

Bellinger Foster Steinmetz
Landscape Architecture

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Meeting Report

To: David Gittleson

Re: El Toro Trail
Neighborhood Meeting

Date: June 12, 2012

Meeting Place:	MH Council Chambers	Present:	
Meeting Date:	June 2, 2012	✓ Karl Bjarke	✓ Mike Bellinger
Meeting Purpose:	Hear El Toro Via Grande neighborhood trail concerns	✓ Julie Behzad	✓ Elke Ikeda
		✓ David Gittleson	
		✓ Alex Kennett (OSA Board)	
		✓ Andrea Mackenzie (OSA)	
		✓ Matt Freeman (OSA)	
		✓ Rachel Santos (OSA)	
		✓ Derek Neumann (OSA)	
			✓ = Present
			☐ = Not Present

Item	Notes	Action Items	Completed
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EL TORO TRAIL - Neighborhood Meeting June 6, 2012

1. **Welcome and introductions**
Karl Bjarke (City Engineer) introduced the project team: City representatives, OSA representatives, Bellinger Foster Steinmetz consultants and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to involve the community in implementation of the adopted 2007 City Trails Plan and to share the conceptual plans for trail access to El Toro and get feedback from neighbors to make project a success and also to

hear their concerns. Karl presented the project history and timeline and spoke about the grants and significant public investment that made this project possible including \$184K from OSA to secure Acton property (the eastern face of El Toro) and Council-approved applications for transportation funding grants.

He also explained what other comment options for neighbors including upcoming public meetings, handout comments sheet, and e-mail or mail to David Gittleston.

Visual aids including a board with the trail planning time line and a board with map #6 from Trails and Natural Resources Study were used to support his presentation.

2. **Project background and objectives**

Elke Ikeda (Bellinger Foster Steinmetz) provided some background information on trails in general and why they have become so popular. She spoke about recreational demands of the growing region and City of Morgan Hill and how the City responded by creating master planning documents that guide recreation and trail planning and implementation efforts in a timely and sustainable fashion. She noted that hiking, walking and bicycling are consistently the top rated recreational activities; People are looking for activities that have a low impact on the environment, are affordable, provide a nature experience, and promote a healthy life style. People use the availability of trails when deciding where to move and where to locate their businesses.

Benefits of trails: environmental, health and well being, assets to community. As such trails have become true assets to their communities. Because trails are so popular, trail networks have developed and even smaller trails like El Toro trail become part of a larger trail network that expands the local experience and connect people regionally and beyond. Elke also noted some findings from a recently conducted El Toro trail survey stating that the majority of trail

users are Morgan Hill citizens that use the trail extensively and regularly for exercise.

3. **Existing trail conditions and proposed improvements**

Elke Ikeda described existing El Toro trail conditions and proposed improvements.

Concerning Existing Conditions:

- Environmental concerns: Because trail is too steep it causes environmental degradation including erosion of soils and destruction of habitat and cannot be maintained.
- Public health and welfare concerns: Because trail is too steep it is unsafe to use. There is a history of injuries and a recent search and rescue event.
- Visual impact concerns: Degradation of the trail has become a viewshed concern.
- Trespassing concern: Current informal trail alignment results in private property trespasses.

Trail Visioning:

While not official, the existing trail has been in use for a long time; the proposed improvements formalize an existing condition rather than create a new use.

- Trail Phase 1: The new trail alignment will create a meandering trail, less steep than the existing trail and will have a firm surface and safe cross slope. Decommissioning of the existing trail alignment would allow for restored vegetation.
- The El Toro trail will connect to a new OSA trail which will start at the West Hills Community Church located south of Spring Avenue. OSA has an access easement to the private road.
- Future phase (ultimate objective): connection to El Toro summit based on willing sellers. The alignment is not determined at this time.
- Recommended trail uses: hiking and bicycling. The City has not made a firm determination on whether dogs should be allowed. However, if they are allowed it would be on a fixed 6' leash.

- Equestrian uses will not be allowed on the trail.
- CEQA process to comply with environmental requirements.
- A volunteer program is envisioned whose participants would educate trail users on proper trail etiquette and assist in maintenance of the trail.

Visual aids included a board with a perspective map and a plan map of the proposed trail alignments.

4. Presentation and discussion of neighborhood concerns

Elke Ikeda thanked meeting participants for providing comments before the meeting. This allowed the project team to prepare for known concerns. Note pads of known concerns had been prepared in advance to facilitate the recording of expected comments. Known concerns included: parking, trailhead location, safety, litter and fire. The meeting participants were asked to focus on one issue at a time, to provide feedback on any additional concerns but also to present ideas and suggestions on how to address/resolve them.

During the discussion an interactive google earth tool showing the proposed improvements was used to focus on specific areas.

Organized by subject matter, see below for comments received and recommendations presented by the City:

PARKING

Comments Received:

- When the trail is made official how many additional cars can be expected?
- If parking is restricted, what about guests? How does police know who is an illegal street parker?
- Neighbors are concerned that parking is not monitored/policed. Does police have staffing to provide additional monitoring?
- Contact larger neighborhood for parking concerns not just residents

on Via Grande.

- Library parking lot is busy with its own patrons and on weekends streets and City Hall parking lot gets impacted by church users (church @ east end of Alkire).
- Parking needs change throughout the day; users stay only for limited period of time. What is average duration of trail use?

Preliminary City recommendations:

- 'No Parking' signage along Via Grande and possibly other neighborhood streets.
- Explore permit parking system in conjunction or instead, if necessary
- Designated trailhead parking at library, on east DeWitt Ave. and City Hall on weekends.
- Increased police presence to enforce 'No Parking' requirements; Police officer to be available during next public meeting for questioning and discussion of options.
- OSA exploring options to secure a formal parking area for OSA trailhead.
- City exploring options to create a trail connection from Dunne Ave.

FIRE/TRAIL USE

Comments Received:

- Trespass/access off Alkire. Neighbor concerned about liability.
- Realigned trail will not eliminate trespassing to the top.
- What is the formal process to stop trailhead from being formalized?
- Get more input on direct impacts, proximity concerns from other neighbors.
- Trailhead at Coyote Creek/Target trailhead: due to improvements @ trailhead, parking was not available. What were the impacts to the adjacent neighborhood?
- Proposed: Looped trail with return to OSA trail to avoid neighborhood connection.
- Will dogs and bicycles be allowed on trail? Dog feces is a problem.

- Fire suppression – Who maintains orchard at end of Via Grande?
How and how often?
- Cal. Fire: what are their requirements/current practices for access at this location; need input.

Preliminary City recommendations:

- Orchard area is private property but past practices indicate regular disking to control vegetation.
- Statistical evidence shows that fires are typically not caused by trail users.
- City will inquire with Cal Fire to understand their needs, requirements and practices.

SAFETY

Comments Received:

- Are there snakes? Is there an increase in snakes when orchard gets tilled/cleared?
- Some trail users not there for recreational uses – undesirable activities occur on trail, at trail head and parked cars.
- Desire for policing trail/non-trail uses.
- Conducted survey did not span enough time to really understand problems. Request more surveys – holiday plus full week at least (6 am – dusk).
- People disregard no-use signage. How can trespassing/access be restricted? Fencing? What are other options?
- Private liability concerns
- How to police if limits or restrictions are ignored?

Preliminary City recommendations:

- Increased police presence to enforce parking requirements.
- More trail users create a stronger presence with more self-policing.
- Presence of trail volunteers will assist with trail etiquette and maintenance.
- Relocation of trailhead away from residences and no parking

requirement will discourage 'hanging out'.

LITTER

Comments Received:

- Street department responsibility; can City commit to regular emptying of proposed trash receptacles?
- Dog feces are a problem along the trail. This is a health concern. What can be done?
- "Friends of San Pedro Pond" assist with trail maintenance. Recommendation to create a similar group to police El Toro trail.

Preliminary City recommendations:

- Trash receptacles at trailhead.
- Regular scheduled City trash pick-up.
- Trash receptacles are present in designated parking areas.
- Trail volunteers will assist with trail maintenance/trash pick-up.
- Designated parking in conjunction with no parking requirements will redirect users. Trail users will only pass through neighborhood.

TRAILHEAD

Comments Received:

- Via Grande - excess cars movement on dead-end street.
- Use of church a valuable resource.
- Potential sale of church site?
- Need better mapping of ownership/access at potential trailhead locations.
- Who is responsible for Fire/Safety?
- Liability for Property Owner or City?
- Congregation at front of homes on street; disrespectful behavior.
- Recommendation: Relocate trail head to end of Main Street beyond homes.
- OSA has access easement up private drive to church lot.

- Other opportunities for public to speak out?
- Library – lot closed Sunday & Monday
- Should trail use be limited to seasonal use?

Preliminary City recommendations:

- Official trail head at Library parking lot
- Recessed, fenced/screened trail head to ensure privacy of residents
- signage (regulatory, informative/map, interpretive and trail etiquette)
- consideration of other trail heads per Trails plan to disperse trail use/trail entry points (OSA exploring use of Church parking lot; City engaged in discussions with property owner at Dunne Ave)
- Future meetings for public input: Community Meeting; Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting; City Council Meeting

OTHER

Comments Received:

- Restroom: Trail users need access to a restroom; Feces are a problem along trail
- Library is closed on Sundays and Mondays

Preliminary City recommendations:

- Restroom facilities are not provided for short trails (per survey results average duration of trail visit is approximately 1 ½ hours).
- During library hours trail patrons can use the library restrooms

POSITIVE COMMENTS received:

Martin Cheek (Parks and Recreation Commissioner) spoke about the positive benefits of the “Friends of San Pedro Pond” and how a similar organization might assist in upkeep of El Toro trail.

Roger Knopf spoke about his many years of participation in the Historic Society who until recently organized an annual hike to the top of El Toro mountain. Up to 1,000 people participated in the ascents,

communicating the popularity of the destination and trail. He also noted that average trail use times would be relatively short, allowing for 'quick' parking turn-around.

Several Via Grande neighbors spoke in support of the proposed trail improvements and noted that in the past they have not experienced negative impacts.

5. Next Steps

Karl Bjarke concluded the meeting by informing meeting attendees of anticipated upcoming public meetings which include:

Community Meeting

PRC Presentation

City Council Presentation