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NEWS

RESIDENTS FORM WATCHDOG GROUP TO PROTECT FUTURE TRAILS IN SAN JOSE

Save Our Trails holds first meeting

By Tiffany Carney

A group of San Jose residents has formed a watchdog group to monitor the development of local trails after learning that a portion of former railroad property in Willow Glen once loosely earmarked for a city pathway could become a sidewalk.

"What we are really after is to save that trail," said Richard Zappelli, a Willow Glen resident and one the 20 members of the newly formed Save Our Trails group, which held its inaugural meeting Feb. 28.

Group members say they are worried that approval of a combined sidewalk-trail will set a precedent for future trails in the city. They have made it their goal to "defend, acquire, construct and maintain the Santa Clara County Master Trail Plan as established in the county and city general plans."

The group has already attracted attention from neighborhoods throughout the city.

"There has been a very large groundswell on this issue," said Taisia McMahon, an avid trail user who heads Save Our Trails, with residents from the Greater Palm Haven, Willow Glen, North Willow Glen and Shasta Hanchett neighborhood groups.

The organization is also partnering with members of the San Jose City Council to help ensure that Mayor Chuck Reed's goal of creating a 100-mile network of interconnected trails comes to fruition.

Zappelli says the group formed to prevent the city and property owner Asante Real Estate Group Inc. from building a trail that will double as a sidewalk in front of homes planned for the former Union Pacific railroad property near Coe Avenue.

Asante recently purchased the \$3.3 million property that stretches from Lonus Street to Broadway Avenue and plans to build 14 homes on land that many had hoped the city would acquire for the Willow Glen Spur trail.

Asante is not required to build a trail at the site, but has included a pathway

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in its proposal that will connect Willow Glen to downtown San Jose via the Lonus trailhead.

"Our development plans to dedicate space for a trail and build the trail from Broadway Avenue to the creek," said Carey Sutton, CEO of Los Gatos-based Asante Real Estate Group Inc.

The trail will also extend from the trestle to the trailhead at Lonus.

Asante will fund, construct and dedicate the trail to the city.

Save Our Trails members say they are opposed to having a trail that is essentially a sidewalk.

Asante's proposed trail crosses over four driveways and is fenced on both sides like a narrow alleyway at some portions.

Zappelli said the group hopes the trail can be a separate project, not part of the housing development.

The city will be responsible for restoring the trestle up to code and safe enough for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Those at the meeting were concerned that with the current budget implications, restoration of the trestle will not be guaranteed.

"If we don't do something, there will be a fence on one end of the bridge and a fence on the other," Zappelli said.

The hope is that the trestle does not get neglected, as the structure is responsible for connecting the trail across the creek.

The group has already formed subcommittees to tackle other trail-related issues, such as outreach and financing for more pathways and the maintenance of current trails.

Securing nonprofit organization status and creating a public trust to fund for the acquisition of other railroad properties to continue the trails are in the works.

The group plans to branch out and discuss current developments and the future needs of Los Gatos, Guadalupe and Coyote trails.

The next meeting is slated for March 14, from 9:30 a.m. to noon at the Willow Glen Baptist Church, 1292 Minnesota Ave.

For more information, join the Save Our Trails group on www.facebook.com or e-mail saveourtrails@gmail.com.

