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Stevens Creek Trail extension approved by council

By Kris Resellmo

Students at Mountain View High School are one step closer to an easy way of crossing Route 85, as the city proceeds with plans for an extension of the Stevens Creek Trail.

The Parks and Recreation Commission's recommendations for trail locations were approved by the city council at its special meeting June 27. The endorsed trail alignment will stretch from Yuba Drive to Mountain View High School, with trail heads at Sleeper Open Space and Dale Avenue / Heatherstone Way. More trail heads were recommended, but those had top priority.

The recommended trail route includes two Route 85 crossings, one by Heatherstone Way, and another by Mountain View High.

The feasibility report drew much public attention, and about 25 members of the public addressed the board. The majority of the speakers were in favor of extending the trail, although several expressed concerns about traffic and fire safety. A speaker asked those in the audience of about 60 people to stand up as a show of support for the trail, and more than 40 people rose to their feet.

Tom Frankum, of Friends of Stevens Creek Trail, said last week that the organization was very happy with the council's full support.

The Public Works Department will now prepare an Environmental Impact Report. The Parks and Rec

commission did not recommend a full report, but council unanimously to go ahead with the report after concerned members of the public addressed the council.

Such a report is more expensive and takes more time than a "mitigated negative declaration," which was the recommended solution. A negative declaration means that all environmental impacts from the project are less than significant. However, City Attorney Michael Martello advised the council that not doing one might open up the possibility for lawsuits from citizens.

Apparently, the council had already received indications that it might receive a suit if an impact report was not done.

Currently, there is no funding allocated for the report, according to David Muela, community services director. The Public Works Department will return to council to ask for funding for the study. When funding is in place, the council will have to approve an environmental consultant to do the report.

There are several hearing and public comment periods for an environmental impact report, and Muela estimated it would be between 12 to 15 months before it is completed. However, Muela pointed out that at this point no timelines are certain.

The estimated cost for the report is \$75,000. The cost for a mitigated negative declaration is about \$50,000, according to Muela.

Upon council approval of the report and its findings, the city would hire an architect to design the trail. However, there is no funding allocated for the new segment of the trail, which is estimated to have a price tag of \$12 million. According to Joan Jenkins, transportation and policy manager for the city, it is fairly common not to have any funding at this stage of the project.

Muela would not estimate when construction of the trail would start, because he did not know how long it would take to allocate funds. This section of the trail has been under planning since February 1998, when the city council instructed staff to study the segment and find a way to maximize public input. Since then, there have been several public meetings, several of them held by Nolte, the consulting engineering

company which did the feasibility study.

Previously, reaches 1 to 3, from Shoreline to Landels School, had been completed. Currently, Reach 4, Segment 1, from Landels School to Yuba Drive, is under construction.



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