

Cupertino, Sunnyvale residents remain vocal on Stevens Creek Trail study

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After a four-month lull in activity, a joint city project that could somehow, someday bridge gaps in the Stevens Creek Trail could soon be back on track.

Residents, city employees and city officials involved in the Stevens Creek Trail Joint Cities Feasibility Study could be back to debating and planning for a feasibility study in the coming weeks. The project is seeing the city councils of Sunnyvale, Cupertino, Los Altos and Mountain View work together on how to connect a multi-use trail in the Stevens Creek corridor.

Meetings involving a council-driven Joint Cities Working Team and a resident-driven Citizens Working Group have been perpetually on hold while the project team conducts more research with Caltrans along several important corridors.

"The additional research that the project team is working on deals with the feasibility of bicycle and pedestrian improvements along the interchanges at Highway 280/Foothill Expressway, Highway 85/Stevens Creek Boulevard, and Highway 85/Fremont Avenue," Sunnyvale communications officer Jennifer Garnett said. "The project team is working on preparing the administrative draft of the feasibility study report. The Citizens Working Group and Policy Working Team meetings are suspended for the time being to allow the report to be drafted."

A new project schedule is coming in early April, with hopes of a feasibility study soon after.

While the project awaits its jump-start, the Friends of Stevens Creek Trail group will be hosting a meeting March 28 for neighbors to address concerns about the trail and discuss others like it in neighboring communities. The meeting is being held independent of the joint feasibility study process.

"This meeting is in response to general misinformation and hyperbole surrounding the trail," said Tim Oey, vice president of Friends of Stevens Creek Trail. "A lot of people don't realize or understand why such a trail is important. We want to have more discussions about the pros and cons and have discussions about other neighborhoods that have been in similar situations and what they are like.

"We encourage people to check out Sleeper Avenue in Mountain View or the Ellen Fletcher Bike Boulevard in Palo Alto as examples of urban trails going through neighborhoods that improve property values."

Titled "Urban Trail connections: Pros, Cons and Information," the meeting will be held on March 28 from 7 to 9 p.m. at West Valley Elementary School, 1635 Belleville Way, in Sunnyvale.

The meeting aims to gather input from the public about the potential for trail connections in Cupertino, Los Altos and Sunnyvale to bridge the gap between the Stevens Creek Trail in Mountain View--which currently ends at Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way--and Cupertino's trail--which is currently being extended from Blackberry Farm north onto Stevens Creek Boulevard, near the Blue Pheasant Restaurant.

"The current feasibility study process seems to have created some confusion in the community about how the trail connections might affect their neighborhoods," Aaron Grossman, executive director of the Friends, said in a statement. "We'd like to do our part to understand the concerns of the neighborhoods and provide relevant information to them."

Despite the lull in activity, residents are also forming groups to comment on joint-city trail issues. In early March, Citizens for Responsible Trails announced its formation. The group is made up of residents from various cities and neighborhoods who plan on commenting throughout the feasibility study process.

The group is focusing on mitigating impacts to neighborhoods where trails are proposed and also requesting the use of as much existing infrastructure as possible to limit costs to taxpayers.

Citizens for Responsible Trails is firmly against a potential pedestrian and bicycle bridge or overcrossing spanning Highway 280, since the multimillion-dollar Don Burnett Bicycle-Pedestrian Bridge already exists about a mile away on Mary Avenue. A possible overcrossing spanning I-280 from the Phar Lap neighborhood in Cupertino was discussed last year during early feasibility study meetings.

"We formed our group to give ordinary citizens a voice in the process," Kathleen Cordova, president of Citizens for Responsible Trails, said in a press statement. "As we learned more about the Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study, it became clear that we would have to speak up for a commonsense approach to the issue."

For more information about the Stevens Creek Trail Joint Cities Feasibility Study, visit stevenscreektrail.insunnyvale.com.