

Mercury News editorial: A rare sign of a brighter future in San Jose: Three Creeks Trail

Mercury News Editorial

Posted: 10/03/2011 08:00:00 PM PDT

Updated: 10/03/2011 09:00:44 PM PDT

With San Jose's budget mired in deficits for what seems like forever, it's rare to find a City Council discussion on spending that isn't about what to cut. But last week, through a happy convergence of outside funding, forward-thinking public officials and a highly successful community campaign, San Jose approved the \$6 million purchase of land for a key segment of the Three Creeks Trail -- the link that will establish a real network for biking and hiking around San Jose and the region.

The money did not come from the city's general fund that pays for police, firefighting and other essential services, of course. It was cobbled together from city capital funds, Santa Clara County's Park Charter Fund, the county Open Space Authority and other agencies, including the state and the Santa Clara Valley Water District. It's a credit to community activists that this plan rose to the top of so many priority lists.

Trails have been built along the Guadalupe River and Los Gatos and Coyote creeks, the "Three" in the Three Creeks Trail, all essentially running north and south. No waterway crosses the valley to provide a natural link among them, but an abandoned Union Pacific Railroad right of way known as the Willow Glen Spur has become an essential element of the trail plan. Last week's decision to move ahead with the purchase of a mile, roughly half the length of the trail, is a huge step.

This is not just a matter of recreation. A trail

network can make walking and biking more practical for transportation. Families will be able to ride from downtown San Jose or Los Gatos to Kelley Park instead of driving -- or to Morgan Hill, for that

matter. While motor vehicles need to share the road with bicycles, alternative trails will encourage commuting by cyclists who'd love to ride more often but hate facing down SUVs on a daily basis.

It's always risky to start crediting individuals, since things like this never get done without the work of lots of people. But we can't resist a tip of the hat to Taisia McMahon, the founder and president of Save Our Trails, which has quickly become a highly effective organization. And of course Larry Ames, the Willow Glen neighborhood leader whose championing of trails goes back decades and whose low-key approach to community challenges is remarkably effective. On Wednesday the Santa Clara County League of Conservation Voters will name Ames its environmentalist of the year, and no wonder.

There's still a long way to go before the Three Creeks Trail meets its potential. There's the eastern alignment still to be acquired. There's preparing the railroad bed for walking and biking. Since San Jose is not expecting a financial windfall anytime soon, there's lots of work ahead for advocates and for organizations like the new San Jose Parks Foundation set up to support public parks. The more groups looking for grants and other types of help, the better.

The council session last week was a lovely respite from unpleasant choices and unhappy constituents. The crowd of trail advocates at the meeting was all smiles -- and energized for the next steps.

advertisement