



STAFF REPORT – CITY COUNCIL MEETING

February 01, 2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Emily Sinkhorn, Director of Environmental Services

PREPARER: Emily Sinkhorn, Director of Environmental Services

DATE: January 24, 2023

TITLE: **Receive an Update on the City’s Trail System and Take Action As Appropriate.**

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Council receive an overview presentation on the City’s trail system, its management and maintenance, and provide direction to staff as appropriate.

INTRODUCTION:

The City of Arcata has an extensive trail system throughout its neighborhoods and natural areas. Over the past several decades, the City has prioritized development and maintenance of these important City facilities, and these assets have put Arcata on the map as both a recreation destination and as a desirable place to live.

The City of Arcata has over 50 miles of trails which provide recreation, natural study, and non-motorized transportation opportunities throughout the City’s neighborhoods and natural areas. Within Arcata there are 7.75 miles of paved trails including the 3-mile Humboldt Bay Trail North, which, with the County’s Humboldt Bay Trail South headed for construction, will soon connect users south to Eureka. Our City also has two dozen miles of trails within the Arcata Community Forest Tract and Sunny Brae Forest Tract and nearly five miles of gravel/natural surface trails within in the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary. In addition, neighborhood connector trails, such as the new bridge over Janes Creek between the 30th Street Project and Janes Creek Meadow, connect neighborhoods and connect people to parks and natural areas for both fun, safer non-motorized transportation alternatives, and for a respite from our busy streetscapes. The City’s trail system is varied in surface type, topography, use and maintenance challenges.

BACKGROUND:

Trails offer opportunities for connection – between neighborhoods for efficient connectivity for non-motorized travel, amongst families out for stroll to their neighborhood park, and between trail users and the natural world. Trails allow for active living accessible from neighborhoods – a no-cost way to take a break from our busy lives, get exercise, and get to where we need to go safely and separated from motorized traffic.

The recreation opportunities within both the Community Forest and Arcata Marsh and Wastewater Treatment Facility also intimately connect trail users to actively managed City properties providing a deeper understanding of the multiple benefits of these facilities both for Arcata residents and wildlife habitat.

The Environmental Services Department manages the City's trail system and engages with community groups and residents to improve and steward these facilities.

DISCUSSION:

Arcata has prioritized connectivity between neighborhoods and creating a community trail system that connects residents and visitors to our public access areas. As with many public entities, the City can face some challenges in meeting expectations for maintenance and feeling of safety on our trails. Arcata's trails are maintained by Environmental Services staff and also supported by our fantastic community partners which assist the City with trail and park maintenance.

Several trail design and management parameters are essential to plan, construct and maintain safe trails including ensuring sight distance by managing vegetation along trail edges, including lighting where appropriate particularly along key commuting routes, providing connectivity to adjacent streets, placing helpful signage, ensuring access for emergency personnel and partnering with trail user groups to encourage positive use of our trails.

Following community feedback, the Environmental Services Department in the past year has prioritized outreach and signage in the Community Forest to encourage safe use of trails shared by multiple user groups.

The City strives to construct universally accessible trails wherever feasible including segments that connect playgrounds to parking and multi-use trails used for commuting and recreation. In some of the City's natural areas, such as the Community Forest and neighborhood connector trails, topography limits opportunities to meet ADA grade standards.

Fortunately the City has fantastic community partners which assist the City with impactful maintenance of our beloved trails. The City has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Humboldt Trails Council for the Volunteer Trail Stewards to lead eleven trail work days annually. The Volunteer Trail Stewards inspire much community participation, greatly reduce the City's maintenance burden along the Humboldt Bay Trail through the Marsh, as well as support stewardship and improvement of trails within the Community Forest. The Humboldt Trails Council has also worked with several local jurisdictions to purchase a flail mower that now rotates amongst jurisdictions that maintain segment of our paved, regional trail system. The City also has an MOU with the Redwood Coast Mountain Bike Association (RCMBA) which supports positive use and maintenance of mountain bike specific trails in the Community Forest and has also provided pro-bono engineering for the planned bicycle pump track at Redwood Park. The City has a long-standing partnership with Friends of the Arcata Marsh (FOAM) which supports stewardship and appreciation of the Arcata Marsh. FOAM volunteers staff the Arcata Marsh Interpretive Center providing trail information and education about the Marsh, lead organized walks, serve as roaming naturalists throughout the Marsh and maintain dogpot stations. PacOut Green Team provides volunteer opportunities for solid waste abatement and beautification and has several work days a year within Arcata. The City also has three active volunteer efforts through our Adopt a Park program which help provide on-the-ground assistance to City staff to steward parks, trails and public rights-of-way. City staff provide materials and assistance, and volunteers pick up trash, abate graffiti and host events to inspire positive use of public spaces.

Planning for future funding and partnerships for maintenance is essential when expanding the City's trail system. The Council recently provided approval for the Arcata Annie & Mary Trail

environmental document which will enable further design and outreach for this priority project to commence in spring 2023. This new 3+ mile paved trail will connect the Valley West neighborhood with an off-street transportation route to downtown and Cal Poly. Our department anticipates inviting collaboration from the Volunteer Trail Stewards or other community partners to support maintenance of this new trail segment. Sources of funding are discussed under Budget/Fiscal Implications.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

The City has planned for and assessed trail connectivity and non-motorized transportation through a number of guiding documents including the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Humboldt County Association of Government's (HCAOG) Regional Bicycle Plan, HCAOG's Humboldt County Regional Trails Master Plan, and the Forest Management Plan.

The Parks & Recreation and Circulation Elements of the General Plan outline transportation and recreational trail goals and are currently receiving review and recommendations from City Committees as part of the General Fund Update process.

The City Council has several goals which touch on trails including 1) Enhance Appearance, Public Safety and Livability of the City and 2) Support Community Creative and Cultural Life – provide recreation opportunity for all residents. Priority projects of the Council regarding trails include improvements to Carlson Park, advancing the Arcata Annie & Mary Trail and working with the Transportation Safety Committee to finalize the Local Road Safety Plan.

BUDGET/FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

Funding for City staff to steward our trails is realized through multiple City funds and overlaps with other City priorities including stewardship of our community forest and natural areas, beautification of our built environment, and realizing multiple benefits from our wastewater treatment system. Our Natural Resources (NR) crew maintains trails within the Arcata Community Forest which is supported through revenues from forest harvest operations to the City's Forest Fund. The NR crew also maintains public access trails within the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary with funding from the City's Wastewater Fund as public access within the City's natural treatment system of the Arcata Wastewater Treatment Facility has been a community and Council priority for decades. Our Parks crew maintains trail segments that connect to our City Parks including the Humboldt Bay Trail north of Samoa Boulevard. The General Fund and Solid Waste franchise fees fund Parks staff to maintain these trail segments and ensure they are free of solid waste and welcoming to trail users.

Adding any new City facility, whether a new trail segment or line of street trees in a right-of-way, does add additional maintenance priorities for City staff. Providing quality of life resources such as trails and beautification also support economic development and potential future revenue to the City.

Fortunately in November 2020 Arcata voters passed the Open Space, Parks & Trails Special Tax which assesses an annual \$37 per parcel to support acquisition, improvements and maintenance of the City's parks, trails, forest and open spaces. This additional revenue source is anticipated to bring in between \$160,000-\$170,000 per year. Utilizing recommendations from City Committees with a purview related to Open Space, Parks & Trails, the Council has so far allocated Special Tax funding to support the completion of the Arcata Ridge Trail, improvement of trailheads, stewardship of forest roads, improvements to parks, and monitoring to support stream restoration efforts. The Special Tax had tremendous community support and provides a flexible funding source to qualify for future cost share grants or address unforeseen maintenance challenges.

An additional funding source developed locally to support maintenance of our regional trails is the Humboldt Bay Trail Fund, created to support the maintenance and development of the Humboldt

Bay Trail. The Fund supports grants for volunteers providing maintenance on Bay Trail segments (including for VTS coordination supporting Arcata's Bay Trail segment) as well as funding to jurisdictions for unforeseen repair needs or to augment trail amenities.