

REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Support the Preferred Alignment of the Stevens Creek Trail as Recommended by the Joint Cities Working Team (JCWT) and Find that Action is Exempt from CEQA under CEQA Guidelines Sections 15262 and 15306 (Feasibility and Planning Studies and Information Collection)

REPORT IN BRIEF

The Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study) is a study initiated by the cities of Sunnyvale, Mountain View, Cupertino, Los Altos, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District in an effort to identify feasible alignments to close the gap of the Stevens Creek Trail between Mountain View and Cupertino. The draft study was released March 2015, and after several months of public input, the Joint Cities Working Team (JCWT) has made their recommendations to each of the city councils on the preferred alignment and other policies that support this collaborative effort. The team is now asking the city councils to support their recommendations.

Staff recommends supporting the JCWT's recommendations with a phased approach; seeking grant funding as appropriate to carry out the recommendations; and adopting the following policies as identified in the JCWT recommendation summary:

- a. All trail projects should try to improve habitat values in and around Stevens Creek.
- b. Existing public lands near Stevens Creek should be maintained as public land to preserve habitat and future trail opportunities.
- c. Continue collaboration with regional partners for extension of the Stevens Creek Trail.

BACKGROUND

The Stevens Creek Trail is a partially completed bicycle and pedestrian route along the Stevens Creek corridor. The trail corridor concept was originally proposed by County of Santa Clara trail planners in 1961 to create an interconnected system of trails that would connect parks along Stevens Creek. Today the trail stretches from San Francisco Bay in Mountain View to Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way. Another segment of the trail has been completed in Cupertino south of Stevens Creek Boulevard through Blackberry Farm Park and McClellan Ranch Preserve. The gap between these existing trail segments has been the focus of the Feasibility Study.

Most recently the City has actively participated in the Joint Cities Working Team (JCWT), a cooperative group of policy representatives from Sunnyvale, Mountain View, Cupertino, Los Altos, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District. The group was formed in 2009 with the goal of developing and coordinating a mutually agreeable concept for completion of the Stevens Creek Trail and subsequently to seek resources to construct the remaining trail in a cooperative and unified effort. As part of this effort the four cities agreed to funding contributions for a Feasibility Study to identify feasible alignments that would close the gap between Mountain View and Cupertino. Funds for the study were also provided by the Friends of the Stevens Creek Trail and a Project Readiness Initiative

grant from the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA).

To complete the Feasibility Study, the four cities contracted with Jana Sokale Environmental Planning (through Sunnyvale as lead agency) in 2012 and subsequently the JCWT sought out volunteers for a Citizens Working Group (CWG). The CWG was tasked with reviewing the technical Feasibility Study findings and serve in an advisory role to the JCWT. The scope of the Feasibility Study was to identify alternatives for the completion of a public bicycle and pedestrian connection and to gather community input throughout the process. The Feasibility Study analyzed a wide variety of possible routes and evaluated a range of possible improvements including fully separated off-street bicycle/pedestrian trails, on-street bike lanes, and neighborhood greenways on lower volume residential streets. The Feasibility Study report presents numerous routes that are considered feasible and documents routes that were evaluated but considered infeasible. This analysis is presented in the Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study (Attachment 1; www.stevenscreektrail.insunnyvale.com <<http://www.stevenscreektrail.insunnyvale.com>>).

While the Feasibility Study itself does not make any recommendations on preferred routes, it provided the framework for the JCWT on feasible alignments. The JCWT was tasked with making preferred alignment recommendations upon conclusion of the 2015 public input.

Now that the JCWT has made their recommendation on preferred alignments to close the gap between Mountain View and Cupertino, they ask their colleagues on the councils of the four cities to support their mutually agreed-on concept for completion of the Stevens Creek Trail (see Attachment 2 for Joint Cities Working Team Recommendations to the City Councils).

The Parks and Recreation Commission considered this item at a noticed public hearing on November 11, 2015 and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission considered this item at a noticed public hearing on November 19, 2015.

EXISTING POLICY

Land Use and Transportation Element LT-1, Protect and sustain a high quality of life in Sunnyvale by participating in coordinated land use and transportation planning in the region.

Land Use and Transportation Element LT-2, Preserve and enhance an attractive community, with a positive image and sense of place that consists of distinctive neighborhoods, pockets of interest and human-scale development

Land Use and Transportation Element LT-4, Preserve and enhance the quality character of Sunnyvale's industrial, commercial and residential neighborhoods by promoting land use patterns and related transportation opportunities that are supportive of the neighborhood concept.

Land Use and Transportation Element LT-5, Attain a transportation system that is effective, safe, pleasant and convenient.

Land Use and Transportation Element LT-8, Provide and maintain adequate and balanced open space and recreation facilities for the benefit of maintaining a healthy community based on community needs and the ability of the city finance, construct, maintain and operate these facilities now and in the future.

Land Use and Transportation Element LT-9, A regional approach to providing and preserving open space and providing open space and recreational services, facilities and amenities for the broader community.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Supporting the preferred alignment of the Stevens Creek Trail is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15262 of the CEQA Guidelines, which exempts feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not been funded or approved. The action is also exempt under CEQA Guideline Section 15306, which exempts information gathering activities undertaken as part of a study leading to action that the agency has not yet approved, adopted, or funded. Should Council direct staff to move the project forward, appropriate CEQA analysis will be performed during the project design or master planning process.

DISCUSSION

The Feasibility Study analyzed a variety of alignments connecting the trail gap between Mountain View and Cupertino, and included a variety of facilities such as off-street pedestrian and bike paths, as well as on-street bike lanes and neighborhood greenways. The study area was divided into four study segments to facilitate the presentation of the feasibility findings. The feasible segments vary by length and begin and end at City streets. The feasibility study area is as follows:

- Study Segment 1: Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue - This segment extends from the Permanente Creek Bypass Channel overpass at St. Giles Lane in Mountain View and to Mary Avenue in Sunnyvale and it surrounds Mountain View High School and Cherry Chase Elementary School. The study identifies an off-street pedestrian/bike path along the 22 acres of open space within the shared space along the Creek between Mountain View and Sunnyvale.

This is the only segment within the Feasibility Study boundaries where a trail along the Creek was found to be feasible based on the availability of public land and the physical space required for trail construction. However, implementation of a trail through this segment is very challenging due to limited Creek bank area. Several bridges would need to be built crossing the Creek and lengthy structures would be needed to span narrow areas between the State Route 85 sound wall and areas of very narrow Creek bank. A lengthy environmental review and permitting process will be required prior to any construction in this area.

- Study Segment 2: Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road - This study segment extends from Louise Lane in Los Altos to Mary Avenue in Sunnyvale and it includes the areas around West Valley Elementary School and Cupertino Middle School.
- The JCWT recommended alignment is a potential off-street pedestrian/bike path along the Bernardo Avenue sound wall, between Fremont Avenue and Homestead Road including a bike/pedestrian overpass at Fremont Avenue. The alternatives for implementation of this path include either the conversion of Bernardo to a one-way street, or significant reduction in parking. While the preliminary investigation done as part of the study determined that this option is feasible, if the City pursues this alignment, further studies must be conducted to fully evaluate the impacts of the roadway change. The JCWT recommended that a detailed traffic and parking study be conducted for this segment, with the findings being considered by the

City of Sunnyvale prior to any further trail master planning work in this segment. If based on the findings of the comprehensive traffic and parking study, the off-street bike/pedestrian path was found infeasible or if this option was not supported by the City of Sunnyvale, the JCWT recommended modest bike and pedestrian safety improvements and/or wayfinding on Belleville Way, Bernardo Ave, and Bedford Avenue.

Numerous concerns from area residents were expressed during the public outreach process regarding this alignment. Potential changes to the roadway in this segment generated concerns about traffic diversion in the neighborhood, loss of parking, and degradation of already difficult traffic conditions around Cupertino Middle School during pick-up and drop-off times. The current Feasibility Study was limited to evaluating roadway widths and physical constraints necessary for trail construction and did not evaluate the potential traffic impacts from narrowing the roadway. Conversely, the Feasibility Study also did not attempt to quantify the potential benefits of a separated off-street bike/pedestrian trail that could provide safer access to the school for area students.

- Study Segment 3: Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard - This segment extends from Grant Road/Foothill Boulevard in Los Altos and Cupertino to Mary Avenue in Cupertino and includes the area contiguous to Homestead High School and near Stevens Creek Elementary School.

In this segment only potential improvements along Homestead Road near Highway 85 are within the City of Sunnyvale. The Feasibility Study concluded that no feasible routes exist that could accommodate an off-street facility and connect through to the existing trail that ends at Stevens Creek Boulevard. Although several on-street routes were considered feasible, the JCWT recommended no specific preferred routes through this area. Rather, a long-term vision was articulated that trail routes continue to be evaluated as conditions change in the area such as the reconstruction of the I-280/SR-85 interchange, or the Union Pacific Railroad property becomes available.

Improvements to Homestead Road at the Highway 85 crossing would consist of a widening the existing bridge or constructing a new bike/pedestrian bridge to create a separated bike/pedestrian path on the north side of Homestead. Highway 85 on-off ramps would also be realigned to promote bike/pedestrian safety. Improvements in this area could be extended along Homestead to connect to an existing off-street bike /pedestrian trail in Los Altos. These improvements would be designed to improve safety for students walking and cycling to nearby Cupertino Middle School and Homestead High School.

- Study Segment 4: Trail Connections to Rancho San Antonio County Park via Stevens Creek Boulevard - This segment is in Cupertino and connects east-west along Stevens Creek Boulevard to Rancho San Antonio County Park. This connection would not be considered part of the Stevens Creek Trail but could provide an important connection from the existing trail through Blackberry Farm Park to an extensive trail network in Rancho San Antonio County Park. While no part of this segment is within the City of Sunnyvale, supporting the efforts of our four-cities partners could help secure funding to improve a route that would be available to Sunnyvale residents.

During the months of July and August 2015 the JCWT held a series of meetings to discuss the team's recommendation to the city councils. During these discussions, the JCWT policymakers took into consideration all these potential issues and others outlined in the draft Feasibility Study, to make their recommendations on preferred alignments and other improvements. As they developed their recommendations the team also considered the public input received during the comment period, the CWG recommendations, and their individual insight to conclude on regional recommendations for the Stevens Creek Trail. The team's recommendations are summarized in the *Joint Cities Working Team Recommendations to the City Councils*, Attachment 2. The recommendation represents the majority support of the policymakers and includes alignment preferences as well as policy recommendations, such as protect and improve habitat, preserve public land, and continue collaboration with regional partners for extension of the Stevens Creek Trail.

Now that the Feasibility Study is complete and the JCWT has made their recommendations, Sunnyvale must decide which alignment(s), if any, to pursue. If the City decides to pursue the implementation of major infrastructure as part of the Stevens Creek Trail, a master plan and environmental review will be required. While the JCWT was a regional group who made recommendations within Sunnyvale, the City of Sunnyvale is ultimately the only party responsible for decisions on improvements in Sunnyvale and implementation of these improvements.

As part of their recommendation, the JCWT also asked the cities to support each other in a collaborative effort to close the existing gap of the Stevens Creek Trail. This collaboration would include coordination and sponsorship in seeking grant funding, coordination during the planning and environmental review processes, and coordination with construction of any improvements.

The JCWT agreed that each of the four cities would present the study and JCWT recommendations to their respective councils and commissions in accordance with their corresponding schedules and procedures. Once the four councils have made their recommendations, the JCWT will reconvene to discuss the outcome and next steps.

FISCAL IMPACT

The fiscal impact of any recommendations for improvements will vary depending on the extent of trail improvements made. Most improvements identified by the Feasibility Study will require funding for further planning, environmental review, and implementation and may require future regional collaboration to seek grant funding.

The identification of a preferred trail alignment does not commit the City to provide funding for additional planning and implementation. Regional transportation funding typically includes funds designated specifically for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Transportation grant funds often require local matching funds and vary by grant program. Current City policies require staff to seek Council approval when applying for grants that require matching funds, except in cases where matching funds are available in the approved City budget.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

Between November of 2012 and May 2014, a series of 23 JCWT and CWG meetings and other public meetings were held to discuss the project and potential alignments to be studied. The draft of the study was released in March 2015 and posted on the project website for public review and comment. Three public input meetings were held in Sunnyvale, Cupertino, and Mountain View. These meetings were advertised by each of the four cities with mailed notices to businesses and residences within a 500-foot radius of study alignments, social media, web posting, and the project's email list; it is estimated that 100-200 people were in attendance at each of the meetings. While each of the meetings had a brief overview of the project, the primary purpose of the three meetings was to obtain public input on the project and potential alignments. A summary of high-level themes heard during these meetings is included in the JCWT Recommendations to City Councils (Attachment 2).

During the comment period, the public was encouraged to submit written comments. The initial deadline for written public comments was June 10, 2015, but was extended by the JCWT to July 20, 2015. A total of 945 written comments were received during this period. Technical comments were reviewed and included in the body of the report as revisions where appropriate. All written comments received during the public comment period are included in Appendix C of the Feasibility Study report.

During the comment period, staff also received comments from Caltrans, County of Santa Clara, Santa Clara Valley Water District, and the Cupertino Union School District. The School District expressed concerns with the Stevens Creek Trail Alignments on Belleville Way and Bernardo Avenue. The School District's comments and comments received from the other public agencies are listed in Attachment 3 (Public Agency Comments on the Draft Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study).

Commission Review

The Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed this item at their November 11, 2015 meeting (RTC 15-0900). While the commissioners expressed concerns regarding traffic if an alignment on Bernardo Avenue were implemented, they were in support of further study as staff recommended. The Parks and Recreation Commission voted 4-0 unanimously in agreement with Staff recommendation to support Alternatives 1, 2(a), 3, 4, and 5, (See Attachment 4).

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission reviewed this item at their November 19, 2015 meeting (RTC 15-1038). The Commission expressed concerns with the staff recommendation to initiate a comprehensive traffic and parking study for an off-street bicycle/pedestrian trail on Bernardo Avenue, between Fremont Avenue and Homestead Road, *after* completing environmental review and securing funding for potential construction of Study Segment 1. The Commission felt that the recommended phasing could unnecessarily delay the potential implementation of Study Segment 2. The commission voted 6-0 (Commissioner Okuzumi absent) in agreement with Staff recommendation to support Alternatives 1, 2(a), 3, 4, and 5, (See Attachment 5) with the following modifications:

- Remove the phasing condition from Alternative 2(a) and change it to the following:
 - Initiate a comprehensive traffic and parking study for an off-street bicycle/pedestrian trail on Bernardo Avenue for Study Segment 2 (Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road). If the traffic study indicates that an off-street facility is desirable as determined by the Sunnyvale City Council, then proceed to seek grant funding for trail master planning, environment review and potential construction of Study Segment 2.
- Revise Alternative 5(c) to include support for the spur trail recommended by the JCWT for Study Segment 4.

Staff has reviewed the changes to the recommendation as proposed by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission. Staff supports the recommended change to Alternative 5(c) to include support for the connection to Rancho San Antonio Park. However, staff has not changed its recommendation on Alternative 2(a) to remove the phasing condition. Staff considers the recommended improvements to Segment 2 along Bernardo Avenue as a potential extension of the trail system south from a completed Segment 1 trail and not a stand-alone project. With an unknown schedule to implement a trail in Segment 1 and only a preliminary concept of an alignment connecting to Fremont Avenue, staff believes it would be premature to initiate the traffic study of Bernardo. Since traffic patterns and volumes can change over time and may be impacted by the potential modifications connecting to Fremont Avenue, staff included the phasing conditions as a way to ensure traffic studies of Bernardo would not begin until there was more certainty about the implementation of Segment 1. This phasing would better allocate City resources by ensuring studies for Bernardo Avenue do not become obsolete before the City considers further extension of the trail.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Support the recommended alignment of the JCWT in Study Segment 1 (Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue). This includes an off-street trail along the 22 acres of open space along State Route (SR) 85 from Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue, and connections at Fremont Avenue, on both sides of SR 85. Collaborate with Mountain View to seek out grant funding for the master planning, environmental review, and potential construction.
2. (a) Upon completing environmental review and securing funding for potential construction of Study Segment 1, initiate a comprehensive traffic and parking study for an off-street bicycle/pedestrian trail on Bernardo Avenue for Study Segment 2 (Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road). If the traffic study indicates that an off-street facility is desirable as determined by the Sunnyvale City Council, then proceed to seek grant funding for trail master planning, environmental review and potential construction of Study Segment 2.
2. (b) Evaluate modest bike and pedestrian safety improvements on Bernardo Avenue, for Study Segment 2 (Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road), as well as other routes in the area that could connect to the Stevens Creek Trail, such as Belleville Way and Bedford Avenue.
3. Collaborate with Cupertino and Los Altos to seek out grant funding for the master planning, environmental review, and construction of Study Segment 3 (Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard) improvements at Homestead Road (i.e., the Homestead Road bridge widening or Homestead Road pedestrian/bike bridge).
4. Support our regional partners as they pursue funding for closing the gap for the Stevens Creek Trail between Mountain View and Cupertino.
5. In an effort to achieve the regional goal of extending the Stevens Creek Trail the City will support and adopt the following policies as identified in the JCWT recommendation summary:
 - a. All trail projects should try to improve habitat values in and around the Creek.
 - b. Existing public lands near Stevens Creek should be maintained as public land to preserve habitat and future trail opportunities.
 - c. The City will continue collaboration with regional partners for extension of the Stevens Creek Trail and support the alignment of a Stevens Creek Boulevard spur trail connection to Rancho San Antonio County Park.
6. Other direction as determined by City Council.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Alternatives 1, 2(a), 3, 4, and 5:

1. Support the recommended alignment of the JCWT in Study Segment 1 (Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue). This includes an off-street trail along the 22 acres of open space along State Route (SR) 85 from Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue, and connections at Fremont Avenue, on both sides of SR 85. Collaborate with Mountain View to seek out grant funding for the master planning, environmental review, and potential construction.
2. (a) Upon completing environmental review and securing funding for potential construction of Study Segment 1, initiate a comprehensive traffic and parking study for an off-street bicycle/pedestrian trail on Bernardo Avenue for Study Segment 2 (Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road). If the traffic study indicates that an off-street facility is desirable as determined by the Sunnyvale City Council, then proceed to seek grant funding for trail master planning, environmental review and potential construction of Study Segment 2.
3. Collaborate with Cupertino and Los Altos to seek out grant funding for the master planning, environmental review, and construction of Study Segment 3 (Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard) improvements at Homestead Road (i.e., the Homestead Road bridge widening or Homestead Road pedestrian/bike bridge).
4. Support our regional partners as they pursue funding for closing the gap for the Stevens Creek Trail between Mountain View and Cupertino.
5. In an effort to achieve the regional goal of extending the Stevens Creek Trail the City will support and adopt the following policies as identified in the JCWT recommendation summary:
 - a. All trail projects should try to improve habitat values in and around Stevens Creek.
 - b. Existing public lands near Stevens Creek should be maintained as public land to preserve habitat and future trail opportunities.
 - c. Continue collaboration with regional partners for extension of the Stevens Creek Trail and support the alignment of a Stevens Creek Boulevard spur trail connection to Rancho San Antonio County Park.

Supporting the alignments recommended by the JCWT and supporting our regional partners provides an opportunity to extend the Stevens Creek Trail and develop pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure intended to provide a convenient transportation alternative to motor vehicles, improve recreational opportunities and access to open space. Furthermore, prioritizing improvements on Study Segment 1 will give the City an opportunity to use the findings of the environmental review and design of this segment to establish the framework for the analysis and studies to be done for Study Segment 2.

Prepared by: Carla Ochoa, Traffic Engineer

Reviewed by: Manuel Pineda, Director, Department of Public Works

Reviewed by: Anne Cain, Interim Director, Library and Community Services Department

Reviewed by: Kent Steffens, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Deanna J. Santana, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study
2. Joint Cities Working Team Recommendations to the City Councils
3. Public Agency Comments on the Draft Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study
4. Excerpt of Draft PRC Minutes of November 11, 2015

5. Excerpt of Draft BPAC Minutes of November 19, 2015