

# City Approves Chabot School & Recreation Center Tree Plantings

## The Lorax Project's Goal: Plant Trees, Keep Air Clean for Kids

by Jon Welch

As part of its settlement with Caltrans, the Fourth Bore Coalition proposed planting trees along Highway 24 to mitigate the effect of the newly expanded Caldecott Tunnel. Caltrans balked.

"We picked up where the Caldecott Settlement ended," said Rich Proulx, director of the Lorax Project, a local tree planting initiative. "We addressed the concerns raised during the negotiations. We even offered to adopt a highway so we could plant trees on the Caltrans land along Highway 24. After years of trying, it was clear that the tree planting would never be permitted."

The Lorax Project received a second wind from the city of Oakland when it recently obtained approval to plant redwood trees along the southern edge of the Chabot Recreation Center area and Chabot Elementary School. The Lorax Project also plans to offer trees to residents on Miles Avenue.

A 2003 California law banned new school construction within 500 feet of any major freeway. Legislators reviewed the scientific evidence and determined that the health risks for children attending schools located so close to freeways were unacceptable, so new schools are not exposed to the conditions faced by Chabot Elementary School and nearby Claremont Middle School, whose



**The Lorax project will be planting trees in the Chabot Recreation Area and the edge of Chabot Elementary. Trees pictured are growing on the Miles Avenue side of Claremont Middle School.**

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campuses are entirely within 500 feet of Highway 24.

Scientific research has established the negative health consequences of exposure to pollution for people who live, work, or attend schools near major freeways. Exposure to pollution among children living or attending schools near freeways is known to increase risks of asthma, allergies, bronchitis, other respiratory problems, and impaired lung function growth. Of particular concern for schools and parks in such locations is that children's lungs are fragile and developing. Current research shows that repeated exposure to freeway pollution can result in critical long-term consequences, including compromised adult lung functioning, lung disease, heart disease, and cancer.

Two years ago, Claremont Middle School planted rows of redwood trees along the side of the campus grounds adjacent to the highway to help mitigate this danger. Studies have shown that trees located near highways can serve as barriers that significantly reduce the transmission of pollutants through the air.

"The fact that the Lorax Project can help

to reduce particulates in the air and make it healthier for our children is wonderful," stated Laura Burnett, Chabot Elementary School PTA president. "It has been a continual concern that Chabot Elementary School is so close to a freeway and so the particulate matter is especially high. Currently, it's at unhealthy conditions. Between the enhanced beauty and better air quality for our children, we couldn't be happier." Jon Mayer, Chabot Elementary principal, added, "It cannot hurt to have more trees around our site. Having more trees is great protection and can only clean the air up."

The success of the Lorax Project is not assured. Proulx warned, "We have taken a big step forward, but our agreement with the city gives us only a short time to plant trees. While we would love to plant 100 new trees, we are completely dependent on funding from the local community. We can use all the help we can get."

For more information about the Lorax Project, contact Rich Proulx, The Lorax Project, 46 Roanoke Road, Berkeley, CA 94705; richproulx@lyceuminstitute.org or call 415/637-5890.

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