



Staff Report

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION REGARDING THE PAPER TRAILS DRAFT WORK PLAN

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

The City Council established a priority calendar item for an assessment of Paper Streets and Pathways. This report provides information pertaining to preparation of a work plan for improvements of the pathway system. Staff is seeking direction from the City Council to continue this evaluation.

Background

Paper streets and pathways are lands of public right-of-way delineated on a subdivision map or other deed that exist on paper but have not been improved for use. Over the eighty years, the City has received numerous paper streets and paths through subdivided dedications. Some pathways have already been improved and are currently in use, but many have never been developed. The City could construct roads or pedestrian and bicycle pathways on some of these right-of-ways. Some show potential for connection to the existing network of hiking trails available to Belmont residents. Also, there are pathways that show connections between neighborhoods that could serve as scenic walkways.

Last year, staff completed an inventory of the City's pathway right-of-way dedications and mapped these pathways (Attachments A and B). There are a total of 53 pathways of which 27 may feasibly be developed for general public use. The pathways range in width from 5 to 20 feet and are a variety of lengths. Staff visited each location to make a preliminary assessment of the right-of-way condition and the practicability of improving it for public use.

Staff reported the inventory and preliminary assessment findings to Council in April 2005 with recommendation that the City further evaluate development of following potential trail segments:

1. Pathway to the top of Oak Knoll, Country Club Neighborhood (Attachments A, B, and C.1).
2. Pathway linking Hillman and Ridge Roads, Central Neighborhood (Attachments A, B, and C.2).

3. Pathways linking Paloma to O'Neill Avenue and Molitor to Sunnyslope, Sunnyslope Neighborhood (Attachments A, B, C.3 and C.4).

Council gave staff direction to proceed with the evaluation of the recommended pathway segments and to notify owners of any potential unpermitted encroachments onto undeveloped right-of-way that such must either be removed or the owner must obtain encroachment permits from the City.

Discussion

Staff identified 16 potential encroachments onto the undeveloped public right-of-way. The actual number likely far less because in most cases it is not clear which of the adjacent properties are encroaching; it is only apparent that there is not 10-foot clearance between adjacent improvements. Staff sent a letter to each adjacent property owner requesting that the encroachment be removed or that the owner provide information documenting his or her right to the use of the public right-of-way. Specifically, the letters requested that the owners provide documentation, such as a deed or title report, and/or explanation showing that the right-of-way easement does not exist or that the owner was granted permission to use this land. The rationale for this request was that most owners who financed their purchase would have title reports showing their deeds and easements. Unfortunately, the request was not productive. Staff received a single response from an attorney of one property owner requesting that the City provide its own proof of ownership of the public right-of-way and boundary survey showing its location. Staff gave this owner a temporary extension while we consider if there are other ways short of a formal boundary survey to resolve the right-of-way locations. The potential encroachments issue has not been resolved, but it will not directly affect evaluation of the three pathway segments listed above since there are no identified potential encroachments onto these segments.

Staff is seeking Council direction to continue preparing a draft work plan, with the overall goal of improving Belmont's pathway system. We believe this plan should address the following items (item number has no bearing on its priority):

1. List of pathways to be improved based on feasibility and public desire

The workplan will include the full inventory of pathway right-of-way with the preliminary screening of their potential for development. The work plan will then focus on the highest priority pathway segments listed above:

1. Pathway to the top of Oak Knoll (Attachment C.1). Though these areas are heavily wooded, overgrown and steep, they will provide a connector for those interested in traveling from Oak Knoll Drive to Arbor Avenue. Heavy clearing and grubbing and the construction of stairs would be needed to allow pedestrian access.
2. Pathway linking Hillman and Ridge Roads, Central Neighborhood (Attachment C.2) This pathway will link Hillman and Winding Way to and Ridge Road and

nearby Notre Dame Avenue.

3. Pathways Linking Paloma to O'Neill Avenue and Molitor to Sunnyslope, Sunnyslope Neighborhood (Attachment C.3 and C.4.) Construction of stairs and some clearing would allow pedestrian access to Paloma from O'Neill and from Molitor to Sunnyslope.

2. Physical location, alignment, and survey

The dedicated pathways have been mapped and the dimensions and boundary bearings are included in the inventory. The three pathways have these approximate dimensions.

Oak Knoll Path – Approximately 910 feet long including street crossings, approximate 280 foot elevation gain at average 31% grade.

- Segment 54: 120 feet long, 10 foot-wide path, (Approx. existing slope = 36%).
- Segment 57: 440 feet long, 10 foot-wide path, (Approx. existing slope = 30%).
- Segment 58: 310 feet long, 10 foot-wide path, (Approx. existing slope = 20%).

Central Path - Approximately 765 feet long including street crossing, approximate 170 foot elevation gain at average 23% grade.

- Segment 50: 520 feet long, 10 foot-wide path, (Approx. existing slope = 20%).
- Segment 51: 225 feet long, 10 foot-wide path, (Approx. existing slope = 30%).

Sunnyslope Path – 380 feet long including street crossing, approximate 80 foot elevation gain at average 32% grade.

- Segment 63: 105 feet long, 10 foot-wide path, (Approx. existing slope = 35%).
- Segment 64: 145 feet long, 20 foot-wide path, (Approx. existing slope = 30%).

Staff proposes to refine this information by developing the plan and profile of the trail segments to begin the conceptual design. Staff may augment this information with field surveys, but does not plan to contract for legal boundary survey at this time.

3. Conceptual use and restrictions (ADA compliant, bicycles, dogs, etc.)

Staff needs to determine the allowable uses and restrictions for the pathways. The physical characteristics of the pathways will play a key role for enforcing use and restrictions.

4. Conceptual physical improvements (clearing, path surfaces, structures)

Staff will inspect each pathway to determine how the pathways can be improved to accommodate foot traffic. The proposed paths are all relatively steep which will have bearing on the acceptable surface treatment and need for stairs. Feasible surface treatments (native material, decomposed granite, concrete, or asphalt) and the need for stairs and/or bridges cannot be fully evaluated until

some clearing and grubbing is completed. In addition to selecting the surface treatments, staff will consider drainage improvement since the clearing and construction which change drainage and infiltration patterns.

5. Compliance with City plans and policies and other regulatory requirements

Construction of the trail system needs to be evaluated for conformance with the City's General Plan and the City's standard planning, building, grading, and hauling conditions of approval. Staff has completed a preliminary review of the work and does not find significant conflicts with the General Plan or other City standard requirements. The circulation element of the General Plan includes the goal of providing a system of hiking and riding trails, pedestrian paths, and lanes to:

- provide recreation, particularly scenic, quiet, leisurely neighborhood walks and rides;
- furnish easy access to trails from individual properties;
- permit safe, pleasant travel among part of the community;
- connect local areas within the City to through trails and paths and regional trail and path systems; and
- create opportunities for nature and conservation education.

The Sidewalk, Trails and Pathways Policy notes that a detailed plan shall be prepared implemented for a comprehensive off-street trail and path system. The plan shall include standards for trail location, alignment and construction to achieve the following objectives:

- disturb the natural terrain and vegetation as little as possible;
- provide a variety of experiences for users;
- provide convenient, safe passage;
- minimize intrusion on privacy in residential areas; and
- encourage use without incurring excessive maintenance costs.

Construction of a trail system is a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The project will require an Initial Study with evaluation of potential biological and historical resources. If federal funding is obtained for construction, the City will also need to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Staff will need to evaluate other regulatory requirements such as access requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and permanent controls for water quality protection under the City's NPDES permit.

6. Public outreach, neighborhood acceptance, safety, and privacy issues

The work plan will outline a suggested public outreach program using City resources, media, and neighborhood associations to get the information to the public. Establishment of a public outreach effort will aid in educating, informing, and involving the local citizens. Feedback will be gathered in order to obtain an overall public opinion of the project. It is without question that this part of the project will play a large role in the overall goal.

Construction of public trails adjacent to private property has been controversial in other cities. Adjacent residents have raised concerns about loss of privacy, noise, and safety. Once a forum is established as a means of communication to the public, adjacent owner opinions and ideas will be actively solicited.

7. Cost estimates for construction and long-term maintenance

Conceptual level cost estimates of +100%/-50% will be developed in the work plan. Typical cost items include the following.

Planning

- Survey
- Environmental Studies
- Other regulatory compliance
- Geotechnical Studies
- Public Outreach

Pre-design

- Alternatives Development
- Conceptual Design
- Public Outreach

Design

- Engineering
- Landscaping

Construction

- Clearing and grubbing
- Pathway surfaces
- Landscaping/Erosion Control
- Amenities

Maintenance

- Vegetation Removal
- Resurfacing

8. Funding sources

Construction of trails is a public improvement that may be funded by private developers, City funds, and grants in the same manner that public streets are developed. Trail construction may be a project condition of approval for development provided there is nexus to the project. Construction of the public trail linking Carlmont Drive to Lake Road was recently completed by Summerhill Homes as a project condition of approval for the Cambridge subdivision project.

Construction of public trails may be eligible for funding through federal, state, and regional grants. The 2005 Federal SAFETEA-LU will provide \$286.4 billion for road, transit, trails, and related programs through September 30, 2009. SAFETEA-LU programs include:

- Transportation Enhancements (TE) – approximately half of TE funding has been allocated to pedestrian/bicycle facilities projects.
- Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program for projects investing in less-polluting alternative forms of transportation, including pedestrian/bicycling facilities and trails.

Regional grant funding sources include:

- Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC)
- Transportation Development Act (TDA) Article 3

Staff will monitor these and other funding sources and will identify to Council any that appear to be a good fit for trail construction. However, because the City is currently giving the US101 bicycling/pedestrian bridge first priority in application for these grant funds, it is not likely that the City can make use of these grants for trail construction until it completes its bridge project.

9. Opportunities for Volunteer and Community Service Groups

The City may design and construct the trails with in-house staff, or contract for services. The City may also be able to use community volunteers to assist with the construction effort.

- “*Local Volunteers*” – Belmont does not currently have a volunteer trail building organization, but the City could sponsor creation of such a group by providing training and equipment. Models for local volunteer groups include the City of Los Altos Hills Pathways Committee and the “Responsible Organized Mountain Pedalers (ROMP) who recently assisted the Parks Department by constructing trails in the Water Dog Lake open space area. Other potential volunteer organizations include youth groups from the high schools, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts.
- “*Regional Volunteers*” – Belmont may be able to take part in regional volunteer trail building and maintenance organizations such as the Trail Center, a non-profit volunteer organization formed in 1983 to provide and promote quality non-motorized trail opportunities for all people in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and San Francisco counties. The Trail Center works with government agencies, outdoor enthusiasts and other interested parties to create and manage an interconnected network of trails for the four-county region. Attachment D shows typical projects this group is undertaking this year.
- San Mateo County Sheriff Work Furlough Program – Work furlough participants can do light trail clearing and construction under the supervision of the Sheriff’s Department. Workers cannot operate construction equipment or wield power tools. The Sheriff will provide this program at minimal cost to the City.
- California Conservation Corp – The CCC will do a variety of outdoor work, including landscaping, trail building, tree planting, brush clearance, and minor construction work. Local agencies may contract with the CCC on an hourly basis or per-project basis, depending on the nature of the work. Corpsmen receive minimum wage. The sponsoring agency provides plans/specifications, materials, and any special tools needed, as well as technical supervision. The CCC provides its own vehicles and basic tool complement, along with a staff (civil service) crew supervisor.

General Plan/Vision Statement

There is no impact to the General Plan or Vision Statement from this informational report. Construction of a trail system is an explicit goal of the General Plan.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact to the City from this report. However, when the City proceeds to planning, design, and construction, there may be substantial costs with developing and maintaining trails.

Public Contact

Public contact includes posting of City Council agenda. A link to the report was sent to all Neighborhood Association Presidents.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council direct staff to continue working on the work plan for a paper trail system. Staff proposes to also present this item to the Parks and Recreation Commission before returning to Council. Staff will also continue researching what other cities are doing and will continue working on the priority and feasibility evaluation.

Alternatives

1. Refer back to staff for further information or other options
2. Take no action

Attachments

- A. Paper Streets and Pathways Spreadsheet
- B. Paper Streets and Pathways Map (24" x 36"), Council only
- C. Exhibits C.1, C.2, C.3 and C.4 showing Oak Knoll, Central, and Sunnyslope proposed paths.
- D. Trail Center – Volunteer Trail Building Projects for 2006

Respectfully submitted,

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