



STAFF REPORT – CITY COUNCIL MEETING

October 04, 2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Emily Sinkhorn, Director of Environmental Services

PREPARER: Emily Sinkhorn, Director of Environmental Services

DATE: September 25, 2023

TITLE: **Approve the Design for Margaret Lane Trailhead Improvement Project and Authorize the City Engineer to Begin the Construction.**

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Council:

- 1) Approve the design for the Margaret Lane Trailhead Improvement Project; and
- 2) Authorize the City Engineer to begin the construction.

INTRODUCTION:

City staff continue to advance Council and Committee goals for the 2023/24 fiscal year. The Forest Management Committee outlined a priority to improve access to the Sunny Brae Forest with a trail ramp adjacent to the existing staircase access on Margaret Lane. City staff met with equestrian users to understand equestrian access needs at this location and have put together a design for the improvements. The trail ramp improvements are a smaller scale project that will be completed in-house by City staff to a standard for sustainable maintenance of trails in the Arcata Community Forest.

BACKGROUND:

Improving access to the Sunny Brae Tract of the Arcata Community Forest has been a Forest Management Committee and Environmental Services Department priority for several years. The completion of the Arcata Ridge Trail in Fall 2022 marked a monumental achievement in connecting the main tract of the Arcata Community Forest with the Sunny Brae Forest Tract. The Arcata Ridge Trail now provides hikers, equestrians, and bicyclists the opportunity to traverse the Arcata Community Forest on a multi-use trail between the South Fork Janes Creek Trailhead on West End Road to Margaret Lane in Sunnybrae. Implementing a ramp adjacent to the existing stairs entrance to the forest at the Margaret Lane trailhead will greatly enhance access to the Ridge Trail for equestrians, bicyclists and mobility-challenged hikers.

DISCUSSION:

In winter of 2023 the three City Committees with a purview in line with the City's Open Space, Parks & Trails Special Tax Fund (Forest Management, Wetlands & Creeks and Parks & Recreation Committees) reviewed Council, Committee and Environmental Services Department priorities and recommended funding improvements to the Margaret Lane trailhead via the Special Tax Fund 202 in the 2023-24 fiscal year. These funding recommendations were adopted as part of the 2023-24 fiscal year budget.

City staff met with local equestrians to talk through phased options for trailhead improvements at Margaret Lane. Engineering and Environmental Services staff worked together to develop designs that would be feasible to build within the City's right-of-way and forest property and provide enhanced access for all Community Forest users.

The project plans include a trail ramp accessed south of the existing stairs access as well as a staging location for trail users off the curb, a no parking zone at the trail entrance to ensure visibility of trail users reaching Margaret Lane, and a designated pull-through parking space for equestrian trailers on Margaret Lane. Currently there is no designated equestrian access to the Sunny Brae Forest. These trailhead improvements will enhance access to the Community Forest for not only equestrians but also bicyclists who must currently carry a bicycle up the existing narrow stairs to access to trails from Margaret Lane.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

The City Council has a goal under Resident and Community Health to provide recreation opportunity for all residents. Improvements at the Margaret Lane trailhead will enable more Arcata community members to have access to the Sunny Brae Forest trails.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA):

A Notice of Exemption was filed for the Margaret Lane trailhead improvements in February 2023. The CEQA determination for this project was a Categorical Exemption under Class I Existing Facilities (CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (c)) due to the alteration/addition of a bicycle facility on an existing facility and also under Class 4 Minor Alteration to Land (CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 (c) (h)).

BUDGET/FISCAL IMPACT:

The Margaret Lane Trailhead Improvement is included in the 2023-24 fiscal year budget under Account 202-60-87-57600 and is funded via the Open Space, Parks & Trails Special Tax.

ATTACHMENTS:

A. Margaret Lane Trailhead design to Council (PDF)