



**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

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CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Meeting: June 21, 2016

Subject

Receive the Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study, the recommendation from the Joint Cities Working Team, and Commission input.

Recommended Action

Accept the Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study; review the Joint Cities Working Team recommendations and Commission input; and provide direction regarding the recommendations and any desired actions.

Background

The Stevens Creek Trail is a partially complete pedestrian and bicycle route along the Stevens Creek Corridor. An interconnected system of trails was proposed in 1961 that would connect parks and open space along Stevens Creek. Approximately five miles of the trail are now in place in Mountain View, from San Francisco Bay to Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way. Cupertino has completed another mile of Stevens Creek Trail from McClellan Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard. The gap between the Mountain View and Cupertino segments has been the focus of the current Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study).

In 2009, policy representatives from Cupertino, Sunnyvale, Los Altos, Mountain View and Santa Clara Valley Water District formed a coordination committee to develop a mutually agreeable concept for completion of the Stevens Creek Trail, and to seek resources thereafter to construct the trail in a cooperative manner. In 2011, the four cities entered a funding agreement and created a Joint Cities Working Team (JCWT) with an elected official from each city, to oversee preparation of a Feasibility Study to identify feasible alignments that would close the gap between Cupertino and Mountain View. Funds for the study were also provided by the Friends of Stevens Creek Trail and by a grant from the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority.

A consultant team was selected in 2012 to prepare the Feasibility Study, with Sunnyvale as the lead agency. A Citizens Working Group (CWG) composed of three volunteers from each city was formed in 2012. The CWG was tasked with reviewing the technical findings of the Feasibility Study and serving in an advisory role to the JCWT. The scope of the Feasibility Study was to identify alternatives for completion of a bicycle and pedestrian connection and to gather community input throughout the process. The Feasibility Study assessed a wide variety

of possible routes and evaluated a range of possible improvements, including fully separated off-street bicycle/pedestrian trails, on-street bike lanes, and neighborhood greenways on lower volume residential streets. The Feasibility Study report presents routes that are considered feasible, and documents routes that were evaluated but considered infeasible. The analysis and findings are presented in the Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study (Attachment A). Although the Feasibility Study itself does not make any recommendations on preferred routes, it provided a framework for the JCWT on feasible alignments. The JCWT was tasked with making preferred alignment recommendations upon the conclusion of public input in summer 2015.

Study parameters were developed to help guide the consultant in conducting the Feasibility Study and evaluating alternatives for connecting completed portions of the trail in Cupertino and Mountain View. The study parameters included:

- Investigate public lands and rights-of-way
- Protect environmentally sensitive habitats
- Seek routes that accommodate beginner bicyclists
- Develop direct routes that close the gap
- Connect to parks, schools, shopping and on-street pedestrian and bicycle systems

The Feasibility Study area focuses on public lands that are bounded by the following:

- South – Stevens Creek Boulevard
- West – Grant Road and Rancho San Antonio County Park
- North – Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way trail overcrossing in Mountain View
- East – Mary Avenue

Within these boundaries, four study segments were defined. The study segments are:

1. Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue
2. Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road
3. Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard
4. Trail connections to Rancho San Antonio County Park via Stevens Creek Boulevard

From November 2012 to February 2013, public meetings were held to provide an overview of the Feasibility Study purpose and to obtain feedback regarding potential routes. The Feasibility Study team investigated potential crossing locations in late 2013 in the areas of Foothill Expressway at Highway 280, a new Highway 280 pedestrian bridge west of State Route 85, and Stevens Creek Boulevard at State Route 85. In 2014, the Feasibility Study team met to recap the findings of the additional site investigations and to complete potential trail routes for the study. The group reconvened in March 2015 and defined a process to wrap up the Feasibility Study and develop a recommendations report to be presented to each of the four cities for approval.

Discussion

The Feasibility Study team defined a process to collect public input on the Study and to develop recommendations for a preferred alignment for Stevens Creek Trail (Attachment B). The draft Feasibility Study was issued in March 2015 for public comment; 945 comments were received. (Comments are available as Appendix C to the Feasibility Study on the City of Sunnyvale website,

<http://sunnyvale.ca.gov/Departments/PublicWorks/StevensCreekTrailJointCitiesFeasibilityStudy.aspx>). In addition to written comments, there were several opportunities after the study was released for the public to provide input on the Feasibility Study and potential trail alignments. Three public meetings were held in May and June 2015 and four CWG and JCWT meetings were held between June and August 2015. Technical comments related to the Feasibility Study were reviewed and incorporated as appropriate.

Citizens Working Group (CWG) Recommendations

On June 17, 2015, the CWG discussed public comments received, including from the public meetings in May and early June. The CWG developed general alignment themes at this meeting which helped guide its alignment recommendations. The CWG alignment themes include:

- Extend the Stevens Creek Trail as a bike/pedestrian path as far south as possible to keep the trail separated from vehicular traffic to the greatest extent possible, in order to create a family-friendly and recreational route that enhances the bicycle and pedestrian networks of the four cities
- Enhance the habitat along the creek corridor with development of the trail
- For existing bike routes that are in the area but not part of the recommended alignment, modest safety improvements should be considered

Based upon the alignment themes, the CWG recommended preferred alignments for each study segment. The CWG's preferred alignments are:

- Study Segment 1
 - Extend the Stevens Creek Trail through the 22 acres of open space along Stevens Creek/State Route 85
- Study Segment 2
 - Extend the Stevens Creek Trail as a separated off-street bike/pedestrian path along the sound wall on Bernardo Avenue
 - If the Bernardo path is not feasible, the second choice is to incorporate modest enhancements to Bernardo, Belleville and Fallen Leaf for bicycle safety
- Study Segment 3
 - Add a new grade-separated crossing at Interstate 280 to provide access to the Stevens Creek Trail on a direct route along low-volume, low-speed streets
 - Crossings in order of preference were a trail underpass along the creek channel; an overcrossing connecting Peninsular Avenue to Madera Drive; and an overcrossing connecting Caroline Drive to Somerset Park

- Study Segment 4
 - Extend a bike/pedestrian path along Stevens Creek Boulevard west from Stonebridge Street to undeveloped open space land behind the Gate of Heaven Cemetery to provide access to Rancho San Antonio County Park

The CWG recommendations are provided in Attachment C, which includes greater detail regarding the CWG recommendations and a discussion of each study segment. The CWG's recommendations were forwarded to the JCWT.

Joint Cities Working Team (JCWT) Recommendations

The JCWT met three times in July and August 2015 to discuss the Draft Feasibility Study, public feedback, written and oral comments, and the CWG recommendations. The JCWT developed its recommendations as a regional body and considered the alignments through all the cities (see Attachment D). Below is an overview of JCWT alignment recommendations. Additional discussion of the individual segments follows.

JCWT Alignment Recommendations Summary

- Study Segment 1 – Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue
 - The preferred route for Stevens Creek Trail in this segment is an off-street trail through an existing 22-acre open space along Stevens Creek/Highway 85
- Study Segment 2 - Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road
 - The preferred alignment is an off-street bike/pedestrian pathway on Bernardo Avenue including a bike/pedestrian overpass of Fremont Avenue at Bernardo Avenue
 - Conduct a detailed study to determine parking and traffic impacts on Bernardo Avenue to determine alignment feasibility (by City of Sunnyvale).
 - Consider modest on-street bike/pedestrian enhancements on Belleville Way and Fallen Leaf Lane consistent with each city's adopted pedestrian/bike plans. These improvements should be considered regardless of whether or not a path at Bernardo Avenue is feasible, and such improvements will not include specific signage relating to the Stevens Creek Trail
- Study Segment 3 - Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Blvd.
 - No off-street facility was recommended in this segment.
 - Support widening the existing Homestead Road crossing at State Route 85 or building a separate parallel bike/pedestrian bridge to provide a connection to the existing off-street bike/pedestrian pathway on Homestead Road.
 - Undertake further studies to identify a feasible route if circumstances regarding land availability change in the area.
 - Reach out proactively to agencies such as Caltrans, VTA and Union Pacific Railroad to express that bike and pedestrian access through the I-280 interchanges vicinity is a community priority, and express interest in land availability for pedestrian/bike improvements and discourage any modifications that may limit

future such improvements should those agencies make modifications to their facilities or changes to their land use.

- Support improvements to Foothill Boulevard/Expressway. Although this segment would not be part of Stevens Creek Trail, bike/pedestrian improvements should be considered if there are improvements to the I-280/Foothill interchange, or as part of other city or county projects in the vicinity.
- Study Segment 4 – Trail Connections to Rancho San Antonio County Park via Stevens Creek Blvd.
 - The preferred route to Rancho San Antonio from Cupertino’s Stevens Creek Trail and creek corridor is a spur alignment that uses Stevens Creek Boulevard on-street bike lanes, and then continues westward along the north side of Stevens Creek Boulevard starting near Stonebridge and includes a bridge over the railroad tracks.

Study Segment Descriptions

Study Segment 1 – Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way to Fremont Avenue

This segment extends from the Permanente Creek bypass channel overpass at St. Giles Lane in Mountain View eastward to Mary Avenue in Sunnyvale; it encompasses Mountain View High School and Cherry Chase Elementary School. The study identifies an off-street bike/pedestrian path through 22 acres of existing open space along Stevens Creek between Mountain View and Sunnyvale.

This is the only segment within the Feasibility Study boundaries where a trail along the creek was found to be feasible based on the availability of land and the space required for trail construction. However, implementation of a trail through this section is challenging due to limited creek bank space. Several creek bridges will be needed, and structures needed to span narrow areas between the Highway 85 soundwall and areas of limited creek bank. A thorough environmental review and permitting process will be needed prior to any construction.

Study Segment 2 – Fremont Avenue to Homestead Road

This study segment extends from Louise Lane in Los Altos to Mary Avenue in Sunnyvale, and includes West Valley Elementary School and Cupertino Middle School. The JCWT recommended alignment is an off-street bike/pedestrian path along the Bernardo Avenue sound wall between Fremont Avenue and Homestead Road, including a bike/pedestrian overpass at Fremont Avenue. Alternatives for implementing this path include either the conversion of Bernardo Avenue to a one-way street or significant reduction in parking.

While the preliminary investigation determined that this option is feasible, further studies must be conducted to fully evaluate the impacts of a roadway change. The JCWT recommended that a detailed traffic and parking study be conducted for this segment, with the findings being considered by the City of Sunnyvale prior to any further trail master planning work in this segment. If based upon the findings of such a study the off-street bike/pedestrian path were

found infeasible or if this option were not supported by the City of Sunnyvale, the JCWT recommended modest bike and pedestrian safety improvements and/or wayfinding on Belleville Way, Bernardo Avenue, and Bedford Avenue.

Numerous concerns from area residents were expressed during the public outreach process. Potential changes to the roadway in this segment generated concerns about traffic diversion in the neighborhood, loss of parking, and degradation of already difficult traffic conditions around Cupertino Middle School during pick-up and drop-off times. The Feasibility Study was limited to evaluating roadway widths and physical constraints necessary for trail construction and did not evaluate potential traffic impacts from narrowing the roadway. Conversely, the Feasibility Study did not attempt to quantify possible benefits of a separated off-street bike/pedestrian trail that could potentially provide safer access to school for the area's students.

Study Segment 3 – Homestead Road to Stevens Creek Blvd.

This segment extends from Grant Road/Foothill Boulevard in Los Altos and Cupertino to Mary Avenue, and includes the area contiguous to Homestead High School and near Stevens Creek Elementary School. In this segment, the Feasibility Study concluded that no feasible routes exist that could accommodate an off-street facility and connect to the existing trail that ends at Stevens Creek Boulevard and enters the Stockmeir Ranch site. Although several on-street routes were considered feasible, the JCWT did not select one of these alternatives as a preferred route through this area. Feasible routes that were identified in the study had major drawbacks which included:

- The route required on-street bike lanes on heavily travelled streets such as Stevens Creek Boulevard or Foothill Boulevard, which was considered incompatible with the goal of a system that is suitable for bike riders of all skill levels
- The route required a new crossing of Interstate 280 and relied on the use of quiet residential streets to make connections, which was opposed by local residents
- A new crossing of Interstate 280 could be changed by the planned reconfiguration of the Interstate 280/State Route 85 interchange

Neighbor concerns regarding potential trail routes in this study segment were expressed throughout the process. For example, in April 2013 a petition signed by 78 residents of the Mann/Madera/Phar Lap area was submitted, requesting that trail alignments avoid their neighborhood and noting concerns about graffiti and crime. Residents of Homestead Villa submitted a petition signed by over 140 neighbors asking the City Council to not route the Stevens Creek Trail through the Homestead Villas subdivision due to a variety of concerns, instead recommending a Foothill Boulevard or Mary Avenue route. Citizens For Responsible Trails also consistently supported use of Mary Avenue or Foothill for a trail alignment, rather than a new highway crossing and neighborhood streets alignment, for a variety of reasons. Alternatively, some of the public comments have been actively supportive of a trail route on neighborhood streets with a new Highway 280 crossing, as was the CWG recommendation. However, the JCWT did not recommend any of the alternatives identified in the Study.

Instead, the JCWT articulated a long-term vision that trail routes continue to be evaluated as conditions change in the area or land availability changes. For example, new trail routes could become available if reconstruction of the I-280/State Route 85 interchange or Foothill Boulevard interchange occurs, or if Union Pacific Railroad right-of way becomes available for trail purposes.

Improvements to Homestead Road at the Highway 85 crossing would consist of widening the existing bridge or constructing a new bike/pedestrian bridge to create a separated bike/pedestrian path on the north side of Homestead Road. Highway 85 on-/off-ramps would also be realigned to promote bike/pedestrian safety. Improvements in this area could be extended along Homestead Road to connect to an existing off-street bike/pedestrian trail in Los Altos. These improvements would be designed to improve safety for students walking and cycling to nearby Cupertino Middle School and Homestead High School.

The JCWT expressed support for improvements to Foothill Boulevard/Foothill Expressway including the Interstate 280 interchange area. This segment was not recommended as a preferred alignment for Stevens Creek Trail due to its traffic conditions. However, bicycle and pedestrian improvements are recommended as part of any city or county project in that vicinity or if improvements to the Interstate 280/Foothill interchange are undertaken.

Study Segment 4 – Trail Connections to Rancho San Antonio County Park via Stevens Creek Blvd.

This segment is in Cupertino and connects east-west along Stevens Creek Boulevard to Rancho San Antonio County Park. This connection would not be considered part of the Stevens Creek Trail, but could provide an important connection from the existing trail through McClellan Ranch Preserve and Blackberry Farm to an extensive trail network in Rancho San Antonio County Park. The proposed alignment uses existing Stevens Creek Boulevard on-street bike lanes, and then continues westward along the north side of Stevens Creek Boulevard on a new path starting near Stonebridge Street. A new bridge over the railroad tracks provides access into County-owned open space, Rancho San Antonio County Park and the associated trail system.

Commission input

On December 15, a special joint meeting of the Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission and the Bicycle Pedestrian Commission was convened. The Commissions considered the Feasibility Study, the JCWT recommendation, and public input. Commissioners provided individual input for consideration by the City Council. Commissioners were overall supportive of the JCWT recommendation. Their comments also noted support for improvements to Stevens Creek Blvd., Foothill Blvd., the I-280/Foothill interchange, Segment 4 access to Rancho San Antonio, collaboration with Union Pacific Railroad, Caltrans and other agencies, preservation of existing public property, and preserving future opportunities. (See Attachment E for Commissioners' input.)

Actions by the three cities

Now that JCWT has made their recommendations on preferred alignments to close the gap between Cupertino and Mountain View, they asked each of the four cities to support their mutually agreed-upon concept for the regional Stevens Creek Trail. The Feasibility Study is complete and has been reviewed by the other three cities.

The City of Los Altos took action to support the findings of the Stevens Creek Trail alignment identified by the JCWT and to support the other three cities in their trail planning efforts, on November 24, 2015 via resolution of the City Council (Attachment F). On December 1, 2015 the Mountain View City Council accepted the Feasibility Study. Thereafter at a Capital Improvement Project (CIP) study session on March 29, 2016, the Mountain View Council directed staff to present a project next year to extend Stevens Creek Trail beyond the current southerly terminus at Dale Avenue/Heatherstone Way, for consideration in Mountain View's CIP for fiscal year 2017-18 through 2021-22.

On Feb. 9, 2016 the Sunnyvale City Council considered the Feasibility Study. They voted in favor of the JCWT alignment and recommendations, however with some modifications (Attachment G). They supported the Segment 1 alignment, the Segment 3 alignment on Homestead Road, and the Segment 4 bike/pedestrian route connection to Rancho San Antonio. For Segment 2, the Sunnyvale Council approved pursuing next steps for the Bernardo Avenue off-street alignment after Segment 1 has completed environmental review and secured funding for potential construction. At such a time, next steps would include initiating a comprehensive parking and traffic study for an off-street trail along Bernardo Avenue. If the study indicates that an off-street alignment is desirable as determined by the Sunnyvale City Council, then grant funding would be sought. As with the other cities, Sunnyvale's Council supported collaborating with other cities on pursuing grant funding, striving to improve habitat values in and around Stevens Creek, maintaining existing public lands near the creek to preserve habitat and future trail opportunities, and continuing collaboration with regional partners for extension of the Stevens Creek Trail.

Summary

Each city is limited in decision-making to its own jurisdiction. However, the JCWT asked the cities to support each other in a collaborative effort to continue implementation of the Stevens Creek Trail. Such collaboration would include coordination and sponsorship in seeking grant funding, coordination during planning and the environmental review process, and coordination of the construction of any improvements. The work of the entire Feasibility Study team was based on regional cooperation for regional benefit. The City Council may therefore wish to indicate support for the overall JCWT findings and recommendations, and endorse providing support to the cities of Mountain View, Los Altos and Sunnyvale in their Stevens Creek Trail planning efforts. Sample recommendations are provided below which are consistent with the Study, the JCWT recommendation, and actions by city councils in our neighboring cities.

Sample Recommendations

1. Accept the Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study
2. Accept the JCWT alignment recommendation including:
 - Support the City of Mountain View in the Stevens Creek Trail planning and implementation for Segment 1
 - Support improvements for Los Altos actions relating to Feasibility Study and JCWT recommendation, consistent with Nov. 2015 approval of such by the Los Altos City Council
 - Support the City of Sunnyvale for a Segment 2 alignment, and a future Bernardo Avenue parking and traffic study with associated actions, at such a time as Sunnyvale may pursue a Bernardo Avenue bike/pedestrian trail or other Segment 2 improvements
 - Support a Segment 3 connection from the existing off-street bike/pedestrian path on the north side of Homestead Road in Los Altos, to a Bernardo Avenue pathway alignment, via either widening the existing bridge or building a new separate bike/pedestrian bridge, and collaborate with Sunnyvale and Los Altos on such implementation
 - Support pursuing a spur trail on Stevens Creek Boulevard connecting to Rancho San Antonio, as described for Segment 4
3. Implement other JCWT recommendations including:
 - Support our regional partners as they pursue funding for closing the trail gap between Cupertino and Mountain View
 - Reach out proactively to agencies such as Caltrans, VTA, and Union Pacific Railroad to express that bicycle and pedestrian access to and across the highway and interchange area is a community priority, discourage any modifications that may limit future improvements, and raise awareness of the shared goal to close the gap in Stevens Creek Trail between Cupertino and Mountain View
 - Should circumstances change in the area, such as regarding land availability, further studies should be undertaken to identify a feasible route
 - Support improvements to Foothill Boulevard/Foothill Expressway including to the I-280/Foothill underpass and I-280/Foothill interchange (see concept in the Feasibility Study, Figures 25-26); seek bike/pedestrian improvements if there are Caltrans improvements to the interchange or as part of any city or County projects in the vicinity
 - Support the following policies identified in the JCWT recommendation summary:
 - Trail projects should strive to improve habitat values in and around Stevens Creek
 - Existing public lands near Stevens Creek should be maintained as public land to preserve habitat and future trail opportunities
 - Continue collaborating with regional partners for extension of the Stevens Creek Trail

Next Steps

The JCWT plans to schedule a meeting after each of the four city councils has reviewed the Feasibility Study and the recommendations and provided any specific direction to staff. Based

on this feedback, the JCWT will discuss the outcome and any next steps that could be followed up on in a collaborative nature.

Sustainability Impact

Support of a regional effort to extend the Stevens Creek Trail system and of the JCWT recommendation would be consistent with the City's sustainability goals.

Fiscal Impact

No immediate impact. Identification of a preferred regional trail alignment and regional goals does not commit the City to provide funding for additional planning or implementation. However, it is expected that neighboring cities may request financial or other collaboration in future years, as implementation of a regional trail alignment proceeds within their jurisdictions.

Prepared by: Gail Seeds, Park Improvement Manager

Reviewed by: David Stillman, Senior Civil Engineer

Christine M. Hanel, Acting Director of Recreation & Community Services

Approved for Submission by: David Brandt, City Manager

Attachments:

A – Joint Cities Coordinated Stevens Creek Trail Feasibility Study, September 2015

B – Stevens Creek Trail Process Map

C – Citizens Working Group Recommendations

D – Joint Cities Working Team Recommendation

E – Cupertino Parks & Recreation Commission and Bicycle Pedestrian Commission, Special Joint Meeting, Amended Minutes, Dec. 15, 2015

F – City of Los Altos, Resolution No. 2015-39

G – City of Sunnyvale, City Council Minutes, Excerpt, Feb. 9, 2016