



Santa Clara Valley Water District

File No.: 17-0401

Agenda Date: 8/22/2017

Item No.: *6.3.

BOARD AGENDA MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT:

Joint Use Trails on District Property: Status and Updates.

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive information and provide direction to staff to proceed with the recommended outreach and next steps.

SUMMARY:

At its May 23, 2017 meeting, the Board requested that staff present information and updates on the joint use of District property for trails. The following information was to be provided:

- Status of trail development along creeks within Santa Clara County;
- Balancing trail development with stream stewardship interests and the District's operational costs;
- Current collaboration efforts with cities on trails;
- Recent Board of Directors' involvement;
- Future outreach and next steps on trail-related topics.

Status of trail development along creeks within Santa Clara County

Over the last 35 years, trails have been constructed countywide along many creeks and rivers in Santa Clara County. Most of these trails were constructed upon maintenance roads (levees in some instances), recreational in nature and limited to daytime use. The District enters into joint use agreements with other public agencies to support and facilitate trail development and public access for recreational purposes on District property. As one example, the District and City of San Jose developed 35 miles of recreational trails since 2003. The District supported 70.89 miles of trails from FY01 to FY 13 and exceeded the Clean, Safe Creeks and Natural Flood Protection Program goals to provide 70 miles of trails along creeks within the south bay cities.

Challenges of balancing trail development with stream stewardship and District's operations

As the south bay region continues to develop and become more densely populated, there is increasing demand for additional trails, transportation corridors, bridge crossings and undercrossings, and inclusion of urban amenities such as artwork, kiosks, and lighting within the stream corridor and riparian areas. In reviewing these trail projects over the past few years, staff has recognized challenges in reconciling at least two ends policies of the District:

- E-4.2.2. Support healthy communities by providing access to additional trails, parks, and open space along creeks and in the watershed, and
- E-4.1.1. Preserve creeks, bay, and ecosystems through environmental stewardship.

Current collaboration efforts with cities on trails

To address sometimes conflicting policies and partner agency goals, staff collaborates with trail proponents, (typically cities) in the study, planning and design processes, and issues permits prior to start of construction. Some of the evolving practices include:

1. Ensuring trail alignment is outside the riparian corridor and above top of bank (excluding undercrossings);
2. Pavement is limited to one side of the creek channel;
3. Access ramps on the back slope of levees are sited strategically and trail connection access points serve the general public and not a single landowner;
4. Pedestrian bridges, hardscape improvements, and lighting are minimized whenever possible; and
5. Impacts to maintenance operations are minimized by anticipating the access, circulation and storage needs of the District.

Recent Board of Directors' Involvement

At the January 10, 2017 Board meeting, District staff presented information on balancing trails and recreational uses of District property with stream stewardship and flood protection missions. During this meeting, staff presented the challenges and impacts to operations that are faced in supporting trails particularly in the areas where the land rights are more constrained, or the use is for transportation. The Board has expressed a desire to conduct outreach on trails with various stakeholder groups.

On March 20, 2017, Director Keegan gave a presentation to the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition on creek trails in which she gave an overview of compatible uses, minimizing riparian corridor impacts, neighborhood considerations and opportunities for community engagement.

At the May 23, 2017 Board meeting, Director Kremen requested District staff come back to the full Board with an update on trails rather than discussing at the Board Policy and Planning Committee. This memo provides the requested update and identifies next steps.

Future Outreach and Next Steps

1. Staff has been working with the City of San Jose on the development of a Trail Network Design Guidelines (Toolkit) document to broaden understanding of best practices and to ensure that District's needs are well considered and accommodated to the greatest extent possible.
2. Staff will work with Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) in the development of an update to the Countywide Bike Plan (CBP).
3. Staff plans to consolidate the information from VTA's CBP and Cities' trail master plans to evaluate the areas where the proposed trails cross our facilities and see the broad perspective.
4. Staff will then conduct an analysis of proposed trail systems across the County and identify constraints along with operations and maintenance needs and identify opportunities in collaboration with various cities.
5. Staff is planning to conduct outreach through its One Water Plan and in doing so include trails and recreation as one component of watershed-based water resources master planning. Outreach for Fiscal Year 2018 is proposed for Guadalupe, West Valley, Lower Peninsula, and Uvas-Llagas Watersheds, as well as finalizing outreach for Coyote Watershed.
6. Staff plans to conduct outreach via three stakeholder meetings to be held in Mountain View, San Jose, and South County by the end of 2018. Staff plans to present the results of this analysis at these public meetings for further discussion with stakeholders.
7. Staff will return to Board to communicate feedback from stakeholder meetings to be included in the design guidelines. The approved design approaches will be communicated to the City of San Jose for inclusion in its Trail Network Design Guidelines.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact associated with this item.

CEQA:

The recommended action does not constitute a project under CEQA because it does not have a potential for resulting in direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: PowerPoint

UNCLASSIFIED MANAGER:

Melanie Richardson, 408-630-2035