

TO: City Council

FROM: River Trail Ad Hoc Committee (Martin/Picanco)

SUBJECT: River Trail Maintenance / Safety Update

DATE: January 2014

The following is a report out of activities undertaken in the past several months related to maintenance and safety issues identified for the river trail system.

November 5, 2013: The City Council received a River Trail Status Report at their regular Council meeting. At the conclusion of public testimony and Council discussion, a Council ad hoc committee was formed to further evaluate maintenance/safety and potential volunteer programs.

River Trail ad hoc committee members:

Councilman Martin
Mayor Picanco

November 11, 2013: The Council ad hoc met with City staff (public works, police, planning, recreation and administration) to discuss:

One Time deferred maintenance

- Confirm scope of work to be done
- Confirm timing of work

Evaluate safety ideas raised at 11-5-13 City Council public comment:

- Trail closure at night
- Remove lighting
- Change lighting style
- Homeless camps – what can be done

Future Maintenance - Volunteer Effort

- Explore scope of work to be accomplished by volunteers
- Consider what level of staff participation/support needed
- Non-profit Group support model (e.g. Friends of the River)

Public Relations

- Raising community awareness and ownership

Repairing Vandalism

- Cost of lights / trash bins / benches
- Materials used / on order for replacement

Irrigation

- Condition of Trail Grant – riparian planting mitigation program
- Plant cuttings and temporary above ground irrigation

Neighborhood Meeting/Trail Walk

- Scheduled for 10AM Saturday, 11-16-13
- Councilman Martin organized / invited staff

November 16, 2013: Councilman Martin met with a neighborhood representative and a city staff member who walked the length of the South River Road trail. Notations were made of conditions in the field.

December 9, 2013: Council ad hoc met again with City staff (public works, police, planning, recreation and administration) and explored some of the identified safety/maintenance challenges in more specific detail as follows:

Safety –

In late November, the Police Chief met with neighbors along the River Trail (Navajo Area) to further learn what they are observing (who/when/where) along the River corridor.

Vandalism: The most challenging times identified for vandalism activity seem to be in the early evenings (up to 8/9pm) and after school.

The Police Department response has been:

- Increase in Patrol spot-checks (both by foot and car)
- Encouragement of a formal/organized Neighborhood Watch Program
- Exploring grant funded opportunity for new dual sport motorcycle for improved police patrol

Homeless Camps: Entails an ongoing/broad program to regularly visit camping spots. The ability to deploy needed resources is a matter of priorities (above patrol capabilities) and currently has been handled through code enforcement officers.

The Police Department response has been:

- Visitation/disbursement of camping areas in the vicinity of the South River Road trail

Surveillance Cameras: The installation of surveillance equipment was discussed, but not recommended based on being cost prohibitive. However, the Police Chief has made contact with the adjacent Vista del Rio Apartments to find out if their surveillance cameras recorded any portion of the trail. It was learned the cameras only record the interior portions of the apartment complex and do not record any portions of the trail system.

Night Time Trail Closure: The closure of the trail from dusk to dawn was discussed but not supported. Isolating the stretch of trail is potentially a greater safety concern and would inhibit spot patrols from conducting their work. No other city trails are closed at night.

Elimination of Trail Lighting: The idea of eliminating trail lighting was discussed but not recommended. The benefits of trail lighting to assist patrols and/or users of the trail, would seem to outweigh its potential detriment.

Changes to Trail Lighting: It was shared that to replace bollard lighting with a pole type overhead design would cost approximately \$7,000 per light fixture. It was determined that replacement would be cost prohibitive at this time, but could be potentially considered in the future.

Maintenance –

Changes to Trail Amenities: The placement/low visibility of certain furniture was identified as a potential “attractive nuisance” along certain more remote stretches of trail, thus heightening the potential for vandalism and maintenance upkeep. The following changes were recommended to be implemented as part of the City’s deferred maintenance/repairs:

- Remove two (2) benches from the wooded trail area just west of Wendy’s
- Remove tall vegetation along the embankment that separates Wendy’s driveway and the trail
- Remove the picnic tables along the trail segment in Larry Moore Park

Shopping Cart Removal: The accumulation of shopping carts from various grocery stores was discussed as one of the challenges of trail upkeep. The Police Department noted from their Code Enforcement experience that stores deploy different methods of collecting their shopping carts. Some send their employees and others use a local service to do routine cart roundup. The Council ad hoc committee members noted their willingness to make personal contact with the local store managers to encourage them to be diligent in their shopping cart roundup efforts.

Product Materials for Amenities: The concern that benches and garbage cans should be replaced with metal fixtures (not wood) was discussed. There was clarification that the materials on order are of a synthetic/manmade (“treks”) material and not a wood product. This material is more impervious than wood, albeit less than metal, that will allow repairs that look similar to existing amenities. Also, reinstallation of slats will be tack welded to make vandal removal more difficult.

Repairs to Amenities: All replacement materials have been received and the Public Works will be scheduling this work as time allows over the coming months utilizing city crews. Again it was noted that a concerted effort would be made for a more “industrial” installation than previously existed (where possible).

Vegetation Clearing: The City had obtained quotes for contracted services from both a local landscaping contractor (already doing work for the City’s Landscape and Lighting District) and the CalFire prison crew program. The City was able to secure the CalFire crew for \$400/day plus cost of a dumpster/rolloff. Two CalFire captains lead the work of 6-10 person crews who started work in early January. The trail segment from (behind) JC Penney north to the 13th Street Bridge are being cleared of weeds, shrub overgrowth and tree limbs for 5-10 feet each side of the trail. Work is scheduled to be complete by mid-January.

Vegetation Maintenance: Use of the CalFire crew worked very well with minimal impact to city resources. It is intended to engage these crews again in the early Spring for additional weed maintenance work along all segments, including the Charolais Trail.

Mitigation Planting: A Fish and Game Permit was acquired in conjunction with the bike trail construction and use of Grant funds, which required the planting of native tree cuttings/plants along portions of the trail.

The City's Contractor installed temporary (above ground) irrigation in early December 2013 and has planted cuttings of plants obtained last Fall from plants that were removed because of the path project. Hydroseeding of slopes has been completed and the temporary irrigation removed after several years.

Erosion Control Fabric Removal: The black fabric fencing located between the path and river will be removed over the coming months to comply with State storm water requirements. The removal should be a visual enhancement along the trail.

Volunteer Support –

Public Relations Program: A high profile effort to educate the public of the importance of open space and trail systems within our community was discussed. Programs such as EcoSLO's "SLO Stewards" program or the Atascadero "ALPS" program were noted as possible models. The recommendation was to start with raising community pride and awareness through submission of articles to local media. It was recognized that a broader public relations program would need to be developed over time.

Neighborhood Watch: The City's Police Chief met with a neighborhood group in the Navajo area and urged their formation of a formal Neighborhood Watch Program. The posting of signs for these active programs, and the coordinated effort of neighbors to communicate with both one another and the City's police staff could be a positive deterrent to negative behavior. This model can be applied in other trail segment/neighborhoods such as the River Bank development.

Community Pride Signs: It was suggested that signs be installed along the corridor to encourage trail users to report suspicious activity and list a direct phone line to police dispatch. The recommendation was for staff to work with community organizations such as the REC Foundation to design and/or fund the signs that might include positive messaging like: "Love your Trail" and include organization logos.

Volunteer Maintenance: The benefit of community volunteerism was identified as a welcome resource. However, the challenges of organizing and deploying those resources in a meaningful way were also recognized. An ideal and efficient volunteer model seemed to be something similar to City's arrangement with the Parks4Pups organization, where a letter agreement defines the scope of work that Pups will do and how the City will support it. The non-profit Parks4Pups carries liability insurance and holds the City harmless for the cleanup work they conduct along the trails. The formation of a "Friends of the River" or similarly focused group would create such an opportunity. It was recognized that deploying new/expanded volunteer programs would require additional internal city resources (e.g. Volunteer Coordinator) that is currently not available. Adopt a Street/Trail programs, could however, continue in their current formats.

Conclusion -

The ad hoc has worked with citizens and staff to further explore identified concerns and/or opportunities for improving the river trail system. Deferred maintenance is underway, and additional repairs of trail amenities will occur in the near future. The Police Department is directing resources (as a rotation with other hot spot areas) to the river trail areas. There are several projects related to a public relations program and sign installation that can still be carried out. The use of CalFire crews appears to be a cost effective way for seasonal maintenance to be undertaken within the budgetary parameters previously set/approved by the Council. Maintenance and security efforts appear to be moving in the right direction.