

Sunnyvale: Council recommends four cities' plan to bridge gaps in Stevens Creek trail

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It took nearly four hours and saw more than 30 residents share their thoughts, but the Sunnyvale City Council has voted to support a plan that would bridge four trail segments along the Stevens Creek Trail.

The council voted Feb. 9 to recommend a Joint Cities Working Team's plan to close gaps in the trail and partner with the other cities involved to seek grant funding.

The bicycle and pedestrian trail extends five miles from San Francisco Bay to the Heatherstone pedestrian overcrossing at Highway 85 in Mountain View. Gaps of approximately three miles exist between the trail segments through Cupertino, Los Altos, Mountain View and Sunnyvale.

The idea for a single unified trail was proposed in 1961 by the Santa Clara County Planning Department, and in 2011 the four cities created a Joint Cities Working Team to oversee the a feasibility study for the project. After several community outreach meetings and a draft feasibility study, the team made its recommendations to the four cities' councils.

The Feb. 9 meeting saw council examine trail segments at Dale Avenue-Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue; Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road on Bernardo Avenue; Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard; and Ranch San Antonio County Park to Stevens Creek Boulevard.

The council spent a great deal of time studying the segments near Bernardo Avenue. In the report to council, the working team recommended either the conversion of Bernardo to a one-way street or the removal of on-street parking. While support for the other three trail segments passed with a 7-0 vote, the issue of Bernardo was controversial, and many residents living near the street shared their concerns with the council.

"To degrade this section of Bernardo further by removing parking or turning it into a one-way street would be extremely undesirable and outrageously unfair to those us who live on the street," said Allen Ross.

Residents expressed worries about traffic impacts. Cindy Iwata said she feared changes to Bernardo Avenue would adversely impact her daily commute as well as her property values. "Bernardo is congested due to school traffic and congestion overflow and the problematic Bernardo and Fremont intersection," Iwata added.

The council voted 4-3 to initiate a traffic and parking study to see what the effects of an off-street trail would be if a lane or parking were removed from Bernardo Avenue. The study would be done after environmental review and funding are completed for the Dale Avenue-Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue segment. Dissenting votes came from Pat Meyering, Dave Whittum and Jim Davis.

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