



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

701 OCEAN STREET, 4TH FLOOR, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060
(831) 454-2580 FAX: (831) 454-2131 TDD: (831) 454-2123

January 29, 2020

NOTICE TO OWNERS OF PROPERTIES IN UNINCORPORATED AREA SUBJECT TO FAA REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO VEGETATION HEIGHTS

FAA Requirements related to Watsonville Airport and Tree/Landscaping Heights

In October of 2012 the City of Watsonville Municipal Airport (Airport) notified owners of certain adjacent private properties of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirements to maintain safe heights of vegetation on their properties. This letter required owners to trim or remove trees/landscaping identified in a hazards assessment, and provided a timeframe for the owners to do the work.

Unfortunately, the response to the letter was not sufficient to address the hazards to public safety, and in October 2016 the identified trees/landscaping were abated as required by federal law through trimming or removal by a contractor hired by Watsonville Airport. As stated in the October 2012 letter to property owners, the costs incurred by the Airport for the work should have been paid by the owners, but instead was paid by the City and County.

In 2017 the Airport, in coordination with the County of Santa Cruz, contacted each of the affected property owners, offering an option to sign a "Right of Entry and Agreement for Tree Height Maintenance" (Agreement) that would be recorded on title to each property. The Agreement removed any past obligation of the owner to reimburse the Airport for the 2016 abatement work, and made it clear that it is the responsibility of the owner to comply with federal requirements for clearance. The Agreement also provided that the County of Santa Cruz, if necessary in the future due to failure of owners to comply, would take action to abate hazardous vegetation and would place liens against those properties to recover its abatement costs. In response to that 2017 effort, two property owners signed the Agreement. Neither the County nor the Airport have taken any further action to recover costs associated with the 2016 abatement for properties located within unincorporated Santa Cruz County. Due to concerns about prior notice provided in 2012, the City and County have now decided not to pursue either reimbursement or the prior agreements for the 2016 abatement activity. Use of public abatement funds was necessary at that time, but such funds will not be available in the future.

The purpose of this Notice at this time is to inform all property owners that may be subject to the FAA requirement, that every property owner receiving this Notice is subject to requirements, at property owner expense, to remove and/or trim trees and landscaping in order to achieve and maintain compliance with FAA requirements. If, in the future, a property owner does not take appropriate action and the County or its contractors must take action to abate non-compliant vegetation to address a public safety hazard, costs related to each property will be placed as a lien on the subject property so that the County will recover its costs.

At this time, the County and Airport will not seek reimbursement of 2016 costs from those properties where abatement action was taken, however this Notice is intended to make it very clear that meeting FAA requirements for tree/landscaping heights to ensure safe flight paths is a responsibility of affected private property owners. If the County is forced in the future to abate non-compliant conditions after appropriate future Notice is provided at the time action is needed, liens will be placed on properties and due and payable on property tax bills and/or at time of transfer of the property.

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation and responsible property ownership.

Sincerely,

Carlos Palacios
County Administrative Officer

Kathleen Molloy
Planning Director