

TO: James L. App, City Manager
FROM: Meg Williamson, Assistant City Manager
SUBJECT: River Trail Maintenance & Security Update
DATE: November 5, 2013

Needs: To provide the City Council with a status report on maintenance and security matters associated with the River Trail system.

Facts:

1. At an August, 2013 Council meeting, after hearing several members of the public express concerns over river trail maintenance and safety, the City Council requested staff to bring back information for discussion.
2. The areas of concern expressed by citizens during public comment about the river trail system were:
 - Homeless corridor
 - Broken lights
 - Not maintained
 - Lack of police patrols
 - False sense of security
 - Lights have exposed wiring

The area presumed to be the subject of these comments stretches between the 13th Street Bridge (northern boundary) and the Charolais Trail (southern boundary). Public Works has received citizen concerns reported for that portion of the trail from JC Penney to Wendys.

3. The noted 3-mile stretch of river trails was constructed in phases between 2007 and 2012 utilizing mostly State and Federal funding as follows:

River Parkway Trail – 2 miles completed in 2007 at a cost of \$375,000. Funding was a State Resources Grant to the Upper Salinas Las Tablas Resource Conservation District (US-LTRCD) who oversaw the project located on City property. The trail project was required to have an education element focused on cleaning up storm water that flows to the river.

South River Road Trail – ½ mile completed in December 2012 at a cost of \$1.3 million. Funding was a combination of State and Federal Transportation dollars. The trail project connected two bridges and enhanced traffic safety by getting pedestrians and bicyclists off of narrow South River Road.

Charolais Trail – ½ mile completed in December 2012 at a cost of \$500,000. Funding was a combination of State environmental mitigation funds and City

Park impact fees. The trail project was secondary to the restoration of the drainage channel repair to eliminate erosion and silt discharge to the river.

4. A River Trail discussion paper is attached to this report as requested by the City Council. The Public Works and Police Departments contributed in compiling information for the attached report.

Analysis &
Conclusion:

The attached discussion paper is intended to provide contextual background of the City's river vision effort and the subsequently formed Council policies and goals which support opportunities to expand recreation and open space, enhance community and regional trail connections, and improve the general health and welfare of the community.

Over the years, City Councils have urged pursuit of grant funding to achieve adopted goals. Each grant opportunity is evaluated individually with multiple opportunities for the Council to consider whether the timing, effort and financial resources presented with the grant are appropriately matched with City goals.

The timing of grant availability is not always convenient or predictable. Since 2006, the City has been successful in securing approximately \$5.8 million in grant funds for projects which directly relate to the river corridor effort. However during that same time, the City experienced unprecedented financial challenges (the Great Recession) that significantly reduced organizational spending, including the reduction of service staff by approximately 35% (and Public Works by 50%).

Based on the discussion paper provided, the City Council may provide direction regarding service/maintenance of current amenities.

Policy

Reference: General Plan (Adopted 2003); 2006 Economic Strategy; Uptown/Town Centre Specific Plan; Council Goals.

Fiscal Impact: One time clean-up and ongoing maintenance costs and its impacts on City finances and competing priorities are described in the discussion paper. Based on this information the Council may direct appropriate actions.

Options:

- a. Receive and file status report;
- b. Direct a course of action for trail maintenance;
- c. Amend, reject, or modify the above options.

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Policy Background

In 2005, the City concluded an extensive community outreach project which resulted in a vision of the Salinas River as an important community resource and connection. The “River Vision” embodied broad based ideologies that were meant to inspire a revitalized river corridor. The Vision is a set of ideas that are “place holders” when opportunities arise, recognizing that the River Vision is a long term commitment.

In 2006, the City and Chamber of Commerce jointly adopted the City’s Economic Strategy which expanded these River Vision values into a set of core principles that support/enhance the community’s overall economic wellbeing. These principles fall within the categories of: People / Place / Positioning / Partnership. Strategies were listed within the section on “Place” that support river corridor improvements.

In 2009, the City Council adopted the City’s Bicycle Master Plan acknowledging the goal of establishing better bike connections throughout the community to connect neighborhoods, and commercial and industrial employment areas through a system of protected paths and trails.

In 2011, the City Council adopted the Uptown/Town Centre Specific Plan to guide the character of City’s historic west-side. The Specific Plan establishes policies that translate “the vision” to action and that help decision makers to set priorities, identify funding resources and make physical improvements.

Why We Pursue Grants

Pursuit of grant funding is an effective method to make progress towards stated goals; and often a grant opportunity allows the City to meet dual goals. For example, the Charolais Trail was a “drainage improvement” grant to avoid future fines by regulatory agencies for a significant erosion problem. Also, the South River Trail was a “traffic safety” improvement since it removes pedestrians, strollers and bicycles from the South River Road shoulder.

The City has a long history of proactively pursuing grant funding to support various city endeavors. Securing State and Federal dollars helps leverage local funds, reducing the financial burden for capital outlay. However, those funds come with specific conditions/restrictions to provide assurances to the Grantee that their funds are being used consistent with their intended mission.

Because grant funding is cyclical and competitive, the timing of fund availability is difficult to predict. Grant funds continued to be available through the recession, even when local agencies were struggling to meet basis service demands. The timing of grant availability is not always aligned to the City’s ability to budget for maintenance.

Every grant opportunity is looked at on a case to case basis to determine if City Council identified policies/goals/projects can be accomplished. Typically, a grant application must be accompanied by a resolution of intent/support by the City Council; then, if awarded, the City Council must formally accept the grant. The City Council has the opportunity to reject a grant.

All capital projects have ongoing maintenance or replacement impacts whether grant funded or not. At the time that a grant is considered for acceptance, the City must weigh and balance the community benefit of the project to its projected impact/cost. Maintenance cost projections have been provided with recent grant projects (e.g. Uptown Family Park) in recognition of the limited City resources caused by the

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recession. The message from City Council that these costs should be more specifically addressed with future grant funded projects is understood.

Grant History

State and Federal Grant funds make progress possible with minimum impact to the City's General Fund. Many recreational trails qualify for transportation grants; and many restoration projects qualify for water quality grants.

Since 2006 the City has secured over \$5.8 million in grant funding for trail and restoration projects that relate to the river system

- \$7,000 Anza Trail Historic Interpretive Markers
 - \$500,000 Charolais Restoration & Recreation Trail
 - \$1,500,000 21st Street Green Upgrade
 - \$1,300,000 River Road Recreational Trail
 - \$1,500,000 River Parkway Preserve Acquisition
 - \$300,000 Restoration in Larry Moore Park
 - \$275,000 N. County River Trail Master Plan
 - \$500,000 Union Road Reconstruction & Bike Lanes
- \$5,882,000** State/Federal dollars to date

Security

The two main concerns identified along the river trail system from a Police Department perspective are:

- Safety of pedestrians due to its location (not visible from the main roadway)

Although there have not been any reported assaults on pedestrians in this area since the trail opened, the remote location of the trail is of concern, especially during hours of darkness. The concern is heightened in this area due to homeless encampments just north of the Niblick Bridge where the police see signs of mental illness or substance abuse.

- Vandalism of the trail improvements (lights, benches, trashcans, vegetation, etc.)

No suspects have been arrested for the vandalism on the River Trail, but the police have indicated the likelihood that the vandalism is a result of juvenile offenders. Without having constant view of the trail from the roadway, the trail improvements become attractive nuisances to juveniles who loiter in the area and damage City property. If the trail use was significantly higher it is also likely there would be fewer instances of vandalism due to a constant watch by residents and/or City staff.

The trails were designed to facilitate visibility to the extent feasible, including lights and trail widths adequate for police vehicle access. However, as with other city departments over the past 5 years, the Police Department has been impacted by lowered staffing levels, making it difficult to implement

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proactive patrols. More recently, police staffing is reaching sufficient strength in the patrol division to enable some short term concentrated efforts that can make positive impacts on problems such as these. A short term concentrated effort usually cleans up the problem in the short term, but without a continued effort, the problem normally returns. A classic example of this is when officers are dedicated to traffic complaint areas to issue citations and educate the public in violation prone areas. Once the short term effort is complete, because officers/resources move on to other issues, the problem normally returns. The best approach for dealing with these issues is an ongoing enforcement and education effort (i.e. Full time traffic officers in this example).

A check was conducted of all the calls for service on the River Trail from January 1st, 2013 through today. There were only nine (9) calls for service:

- 1) A group of 8 juveniles drinking alcohol and doing drugs behind Wendy's
- 2) Found property - \$20.00
- 3) 3 breaks in a waterline along the River Trail – unknown if vandalism
- 4) Vandalism to lights and trash can. Graffiti on electrical box
- 5) Irrigation line break
- 6) Graffiti on wall behind Wendy's
- 7) Mountain Lion sighted behind JC Penny
- 8) Domestic verbal argument in a riverbed camp behind Wendy's
- 9) Found bicycle on River Trail

The Chief of Police notes that while items 1, 4, 6 and 8 on the list above are of importance, a review of the reported activity does not show there is a significant public safety issue. Nor does it rise above similar public parks and open space areas within the City.

The Chief has indicated that their department can initiate a short term concerted effort to have officers in the area of the river trail system, but there is not yet sufficient staffing to have a more regular and consistent way to monitor the river trails in the long term, keeping in mind that there are currently higher priorities in the City (i.e. Illegal Drugs / Gang concerns).

Some possible security modifications that could be considered:

- Install a security camera system along the trail to capture vandalism or other unwanted activity
- Install motion detection lights on poles so officers or residents can be alerted to a presence of individuals during hours of darkness
- When staffing increases in the future, reinstate the traffic officer position and have that officer ride the paved trail areas a couple times a day

The cost associated with implementation of these measures is not yet estimated. However, it is clear that there would be both financial and operational impacts from each. Additionally, there are other park and open space areas within the City with similar challenges that would need to be considered as well.

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Electrical Safety

The Public Works staff conducted an inspection of the bollards/ lighting system along the South River segment of trail and has confirmed that there is no electrical shock hazard from exposed wiring on the vandalized lights.

Repairs and Deferred Maintenance

The Public Works staff has inventoried the damage of fixtures along the trail system. Most vandalism damage has occurred along the half mile stretch of the South River Trail. There is need for weed control and trimming along all trail segments. The following repair/replacement needs have been identified:

Lighting – Eleven (11) lights are damaged. Ten (10) can be repaired, and one (1) must be replaced.

Benches – Four (4) benches are damaged. One (1) can be repaired, and three (3) must be replaced.

Trash Cans – Four (4) trash cans are damaged. One (1) can be repaired and three (3) to be replaced.

Irrigation - Various repairs identified.

Trimming/Weeding - Needed to create walking clearance on pathways & for visual improvement.

Replacement Plants – Various shrubs have died after their initial installation with broken irrigation.

Parts and fixtures have been ordered for repair of the lights, benches and trash cans. These repairs and installations will be accomplished using City labor which is the most cost effective approach. With limited staff resources, it is estimated that repairs will be accomplished over the next 3 to 6 months.

The deferred trimming and weeding needs will be accomplished through contracted services.

The cost of onetime repairs and cleanup of the 3-mile length of river trail is approximately \$19,000. Of that total, approximately \$4,500 is contracted services and \$14,500 is materials and replacement parts.

Annual Maintenance

The projected annual cost to maintain the 3-mile length of the current/built River Trail system would be approximately \$45,000.

Trail maintenance would include weeding, pruning shrubs from pathways, removal of debris and any dead vegetation, checking irrigation, and making minor drip repairs. The intensity of maintenance needs will vary on a seasonal basis. For best results, the trail should be serviced three times a year (Spring, Summer and Fall). This annual maintenance would be accomplished with a combination of City labor and contracted assistance.

There will be additional costs to repair/replace improvements over time due to usual wear-and-tear and/or vandalism.

Fiscal Impact Summary

The Spring 2013 General Fund Financial Forecast projected a Fiscal Year 2014 operating surplus of \$343,000. City Council has already approved use of \$206,000 in FY 14. Additionally, \$232,000 of essential repairs must be undertaken this fiscal year. Consequently, approved or essential expenditures

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already exceed the projected FY 14 operating surplus by \$75,000, reducing General Fund Reserves from \$6,400,000 to \$6,325,000.

Already Allocated from General Fund Reserves:

Median weeding _____	\$ 60,000
'Hot spot' repairs _____	<u>\$146,000</u>
Subtotal of Allocated	\$206,000

Probable/Potential allocations to General Fund Reserves:

Library re-roofing _____	\$200,000*
Street sweeping _____	\$200,000
Advance funds for City Park playground _____	\$ 350,000
Replace gas line 625 Riverside _____	\$ 18,000*
Repair HVAC at Centennial _____	\$ 14,000*
PM II staff person (Storm Water) _____	\$ 32,000 (reoccurring expense)
PM II staff person (Climate Action/planning) _____	\$106,400 (reoccurring expense)
GPS equipment tracking _____	\$130,000
Replace HVAC at Centennial Park _____	\$140,000
Repair air handler equipment at Library/City Hall _____	\$ 50,000
Contract Janitorial at City Hall/Safety Center _____	<u>\$ 85,000</u> (reoccurring expense)
Subtotal of Potential Allocations	\$1,325,400
Total All	\$1,531,400

*These repairs are unavoidable/necessary

Additional allocation for River Trail Maintenance:

Repair and Maintenance (one time)	\$ 19,000
- Lights	\$3200
- Trash cans	\$3600
- Benches	\$3600
- Irrigation	\$2500
- Plants	\$1600
- Contract service	\$4500
Reoccurring maintenance (annual)	\$ 45,000