



The community's voice for the protection, restoration, responsible development, and celebration of the Napa River and its watershed through education and advocacy.

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*A "living" Napa River  
conveys equilibrium  
and harmony with all  
that it touches and  
resonates through  
the human and  
natural environment*

16 September, 2022

Andrew Butler, P.E.  
Napa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District  
804 1st Street  
Napa, CA 94559

RE: Friends of the Napa River Comments on the 15% Flood Wall Plans

Dear Andrew,

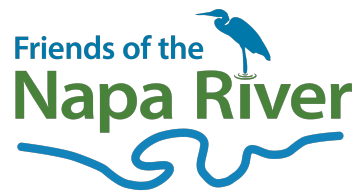
Friends of the Napa River (FONR) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the 15% Flood Wall Plans at this early stage in the design. FONR board members attended live and Zoom presentations that discussed these plans. These comments by Friends of the Napa River are focused on how the plans relate to the Living River concepts, particularly 1) enhancing the natural and biological functions of the river and 2) providing public visual and recreational access to the river.

#### COMMENTS

1) Despite no landscaping plans at this stage, the one landscape issue that was mentioned is that Corps standards require that 15 feet on both sides of the concrete flood wall be a "vegetation free zone." But the engineers said that that zone can actually be planted with grasses or short shrubs as long as maintenance/inspectors can see and access the wall, and that the Corps has a list of plant species that are allowed in this zone. FONR would want to see native plant species in any landscaping, at least on the river side of the wall. (The Flood Control District's maintenance access road will typically be on the landward side of the wall in the vegetation free zone.)

2) The plans show quite a few mature riparian riverbank trees being removed for the flood wall construction. This has the potential to remove a significant area of riparian forest in those areas. FONR requests that removal of native riparian trees be minimized to protect this plant community and ecosystem. FONR requests that in any areas where significant existing vegetation is removed, the project includes suitable 'mitigation' replacement planting.

3) The flood wall's height above 'existing grade' (and therefore above finished grade?) is often 8 or 9 feet and gets as tall as 12 feet in a few places. The visual height of the wall is an aesthetic issue for trail users and adjacent landowners. The engineers said the flood wall freeboard (i.e., safety factor) is 3.0 feet above the 100-year "Design Water Surface Elevation" (expected maximum floodwater elevation). We recall that the subject of how much freeboard is actually necessary/appropriate was discussed years ago by the Flood Control District's Technical Advisory Panel about the flood walls south of the library and that there was possibly some option to



slightly reduce the freeboard. We recall the engineers commented that the Corps may later revise the design freeboard, ideally down but possibly up based on more detailed analysis. For the reason stated, FONR requests minimizing the freeboard to reduce the visual impact of the wall height.

4) The engineers explained that the river trail along the wall from the River Terrace Inn to Ace & Vine and Lincoln Avenue is currently planned to be on the landward side of the flood wall. This would, in effect, block all public visual and physical access to the river and bring trail users closer to the private back yards of adjacent residences. FONR requests that the public river trail be instead be placed on the water side of the flood wall. The engineers responded that the trail could probably be placed on the water side of the wall. FONR asks that the designers make this important change. We would also appreciate notification of discussions with the Ace & Vine owners in regard to the improvements adjacent to their property.

5) The flood wall between the northern end of the River Pointe property and the Elks Club will replace the existing levee, which is structurally unsound and therefore must be removed and the wall constructed on native soil. The Corps is interested in possibly reusing some of the soil excavated to remove that levee as fill on both the landward and river side of the new wall. This could reduce the visual impact of the wall for both river trail users and adjacent property owners – and reduce costs for the project. FONR supports this option and suggests careful and detailed design to maximize these benefits.

The additional and perhaps contradictory design issue at this location is that some residents west of the flood wall are concerned about public trail users and others along the river being able to climb over the flood wall and trespass into the back yards of the private properties. Thus, the solid flood wall or a combination of wall and a fencing on top should be high enough and unclimbable enough to prevent this trespass.

Since no trees would be allowed in the 15-foot “vegetation free zone” portion of the fill slope, it would be beneficial to allow space between the toe of the slope/edge of the zone and the river trail to be able to plant an “allee” of trees along that area. Likewise, on any portions of the river trail that does not have any mature tree cover, it would be highly beneficial to plant a similar “allee” of trees along the trail.

We also like the idea of incorporating the River Pointe street system into the maintenance system, perhaps eliminating expensive duplication of paving.



6) The engineers said that all current neighborhood access gates to the river trail in the leveed area north of Lincoln will be maintained and will use some kind of floodwater blocking panels to be installed ahead of flood events. An alternative in some locations could be a stepped or ramped 'stile' that takes users over the wall rather than through a gap in it.

7) FONR suggests that the river trail adjacent to the flood walls be a Class I Bikeway, which specifies it be paved and have a certain minimum width.

8) Along the River Pointe property, the proposed flood wall and trail appear significantly set back from the existing riverbank. The reason stated for this is that the existing riverbanks at that location are steep and potentially eroding. The engineers said that Corps standards require the wall setback distance to be landward from a theoretical 2.5:1 slope from the toe of the riverbank that might be required for future bank erosion control. Following this standard, this setback appears justified. Rick Thomasser stated that the FCD would apply for future grants or other funding to stabilize the banks and minimize erosion in this area independently of this project.

#### QUESTIONS

9) Would the installation of the floodwalls on the west bank of the river possibly increase the river's flood water surface elevation, water velocity, and therefore erosive shear potential?

10) Would it be helpful to identify the owners' names and/or street addresses on the plans in addition to the Assessor Parcel Numbers?

11) The long reaches of high concrete wall proposed will create a barrier to much of the terrestrial wildlife along the river. Will this impact the functioning of the river and riparian wildlife habitat? Should there be wildlife passage around/over the flood walls? Are there any solutions that could allow wildlife passage without compromising the function of the flood walls?

FONR is appreciative of this opportunity to review and comment on the 15% flood wall plans and looks forward to reviewing updated versions of the plans.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors, Friends of the Napa River