a range of urban services to offset the effects of the numerous apartments, townhouses and condominiums the county has allowed in their community.

The straw that broke the neighbors' tolerance was a poor drainage channel that sent

white water rushing through one home and threatened others on Webster Court.

Live Oak is a low land of ocean shelf cut by swales and basins. Its drainage problems have grown with the development of the last 20 years, said Kim Vester, senior engineer with the county flood control district.

"The more impervious area you have — roofs and pavement — the more runoff you have," Vester said.

But the development that increased the runoff has also blocked and altered natural channels taking storm water from the foothills to the sea. The result is flooding.

East Cliff Drive, for example, was built over an arroyo, Vester said. Development has slowly filled in the rest. Now, each year the East Cliff Shopping Center floods, forcing the owners of Polivio's to routinely sandbag their restaurant, and water spills over the street.

The county is working with limited money gathered through the flood control district to solve Live Oak's drainage problems. Several of the more serious problems have been addressed — at least tem-

porarily — but many irksome areas remain. that fund such projects for Live Oak, as well as Capitola and Soquel, now have about \$200,000 available, Vester said.

Storm water follows two main drainage channels into Live Oak, Vester said, the Thurber

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"We've been putting some pretty good bandaids on it," said Carl Johns, one of the founders of the Live Oak Community Assn., "but there's a lot of major work that needs to be done." The county's draft capital improvement plan lists 26 necessary drainage projects at an estimated cost of \$4.8 million for Live Oak. The coffers

Lane and 41st Avenue channels.

The Thurber Lane Channel, begins at Santa Cruz Gardens and runs southwest through Live Oak to Schwan Lake.

In past winters, water has pooled in several places along the channel. Especially bad areas have been at Twin Hills Drive, Sequoia Drive, and at Mansfield Street and 17th Avenue. Severe flooding has taken place at Pinewood Street

off 16th Avenue. But a recently installed drain is expected prevent flooding there, Vester said.

Ponding at Capitola Road and 15th Avenue has also troubled residents in the past. But, the county has installed a temporary solution to that problem, as well, Vester said.

The 41st Avenue channel begins in the foothills near Soquel Drive and flows southeast to Corcoran and Black Point lagoons.

The water flows underground along 41st Avenue to a large basin at 38th Avenue and Brommer Street. The underground pipe carrying water from 41st Avenue to the basin can hold water from storms likely to occur in 10-year weather cycles. But since the system was built, the county has adopted higher standards calling for systems that can handle storms likely to occur with 100-year cycles.

From the basin, the water channels into an open ditch

cutting through the Blue a Gold Mobile Home Park, then passing underneath railroad tracks.

Flooding at the park and under the tracks is a "historic problem," Vester said.

The county is now planning solutions to problems along the 41st Avenue Channel.

To bring the underground pipe up to standard, the county has proposed solutions involving other agencies.

One, carrying off some of the water flowing down the underground pipe to Soquel Creek, involves the City of Capitola and the state Department of Transportation.

A second solution hangs on plans to expand the Capitola Mall. The expansion plans call for a system to carry off more water on the channel from from Capitola Road to Rodeo Gulch.

Smaller swales are also causing problems for Live Oak residents. Ponding commonly took

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place on the flat areas along 26th Avenue from Fresno Street to Cliff Drive. The county has just awarded a \$130,000 contract to solve the problem.

Drainage along the 17th Avenue swale became controversial when a 36-inch cement pipe was improperly installed on a privately owned beach

known as Sunny Cove. Officials from the California Coastal Commission red-tagged the pipe, designed to drain a housing project for low-income seniors, and delayed the Volunteers of America project.

A permanent solution to the problem has yet to be found. County planners are now preparing to award a contract for a full environmental impact report on the project that will assess several solutions, some

carrying price tags as high as \$400,000.

Live Oak is safe from severe flooding in the case of the worst storms likely to occur in a ten-year weather cycle, Vester said. But, the engineer agrees that much work needs to be done.

"If you want to solve all these problems in a short time, you need a lot of capital," Vester said. "It's going to take the support of the public."