



*Dear Pine Lake neighbors,*

*I want to take a moment to address the concerns many of you have shared about the recent vegetation removal along the lake path. I understand why this has been upsetting. The path and its surroundings are deeply loved, and the change was sudden and visually stark. When something familiar disappears overnight, it can feel alarming and even heartbreaking. Those feelings are valid, and I want you to know they've been heard.*

*I also want to recognize that the questions and frustration coming forward are rooted in care—for the lake, for the wetlands, and for the character of Pine Lake. That care is something I respect deeply.*

*Because there has been understandable confusion, I want to clarify a few important points.*

*The area that was cleared is part of the dam structure, not a natural shoreline. The lake itself is a man-made system, and because the City owns the dam, we have a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure its long-term stability. Certain trees and vegetation along the upstream slope—particularly those with deep or aggressive root systems—pose a known risk to dams over time. They can compromise structural integrity and prevent a full and accurate inspection.*

*The vegetation removal was not only to protect the integrity of the dam, it was also a necessary step to move forward with ongoing wetlands repair studies, which require accurate data on the lake's holding capacity and behavior during large rain events.*

*Without clearing this vegetation, our engineers and regulatory partners—including those responsible for dam safety and wetlands protection—could not complete the work needed to design the correct long-term solutions.*

*Some residents have referenced Environmental Protection Division (EPD) guidance that discourages riprap along shorelines. That guidance generally applies to natural shorelines. Dams are governed by different standards because the risks are different. During the Council discussion, our City Attorney emphasized that ensuring the dam's integrity must take precedence, particularly given the City's ownership and the potential consequences of failure.*

*I also want to speak directly to the ecological concerns, because they matter—and they matter to me personally. Protecting the dam is not at odds with protecting habitat. It is about placing habitat where it strengthens the system rather than undermining it. During our town hall, the City’s engineering firm shared that properly designed riprap at the water’s edge can actually increase fish habitat. Replanting and habitat restoration remain part of our long-term vision, but they must follow the surveys and engineering work that determine what vegetation is appropriate and safe for this location.*

*Taking the long view is essential. If our goal is the health of the wetlands ecosystem and the safety of our community, then completing the inspection and studies is not a detour—it is how we move forward responsibly.*

*I know this change is difficult in the short term. I know it feels like something precious was lost. But this decision was made with care, thoughtful discussion, professional guidance, and a focus on long-term stewardship of the lake and the wetlands.*

*Thank you for continuing to engage, to ask hard questions, and to show up for our community. We will continue to communicate as the next phases of work are scheduled and as replanting options come into focus.*

*With gratitude,*

*Brandy Hall*

*Mayor, City of Pine Lake*