

Sonoma County
Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission

DATE: Monday, May 18, 2009
PLACE: Board Chambers
575 Administration Drive, 100A
Santa Rosa, California

1. Call to Order

Commissioner Wheeler called the meeting to order at 5:10 pm.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Director Mary Burns led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Bill Wheeler, Karen Collins, Pam Stafford and Director Mary Burns

Commissioners Absent: Bill Trowbridge and John Mills

4. Acceptance of Minutes

VOTED to approve the minutes of April 20, 2009, as follows:

MOTION:	Commissioner Collins	AYES: 3	NOES: 0
SECOND:	Commissioner Stafford	ABSTAIN: 0	

5. Comments from the Public

None

6. Comments from Commissioners

None

7. Director's Report

Ms. Burns brought to attention a few items in her written report. The recommended budget from the County Administrator's office has been submitted and hearings will be held the first week in June. The hearings for Regional Parks will be on Tuesday and Wednesday of that week. The list of proposed cuts have been previously shared with the Commissioners. It didn't look likely that the appeal process would take place this year. Several of the larger proposed cuts for Parks have been put on the add back list so that if sufficient funds come from the Transit Occupancy Tax Fund (TOT), some of those items might be restored.

Efforts continue to bring to conclusion the litigation matter with one of the property owners adjacent to Tolay Lake Regional Parks. It is hoped that the final settlement agreement will be brought to the Board of Supervisors in closed session on June 2.

We are having a very successful Park Celebration and Park Pass Promotion effort. The County launched its iWalk program on Saturday. Mary Clemens, Environmental Discovery Center Coordinator, has been our liaison and has been working with the health action group.

Marketing Specialist Donna LaGrafte has been working with several individuals and the disabled community to start a group modeled after Access Adventure of Solano County. This Solano County group provides outdoor recreation, environmental education and open space access in Sonoma County for anyone living with disabilities. It involves a horse drawn wagon. The first outing was last weekend in conjunction with the Laguna Foundation.

A number of Grant applications have been applied for. The State has promised that they are going to be releasing funds for reimbursement for grants that already have been completed. During the state's budget crisis the Dept. of Finance froze the funds. Parks is waiting for \$1.2 million dollars for work completed. Private funding for the Environmental Education Center has been lost but we have recently learned that the Open Space District will be participating again with \$25,000 for the upcoming fiscal year.

8. Action Items

None

9. Reports and Division Updates

• **Santa Rosa Creek Trail**

Todd Holmes, Park Planning Manager, addressed the Commission about the Santa Rosa Creek Trail Reach F improvement project. This item was last brought to the Commission in August. The department has been working on a number of issues since then involving analysis of potential impacts of the project and addressing questions that were raised. After the analysis, the project will go forward as planned.

Ken Tam, Parks Planner, discussed the more specific details of the project. Mr. Tam suggested that everyone who is not already on the mailing list to please sign in.

History on the project:

- Proposed project is to pave an existing gravel surface from Willowside Road to Fulton Road. Santa Rosa Creek Master Plan - 1993 and the Santa Rosa Citywide Creek Master Plan – 2007.
- There was extensive public outreach and comments were solicited.
- Last public meeting was held August 18, 2008 and there was both opposition to and support of the project.
- Only the trail on the north side of the creek will be paved, not the south side.
- This is a joint project between the Sonoma County Water Agency, the Sonoma County Open Space District, the City of Santa Rosa and the Regional Parks Department.
- The Sonoma County Water Agency installed 3 pedestrian bridges in 2006 with grant money totally \$800,000.
- Parks responsibility as part of the joint project was to secure grant funds and pave the channel on the north side of the creek from Fulton to Willowside.
- A petition was received opposing the paving of the north side trail.
- The comments for and against are listed in the attached report to the Commission.

Next Steps include:

- Preparation of a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) addendum to the previously adopted Environmental Impact Report for the Santa Rosa Creek Masterplan.
- The Addendum will be presented to the Board of Supervisors.
- The bid process will be initiated in June 2009.
- Construction is anticipated to start in September 2009.

Commissioner Stafford asked why a permeable surface couldn't be used.

Mr. Tam responded that the existing soil was sampled and is expansive clay. The section between Fulton, all the way down to Willowside, is expansive clay soil, is not very permeable and expands and contracts with moisture. A treatment will have to be put on the soil to make it dry and harden before the pavement goes on.

Comments from the public:

Sheila Heim is leading the opposition to the project and had the following questions:

1. Would a chemical treatment or a physical treatment be used to harden the soil?
2. Is this procedure new or has it been previously reported on?
3. Please explain why the biological assessment performed in January 2009 was not distributed to the public and why notice was not made in January.
4. Explain why the update to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document is six months after the report was produced. It appears as though you are producing your update to CEQA just before planning construction rather than giving the public plenty of notice to prepare comments.
5. What date would the construction bidding process begin?
6. What is the process for opposing this project and to whom do we present our arguments?
7. Will a decision or recommendation be made to the Board of Supervisors?
8. Would somebody please clarify this for me?

Hollynn D'Lil is from Graton. She supports the work the County has been doing making this trail accessible to everyone including those with disabilities. There are very few recreational opportunities for people with disabilities. The West County Trail is wonderful but does have a pretty severe cross slope in several places. This trail has only a 2% cross slope and that is very significant for people who use wheel chairs. The disabled are a minority group that is protected by law and they don't discriminate. Anybody can join the ranks at any time. This is an aging county and there will be more need for this kind of recreation. This trail goes through one of the prettiest areas and will be available for use by those with wheelchairs, strollers and those who cannot walk on gravel.

Genevieve Navar said that she takes care of her disabled husband. One of the first activities he was able to participate in after his stroke was to ride a tandem bike. She would like to echo the comments that were just made by Ms. D'Lil. They have been waiting for this part of the trail to be bridged and paved because every little bit of gravel makes it difficult for them to ride. Falling on gravel could have life-threatening consequences for her husband. She urged Parks to go forward with this project.

Eleanor Guerin said that she has walked, biked, hiked, watched birds and taken her dog on this trail. It is wonderful to be able to ride her bike all of the way through. She supports Parks and thanked staff for all of the work that they do.

Lori Sullivan is a resident of District 1 in Sonoma County and most heartening is the development of more bike trails. She is a user of the trail in question and while she can get around on the gravel trail, it isn't optimal. She commends Parks' work and hopes that the trail will be finished as soon as possible.

Leslie Michaelwitz said that she lives adjacent to the trail, is a horsewoman and rides the trail. She is aware that very fast bicycles and horses on the trail do not mix. She asked that equestrians be considered for use of the trail.

Michael Gray has been walking and riding this trail since 1980. Paving it would allow users of all kinds to go faster. It would be detrimental for the wildlife. There are coyote, fox, river otter, egrets, herons and ducks. When people come in droves the animals are going to start leaving. He is not in support of the faster energy that a paved trail will bring. Leaving a dirt trail for the runners and walkers is ideal. A paved trail will draw younger and faster bikers. Having the trail end up on Willowside road is not good. The destination is a road that is dangerous. Children will be riding on a slant and cars will be passing by very fast. He doesn't want to see someone hurt because they end up on the street. He believes that the risks far outweigh the joys of the faster environment.

Mark Mackenzie said his wife is disabled and uses a wheelchair. When he has used the Joe Rodota trail, which is paved, the bicycles do go fast and the trail frightens his wife. Their view is that a paved trail would be scary for the disabled. He said there is no disabled access to the trail. Paving increases the speed and will be dangerous and could increase liability for the County. He does not believe that the paving is necessary.

Gloria Andreani has been walking the trail for 20 years. She recently moved to Sequoia Gardens Mobile Home Park for seniors. Her property backs up to the proposed area to be paved. She does not want an increase in bicycle traffic. She has been bumped into by bicyclists. She is opposed to the paving.

Gary Brutton has walked the stretch daily for two years. It is just perfect and so nice just as it is. He can't imagine why it is being changed. Nothing needs to be done to this trail. He is opposed to the paving.

The owner of the Trek Store, a bicycle store in Santa Rosa, is a proficient bike rider and rarely rides that trail because it is dangerous to ride on a road bike. It constantly has standing water and major ruts in it and just today they had visitors come into town from Boulder, Colorado to ride the beautiful roads and he could not send them to that trail because of the condition of the road. He is in support of the trail being paved.

Robin Abramson believes that it is very discriminatory to **not** pave the trail. Especially, when there is an unpaved trail on the other side. There are people in wheel chairs that cannot use the trail. When she was a young mom she couldn't use it to teach her kids to ride a bike

or roller skate. She would like to see the trail used for people to commute to work on. This is a green county. She believes that those in attendance at this meeting who do not want the trail paved are being rude and she apologized for them.

Commissioner Wheeler asked that there be no further outbursts from those in attendance.

Jim Draeger said that he doesn't use the trail that often because of its condition. It is full of ruts with lots of standing water and isn't safe year round. He is a contractor who tries to use his bicycle for his business, as much as possible, instead of his work truck. Tonight he is hearing a lot of "not in my backyard" opposition. He said that roads have been paved since 1942 and that is called progress. It cannot be stopped and will continue. It is a public thorough fare for public use and not just the minority of residents that live there.

Sunny Mawson from Windsor said that she would be thrilled if she could walk out of her house and right onto a bike trail. She has to go to great lengths to get her 9 year-old grandson onto a bike path. She said it needs to be safe for children to bike to school. She is almost 70 years old and can't keep riding on the highway. She needs a place to ride a bike. Pollution and the over use of oil will continue until there is space for children to use alternate transportation that doesn't use those things. The elderly should have a safe place to ride a bike and not worry about cars.

Rose Morgan lives around the corner and is opposed to the paving for a variety of reasons. She prefers a more forgiving surface that is less stressful on the body. She asked where is the consideration for wildlife. This area is adjacent to homes that must suffer the consequences of commuter traffic. Please do not grant this request and turn it into an asphalt jungle. There is graffiti on the bridge already. She offered photos to bear witness that there is a negative impact to the environment. The photos depict graffiti, trash and parking issues. Please do not grant this request for paving the Santa Rosa Creek because there are other options for bicyclists nearby and it will just become an attractive nuisance.

Barbara Robb encourages everyone to ride or walk the trail. It is perfectly accessible in its present state. Paving it would invite more speed. Anytime there is change in space use there are maintenance and liability costs. If the path is paved there will forever be maintenance costs. With budget reductions there will be cuts in services for maintenance of these trails and will lead to liability problems. She believes that this is a bridge that will lead cyclists to "no where". Cyclists could use Hall Road. Please take the time to walk the path yourselves and you will see that the path is perfect as it is.

Vincent Hoagland has lived in Sonoma County for 40 years and commutes by bicycle to work at Sonoma State. He is on the Sonoma County Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. This is part of the bike plan that was approved back in 1997. It is continuing the bike plan for which there would be a paved trail all of the way from downtown Santa Rosa to the end of the creek. He rarely rides this part of the trail because of the surface of the road. It is not a safe place to ride, especially in the winter time. People who wish to ride their horses and walk their dogs have the south side to ride and walk on.

Christine Culver is the Executive Director of the Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition. She thanked Regional Parks' staff for going through this process. This is a corridor that is very important for folks who ride bicycles whether it is for recreation or for transportation and is a key route to the West County. You can't stop a process because it isn't perfect. This project needs to continue forward. This isn't the end of the trail. It is not a trail to "no where". There is a plan to continue out to Guerneville Road. There is a whole network of bike paths planned. This is about sharing resources. There are two paths on this trail and creek. People need to get out of their cars and this trail is an important way to do it.

Leslie Michaelwitz said that the south side of the path is inaccessible to horses. You would have to get onto Guerneville Road to use the trail.

Commissioner Wheeler asked that those in attendance comment only once during this portion of the program. Questions will be answered by staff when everyone has commented.

Melissa Sharhay, a Sebastopol resident, said that there are two paths that are public. Bicyclists need to be considerate using the trail. Her only concern is the environmental impact. She would like to see the north side paved and the south side stay as it is and make it more accessible to horse riders.

Arthur Webb said that he spearheaded the petition opposing the project two years ago. The petition contained about 150 signatures. He has been running this section of the trail for 25 years. His first question is regarding a statement by Ken Tam that this soft surface is cracking. He does not agree with that statement. He is there everyday and there is not one single crack in the soft surface. He presented 2 photos showing the path in almost perfect condition and it looks as if it is already paved. This path is suitable for everyone and they do not wish to discriminate against anyone. The trail is so pristine and he is against its paving. This bike path leads to no where. It ends up on Willowside Road and that is it and there is no where to go. There is just disaster and liability waiting to happen. Paving the path is like a contradiction to being a green America. Spending \$700,000 to pave a trail that does not need to be paved is ludicrous. It is an insult to the wildlife. Dr. Nicholas is a biologist that studies the western pond turtle in that section of the creek. He asked for a copy of the report.

Ken Wells, President of the Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition, and the Vice-President of the Sonoma County Trails Council said that he has been on advising committees since 1992 and thanked Parks staff for being so patient and perseverant. One of the benefits of living in the United States is the benefit of being able to speak up about anything and it has been heard tonight. The three bridges were put up as the first step in a plan to connect a bicycle path from Santa Rosa to the West County. It will eventually continue to Guerneville Road. Cyclists will be able to get off the roadways with the motor vehicles and have a safe place to ride bikes. This trail provides that opportunity.

Barbara Gray has been using the trail for 20 years and commutes to work. She has never had a problem riding that trail. It is a perfectly safe place to ride a bike. She urged that the trail not be paved.

Sue Bennett said that a paved trail is so much more than just for bicyclists. Seniors who walk for exercise so that they can help keep themselves fit can stumble and fall on gravel and a dirt trail. They deserve to have the opportunity to exercise on a safe trail. Parents with small children who can't afford those strollers with the great big bicycle wheels would be much better suited on a paved trail. She would like to see one side of the trail paved for the use and benefit of the disabled community.

Todd Holmes, Park Planning Manager, addressed the comments from the audience.

- The trail continues and is not a dead end to nowhere. It will be a segment that is continuous with other sections of the trail.
- The hardening of the trail subsurface is a standard treatment for expansive soils and is a chemical treatment that would stabilize the soil under the trail.
- The Biological Assessment was finished in January and there is a lot of staff analysis that goes into it. One of the things that Parks has been doing is an extensive review of the impacts of the project and determining the best approach to take for compliance with CEQA regulations.
- Tonight's report is an informational item and not an action item so the Commission's role is to make comments which will be noted by staff and then communicated to the Board of Supervisors. This project is part of an already approved county-wide bicycle plan. The Board's role in this process will be to approve an addendum to the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that was prepared for the master plan.
- Anyone on the mailing list will be communicated with and there will be future postings on the website.
- Notes are being made of tonight's comments and a record will be made.
- A summary of the comments both for and against the project will be presented to the Board of Supervisors.
- The project will go out to bid in June.
- Construction would start in September.
- Motorcycles are prohibited on the existing trail and will continue to be prohibited on the paved trail.
- A biologist did an exhaustive analysis of the entire habitat in the area and trail itself is not pond turtle habitat, it is a compacted surface. The trail itself is not conducive to the turtle habitat.
- The maintenance for graffiti and trash are part of the existing trail issues. The maintenance costs are always part of the department's ongoing budget. There are funds budgeted in the current maintenance program to maintain the trails as they currently exist.

Ken Tam added:

- There is on-street parking on Placer Drive.
- Funding received for the project is \$550,000 from Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC), \$100,000 in Transportation Development Act funds. If the money is not used it will go back.
- The biologist that was hired has a lot of experience in the Sonoma County area.

Commissioner Collins said that she is impressed with the attendance at this meeting and the research on this topic. She is a jogger and a bicyclist. She will recommend to the

Board of Supervisors that they accept staff recommendations. This project is a great compromise in which everybody can use the trail. This is not a trail to “no where”. She has watched these plans develop over the years and each segment is a step in a project that will take many years. She would like to see “courtesy campaigns” started where user groups get together to discuss usage and the sharing of the trails.

Commissioner Stafford said that she appreciates the staff’s work on this project. It takes a lot of time and effort to answer questions. She believes that riding your bike reduces greenhouse gas emissions and is making it safer for everyone to live. She agrees with the staff report and recommends that the project be moved forward.

Commissioner Wheeler is neutral regarding this project.

Ms. Burns said that this item will go to the Board of Supervisors. The date has not been set. Please be sure that you are on the sign-up sheet at the front of the room for notification regarding this project.

- **Summer Operations Update**

Bert Whitaker, Park Operations Manager, gave a quick overview of the summer operations:

- * Environmental Discovery Center “Sustainable Summer Fun” Program
- * Spring Lake Swimming Lagoon and Healdsburg Memorial Beach are scheduled for opening on Memorial Weekend.
- * The sixth season of Vamos a Nadar has kicked off.
- * This year will be the 2nd year of the Open Water Junior Lifeguard Program being held at Spring Lake Swim Lagoon. This year the program has been expanded to two one-week sessions.
- * Various Eagle Scout projects have been completed at Helen Putnam, Foothill Park and Ragle Ranch
- * Riverfront has a fully functioning restroom building.
- * Sunset Beach Parking Lot is complete and signage will be installed.
- * Ranger guided hikes are continuing at Tolay.
- * Doran Beach houses a manure bunker.
- * The battle with the Canadian Geese at Spring Lake continues.
- * Park Ranger recruitment continues.
- * Crane Creek Disc Golf Course dedication was held on April 19.
- * April Park Celebration was a big success.
- * Tolay Interim Access Permit program curriculum will be ready for review.
- * Major Maintenance projects that have been funded by TOT/Advertising Funds are continuing to be completed.

- **Foundation Update**

Mary Jo Delos, Executive Director of the Regional Parks Foundation said that she brings an update to the Commission periodically. The Annual Parks Pass Promotion takes place each year and each year the promotion is more successful. Even though we are in the midst of a terrible financial crisis, we are holding our own. Park donors are sticking with us. The

staff in the Front Office of Regional Parks work very hard and are very successful in seeking donations for the Foundation.

After 10 years, the Children's Memorial will be completed. At the January Foundation Board meeting, the allocation of \$35,000 for completion of this project was approved. There will be a dedication ceremony to formally open the grove after completion.

Commissioner Wheeler asked if the Foundation was interested in helping with the Watson School Project.

Ms. Delos said that they are very interested but at this very moment they don't believe that there is any activity regarding funding for the Watson School.

- **Planning Division Update**

- * Received \$60,000 in CDBG funding for the Ragle Ranch Playground Project
- * Sunset Beach will be open by Memorial Day and a dedication ceremony will be held in the future
- * The SPUD cam is operational

10. Adjournment

Adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Laura Cordes, Executive Secretary