



## Alamo Fire Station Review Part 2

*This is the second part of a two part article on the Fire District Application.*

The San Ramon Fire District application for a new fire station to be located at the corner of Miranda and Stone Valley Road has presented some problems for the site that should be resolved before the application for the fire station should be approved by the County.

The fuel station, propane tank, generator, and tool shed/trash enclosure area shown on the plans are located within close proximity of each other and at the front of the property at the corner of Miranda and Stone Valley Road. It is located directly behind the corner landscaping and a decorative wall. This area needs to meet various County code requirements, OSHA requirements, noise level of generator and other equipment, location of equipment, and height of equipment with mitigating measures that will be hide this area from view. Present plans have to be revised to incorporate all these concerns prior to site approval.

The Mitigated Negative Declaration should also include a review process using an independent expert for this type of use in coordination with the various governmental agencies.

The monument sign location and design and the corner landscaping plan for the station now shown on the plans should be designed to integrate with the retaining walls and landscaping proposed for the corner of Miranda and Stone Valley Road. A possible redesign would be to modify the lower retaining wall to be a constant low height with a curving design toward the road intersection, using typical building materials that are being used on the site and using surface-mounted metal lettering and subdued lighting.

The main building design should be reviewed further. Because this is a mature, developed residential neighborhood, it is important to develop the correct balance in residential character for the main building, blending it into the setting while still retaining certain focal elements that distinguish the special use of the site. To this end, while the tower design is intended to represent the



## Spring Pruning

By Blaine Brende & Joe Lamb

Once again, it's that time of year when the landscape grows lush, beautiful – and out of control. At Brende & Lamb, we prune to balance the practical with the aesthetic. When our clients ask us to restore their

views, bring more light into their gardens, and reduce fire hazards, we do our best to keep their screening intact and to protect their privacy. At the same time we work hard to enhance the natural beauty of their trees. Balancing your tree care needs are skills we've developed over decades of caring for trees.

### Aesthetic Pruning

Each plant has a natural growth pattern. Aesthetic pruning accentuates the shape given the plant by nature. Good pruning creates a light and open feeling. A well pruned plant enhances the observer's experience by accentuating the interplay of light and shadow, open spaces and denser spaces, and by revealing the sculptural elements of trunk and branch.

The first step in aesthetic pruning is to see the flow of the tree. We begin by looking at the base of the trunk, then let our eyes follow the trunk upward into the branches and out to the branch tips. We notice how the flow of the branches determines the tree's form. The form may be weeping, as with Willows and Chinese Elms. Perhaps, as with Monterey Cypress, the branches form at acute angles to the trunk, giving the tree an upswept look. Or the branches may bend and twist, forming complex arcs, as does the Coast Live Oak. Within these patterns, each tree has its own unique form and flow.

### Pruning and Size Reduction

It is important to prune in a manner that does not harm the health of the tree. When thinning a pine, for example, it is important not to strip the major branches of their smaller branches, a practice called "lion-tailing" which leaves a branch denuded except for foliage at the end. Lion-tailing

historical hose drying feature of period stations, this element of the design should be reviewed further for height, roof slope and design, exterior materials, integration into overall building design, etc. to enable the design to blend into this existing residential neighborhood.

Fire house truck doors design should be reviewed since the front doors facing Miranda are shown to be of a bi-fold design to provide for noise reduction and added safety, and the rear doors are roll-up standard metal exterior doors with few glass inserts. All doors should meet requirements for noise and light pollution, standard design, etc.

The present plans do not show the location of the Communication Antennae, this element must be added to the present plans. We currently have no studies of any impact of Emergency Call Antennae use and any impact on cell phone reception within the immediate area.

Traffic concerns exist along both frontage streets. Keep Clear Zones, turn lanes, and light signals along with school traffic should be clearly addressed in traffic studies and on the plans. Street changes proposed on both Stone Valley Rd. and Miranda Ave. and the proposed design of the sidewalks along frontage of the property should be reviewed to minimize impact and also improve efficiency.

The Mitigated Negative Declaration, although prepared to address numerous issues and concerns, is using somewhat limited data in support for the conclusions shown in this report.

At this point, AIA has scheduled a review of the application at its Wednesday, March 9<sup>th</sup> meeting. Visit our website [www.AlamoCa.org](http://www.AlamoCa.org) for information on AIA and computer renderings of the proposed fire station.

## Volunteerism in Alamo? Enjoy our Community? Is it possible to donate your time to "Give Back"?

Our Alamo Community is fortunate to have a wealth of vibrant, energetic residents that are accomplished professionals in virtually every type of field. AIA welcomes your participation in making our community better. Please consider this as you make your plans for 2011. Donating your time to our community will benefit you, your family, your neighbors and our community. Consider donating your time to any of our various community groups. AIA is currently asking their membership for volunteers interested in donating time for several committees including Planning, Code Compliance, Traffic/Transportation and Community Affairs. Please visit our website [www.AlamoCa.org](http://www.AlamoCa.org).

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increases the chance of branch failure by concentrating the weight at the branch tips. A healthier tree, and more subtly beautiful look, is achieved by thinning to highlight the spaces or "layers" in its natural patterns. Removing diseased wood, and removing or reducing crossing branches that interrupt the natural flow, lets in more light and air, encouraging interior growth and overall health. Careful pruning can increase desired screening over time by encouraging interior growth.

### Aesthetic View Work

In view work, the beauty of the view and the beauty of the tree often seem to be in conflict. Some tree-workers will sacrifice the tree for the view by "topping" the tree. Topping is almost always a bad idea. "Topping" creates a dense re-growth in water-sprouts that is unsightly. But more than the tree's beauty is at stake here. Topping wounds the tree and promotes disease, including heart rot, and can make the tree dangerous. The water-sprouts on a topped tree are not deeply anchored in the trunk and are subject to failure in high winds. Add in the fact that these sprouts may be anchored onto a rotting trunk, and you have a safety problem that gets worse over time. Responsible arborists do not top trees. Removing a tree, perhaps replacing it with a smaller variety that can be kept out of the view, is usually preferable to beheading it.

Looking at tree and view as two elements that complement each other can often solve view problems. Sometimes, lightly bringing the tree back without cutting into major branches can prevent further encroachment on the view.

To open even more of the view, we create windows by selectively removing branches not essential for the tree's natural form. We can enlarge these windows by removing branchlets that rise or drop into the view. Thinning above and below the window creates a feeling of openness, rather than gaping hole. The image formed by Mt. Diablo, framed by the trembling leaves of a well-windowed tree, proves that nature and civilization can complement each other.

***If your trees and shrubs need a little TLC - call us at 510-486-TREE (8733) or email [bl@brendelamb.com](mailto:bl@brendelamb.com) to schedule a free estimate. For more information visit our website at [www.brendelamb.com](http://www.brendelamb.com).***

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