

# The Mercury News

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## Opinion: Trail network will move us toward a healthier Santa Clara County

By George Shirakawa and Ken Yeager  
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Imagine being able to get across San Jose by foot or bike in a natural setting virtually free of cars. The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, along with the city of San Jose, the Open Space Authority and civic groups such as Save Our Trails, have been dreaming of just that. Recent funding allocations to build the Three Creeks Trail have moved that dream closer to reality.

San Jose has a number of beautiful trails including Los Gatos Creek, Guadalupe Creek and Coyote Creek. Removal of old Union Pacific Railroad tracks through the central part of the city presented an opportunity to create a 2 1/2-mile link connecting those trails together. In 2004, residents and local leaders banded together, and the idea for the Three Creeks Trail was born.

At that time, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors and the city of San Jose entered into an agreement to acquire the necessary property. It has taken a number of years, committed leadership and patience, but this urban trail connection is now on its way.

On Tuesday, after years of work by many people to pull the pieces into place, the supervisors voted to

authorize the use of \$2 million from the County Parks Charter Acquisition Fund to purchase the property. That funding will be used along with money set aside by San Jose and the Open Space Authority to get work started on the western half of the trail network.

However, the work to complete the Three Creeks Trail does not

end there. To keep the momentum going, the Board of Supervisors also set aside an additional \$1 million to keep this urban trail moving eastward toward Kelley Park. When both halves are completed, Three Creeks Trail will connect three significant regional trails and two of San Jose's most popular parks, Kelley and the Guadalupe River Park. Besides more recreational opportunities for residents, it will provide a conduit for green transportation and a bridge that unites neighboring communities.

Making recreation and physical activity a priority is not easy for all residents. Some neighborhoods have inadequate access to safe recreation choices, and that contributes to making families inactive and unhealthy. Building walkable, bikeable trails in densely populated areas can go a long way toward encouraging physical activity.

Fiscally and ethically, the county must have a role in influencing healthy lifestyles. In Santa Clara County, more than 55 percent of adults are overweight or obese; 35 percent of our Latino, African-American and white youths are in the same shape. The costs to treat chronic diseases associated with inactivity and poor eating habits affect an already fragile county budget. According to the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, adult obesity costs the county \$420 million in health care bills and another half-billion in lost productivity.

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Combating these alarming trends with greater accessibility to a healthier lifestyle is our priority. This moves Three Creeks Trail beyond an investment in making San Jose a great place to live, work and play. The trail is an investment in the health and wellness of our residents. We hope this inspires more innovative projects to create a true urban trail network and healthier Santa Clara County.

GEORGE SHIRAKAWA represents District 2 (crossed by the Three Creeks Trail) on the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. KEN YEAGER is president of the board and represents District 4. They wrote this article for this newspaper.

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