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Plan to link major San Jose trails stands at a crossroads

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A plan to unite three major trails in San Jose is facing some obstacles with development, and a trails advocacy group is trying to keep the project on track.

For several years, San Jose and Santa Clara County officials have been trying to link the Los Gatos Creek Trail with the Guadalupe River Trail and the Coyote Creek Trail. The proposal is called the Three Creeks Trail, formerly known as the Willow Glen Spur Trail, and it would run mainly on an old Union Pacific line whose rails were removed in 2004.

In July, county leaders held three workshops to gauge residents' opinions of future parkland acquisitions, including trails, for its new Parks Acquisition Plan. In late August, the county board of supervisors is expected to review residents' input on new trails, and county officials are collecting input by e-mail.

The Willow Glen-based Save Our Trails group is now asking residents who support the trail to e-mail their county representatives.

"Right now is a critical time for the acquisition," said

Save Our Trails chairwoman Taisia McMahon. "It's a threatened piece of land."

Part of the reason trails have been developed next to the Guadalupe River and other waterways is that they are protected by law from development.

Unlike waterways, proposed paths along old rail lines such as the Three Creeks Trail are more open to development. Nearly all the land along the proposed trail is zoned for commercial or industrial uses, and

developers could build or expand businesses there through San Jose's planning process.

Yves Zsutty, San Jose's trails manager, said he meets weekly with city planners to stay apprised of potential development on land targeted for trails. The city is trying to create 100 miles of trails in the city by 2023, and it stands at roughly 55 miles as of early August.

For the Three Creeks Trail project, Zsutty and other city officials have been negotiating with Union Pacific for more than three years. City trail officials have said that hurdles remain in acquiring land, especially on the Eastern Alignment. The Eastern Alignment runs roughly from Highway 87 to the San Jose Municipal baseball stadium along the old Union Pacific right of way.

The path would have to cross the Caltrain line and a future California High-Speed Rail line with bridges or other structures.

San Jose parks officials regularly discuss planned trails with Santa Clara County officials, who are working on their own Parks Acquisition Plan.

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The county's acquisition plan receives money from a Park Charter Fund that county voters approved in 2006. Fifteen percent of the fund's money goes to land buys of future parks and trails.

McMahon, of the Save Our Trails group, said members of the group plan to speak at the county supervisors meeting, tentatively set for Aug. 24.

Trail information

To submit comments to the county, e-mail parkinfo@prk.sccgov.org. For questions, call 408.355.2215. For updates on the Three Creeks Trail, visit www.sjparks.org/Trails/WillowGlenSpur/WGS.asp.

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