



Memorandum

TO: PARKS AND RECREATION
COMMISSION

FROM: Albert Balagso
Peter Jensen

SUBJECT: TRAIL NETWORK - SAFETY
ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS

DATE: 05-20-10

Approved

Date

COUNCIL DISTRICTS: Citywide

RECOMMENDATION

Review and provide comments on staff proposals to enhance safety of San José's Trail Network.

BACKGROUND

San José's Trail Network is over 53 miles in length across 24 trail systems. In October 2007, the City Council unanimously adopted the Green Vision for San José, an ambitious 15-year plan to promote clean tech innovation, sustainability, and green mobility. Goal 10 of the Green Vision set forth a goal of developing a 100-mile interconnected trail network by 2022.

In September 2009, a 62-year old woman died from an accident on the Los Alamitos Creek Trail located in San José. This tragic incident prompted Council Member Nancy Pyle to conduct a community meeting in October 2009 to seek input and ideas for improving public safety along trails. About 100 community members attended the meeting held at the Almaden Community Center, near the Los Alamitos Creek Trail.

In November 2009, Council Member Pyle recommended to the City's Rules Committee that the Parks and Recreation Commission review findings from the community meeting, conduct a citywide discussion, and consider the need for further action.

In February 2010, staff presented to the Parks & Recreation Commission an overview of current safety enhancement projects and community input received. Staff gathered input from commissioners and community members. About 10 community members were in attendance.

In April 2010, staff presented to the community a set of recommendations for addressing community concerns and solicited further input. Five community members attended the meeting conducted at City Hall. Also, in attendance were Councilmember Pyle, Director Albert Balagso, and a representative from the County Parks and Recreation.

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) created a web page for the sharing of information related to this issue (<http://www.sjpark.org/Trails/TrailSafety.htm>). The page includes notes from community meetings and past presentations. Throughout the process, staff received public input via email and has uploaded such information on the website. Oral and written communications have been recorded and consolidated into a matrix (attached) and serve as the basis for proposals set forth in this memorandum.

ANALYSIS

San José's trails are multi-use and accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists, skaters, equestrians (along some trails), and maintenance and emergency services vehicles. San José seeks to encourage use of the trails as a key safety strategy. The greater number of "eyes on the trails" increases the likelihood of incident reporting and access to personal and public resources.

An annual count and survey of trail users documents a continual growth in usage over the past 3 years. The count has occurred along the Guadalupe River, Highway 87 Bikeway and Los Gatos Creek trails. These centrally-located trails reflect the dual purpose of trails; serving both recreational and commuting objectives. The typical 16' wide trail offers capacity for multiple users, with gravel shoulders and 2-way traffic on the asphalt surface.

Input gathered to date from the community and Parks and Recreation Commission have been grouped into nine (9) areas:

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|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Hours of operation | 2. Avoid new rules/laws | 3. Striping/signage |
| 4. Rules/Laws | 5. Education/behavior | 6. Trail design |
| 7. Dog ordinance | 8. Enforcement | 9. Emergency Services/Call Boxes |

The following proposals seek to address each area of concern:

Amend the City's Leash Ordinance

Bikers, runners, and walkers with or without dogs must share the City trails. Most City trails are less than sixteen (16) feet in width. The Municipal Code currently permits a dog that is on any public park or public open space to be on a leash up to twenty (20) feet in length if the owner could exercise sufficient direct physical restraint on the dog to prevent unwanted contact with another person or animal.

Staff recommends Council approve an ordinance amending San José Municipal Code Section 7.40.040 to require that a dog owner/guardian or person with a right to control a dog must keep the dog under direct physical restraint by means of a leash not to exceed six (6) feet in length on any City trails, and that the dog must be kept to the right of trail's centerline unless passing others. The proposed amendments would modify the current, more general rule that requires a leash and control of the dog at all times. This amendment would reduce the potential tripping hazard of a longer leash and make it easier for the person controlling the dog to *keep the dog under direct physical restraint*. Staff recommends this clarification because trails are traditional park facilities but functionally analogous to sidewalks within the public roadway system.

Many trails are located on Santa Clara Valley Water District property pursuant to the 2003 Collaborative Action Plan agreement. The agreement authorizes the City to enforce rules and regulations on trails per Exhibit 2 and 4 of the Joint Trail Agreements.

Staff has sought to minimize the creation of new rules / laws in keeping with community sentiment about not creating more rules and regulations and also acknowledging that enforcement is challenging with limited and decreasing number of Park Rangers. Staff is exploring options to encourage and educate the public on the rules and regulations for safe use of trails since enforcement will be limited due to lack of resources.

Update Trail Rule Sign

As part of a grant-funded project initiated two years ago, staff has developed a set of standard signs for deployment along existing and future trails. The signs offer regulatory, warning and guide information. Based on community input and review of trail rules from other cities, staff has developed the proposed Trail Rule sign depicted as Attachment A to this memorandum. Staff believes the proposed sign includes strong graphics to draw interest and more easily convey the intent of each rule. The new sign will also include three new rules to be adopted by the Director of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services pursuant to San José Municipal Code Chapter 13.44:

- "Bicyclists may not ride bicycle with headphone, earplugs, or other devices covering both ears". This rule would be consistent with the California Vehicle Code (27400) which prohibits a person from operating a motor vehicle or bicycle with a headset or earplugs covering both ears on streets and highways. This proposed rule permits people to ride with an entertainment device but ensures that they remain aware of their surroundings.
- "15 mph Speed Limit". This rule would create consistency with the existing County rule and the speed limit is common to many trails across the country.

A change to the Municipal Code will be required as follows:

- "The dog owner/guardian or person with a right to control a dog must keep the dog under direct physical restraint by means of a leash not to exceed six (6) feet in length on any City

trails, and that the dog and leash must be kept to the right of trail's centerline unless the owner/guardian is passing others."

Deploy Signage and Striping

Funding is proposed in the 2010/11 Capital Budget for the installation of new signage and striping (when not already in place) as defined by the grant-funded project noted previously. As part of that project, staff will manage installation of new infrastructure at all existing trail systems and use a common approach for future trails. The project will include but is not limited to:

- Paint centerline stripe to reinforce right of way. The paint installation will meet the City's new specification for reflectorized, thermoplastic paint which supports more rapid identification and response by the Police Department's Aerial Support Unit during evening hours when unlit trails are difficult to identify within riparian zones.
- Paint "Keep Right" message strategically along trails.
- Install "yield to pedestrian" signs that graphically show that bicyclists need to approach with caution.
- Install "pass left / keep right" signs that graphically show that persons should travel to the right of the centerline. Passing movements should occur to the left of the centerline in conjunction with ringing a bell or calling "to your left".
- Install other regulatory, warning and informational signs as necessary.

The guidelines for the new signage are posted on the Trail Program web site under "Reports".

Support Use of Bicycle Bells

San José's Bicycle Program is managed by the Department of Transportation and includes a nationally-recognized child and adult bicycle education component. Lights and helmets are provided as part of the program. PRNS staff will coordinate with DOT staff to include the provision of bicycle bells. Education and encouragement for use of bicycle bells will occur as part of the existing Street Smarts Program.

Equestrian Use

Staff will clarify the trail systems that are designed for equestrian use. Designated trails will include informational signage for safer interaction between the horse and rider, and the bicycling and walking public. Additional educational material will be posted on the Trail Program web site.

Institute Trail Watch

Staff is working on patterning a volunteer program after a successful effort undertaken by the County of Santa Clara. Trail Watch encourages frequent trail users to volunteer their time for reporting maintenance issues, incidents and recurring rule violations to the Park Concern hotline.

Securing data from the public permits maintenance and operations staff to target trails in most need of maintenance or enforcement.

Install Milestone Markers

Staff seeks to install the Milestone Marker system which includes markers spaced at ¼ mile increment along all existing and future trails. Each marker has a unique code to aid trail users, maintenance personnel and emergency services personnel to quickly locate points along the trails.

Once deployed, the system will be one of the first in the nation to provide accurate “addresses” and sequential numbering along interconnected recreational trails. The precise location of each marker will be recorded in the City’s Geographic Information Systems database, with companion data identifying the quickest entry and exit points for service vehicles. This information will facilitate 911 calls for service and deployment of appropriate staff.

The system will have additional benefits in helping recreational users track their distance and accurately report incidents for more effective staff deployment for maintenance and enforcement.

A Fiscal Year 2010/2011 Budget proposal provides funding for grant-reimbursable expenses and staff anticipates that initial installations will commence by November 2010.

Pursue Green Vision

As noted elsewhere in this memorandum, staff continues to pursue development of the trail network in order to provide 100-miles of interconnected trails by 2022. Over the past several years, the City has delivered approximately 3 miles per year. Development of more trail systems will offer additional venues for trail users to enjoy and potentially offer an alternative for trail users seeking to avoid popular bicycle commute routes.

Information Sharing

Staff will report findings and recommendations to neighboring agencies. Several San José trails link to other communities and the issues raised by the community are likely common to other jurisdictions. The sharing of information can hopefully help other agencies enhance their trails’ safety. Staff will post similar information on several trail-focused Internet sites used by trail professionals throughout the country and internationally.

The Trail Program web site includes etiquette information. It will be reviewed and updated to include the proposed rule changes and provide context for their role in offering a safer trail experience.

Conclusion

Staff will submit a memorandum to City Council for approval of Municipal Code changes in Fall 2010.

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Department of Parks, Recreation
and Neighborhood Services

Peter Jensen
Director of General Services

For questions please contact Yves Zsutty, Trail Manager at 408 793-5561.