



Staff Report

PARTNERSHIP TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT AT WATER DOG LAKE

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

The Parks and Recreation Department is working with volunteer groups to realign the Lake Loop Trail around Waterdog Lake. The Department is providing the materials, guidance, and oversight while volunteers are providing the labor. The project is a priority calendar project included in the 2009 budget. The purpose of the realignment is to restore natural resources and provide improved recreational opportunities.

Background

Belmont is fortunate to have over 300 acres of open space mainly in the western hills including Hidden Canyon Park, Waterdog Lake, and the John Brooks Open Space. Planning efforts related to the open space areas were completed in 1990 as part of the Western Hills Area Plan, 1992 as part of the Parks and Open Space Master Plan, and in 1994 in the Report of the Belmont Ad Hoc Open Space Preservation Task Force.

In an effort to retain the natural resource values of the open space and ensure its continued recreational use the Department has partnered with volunteer groups to maintain trails and make improvements. This project is a product of that partnership.

Discussion

The City of Belmont proposes to realign the Waterdog Lake Loop Trail from its current alignment directly around the lake to a higher alignment around the lake. The purpose of the realignment is to restore natural resources and provide improved recreational opportunities.

The existing trail around the lake floods in places, requires hikers to navigate stream crossings and low branches, is not bike friendly, and is difficult to follow. Currently the west side of the Waterdog Lake Loop Trail travels through a wetland area which results in increased sediment load in Waterdog Lake. As hikers traverse the wetland area sediment is dislodged and is washed into the lake during storms. The current trail is not usable during wet winters because the water held at the dam backs up and inundates the trail. The current trail also lacks a uniform width, requires hikers to negotiate low tree crossings, and leads hikers to get lost because the trail is overgrown.

The proposed project will provide a trail that remedies these challenges and also expands the number of users that will be able to hike around the lake. The trail will be at least 15 feet above the waterline, will allow year round use, and will avoid the water quality impacts that are currently occurring from visitors walking in streams and wet soils. The trail will be wide enough for strollers and will attempt to maintain a steady grade. The existing trail along the far west end of the lake will be re-vegetated to improve the quality of the wetlands.

The project includes four small bike/pedestrian bridges with a 4' or 5' tread width and the purpose is to get users over the drainages and the spillway. Footings will be constructed of concrete on the top of banks and without disturbing the riparian zone in the drainages. Lumber for use in the bridges would be driven to the Lake via Lake Road and would be moved into place via a grip hoist system. In addition to the bridges, it appears one retaining wall will be needed along the trail to avoid cutting into a slope more than a few feet.

The Parks and Recreation Department worked with local experts to evaluate the potential for rare or threatened plants to be in the area. One plant, Western Leatherwood (*Dirca occidentalis*), is found near the trail re-alignment. Western Leatherwood is a shrub that is native to California and is listed by the California Native Plant Society as a sensitive plant species. The plant is not listed by the State or Federal government. Steps will be taken to avoid disturbing the plants found near the trail including flagging prior to trail building and avoidance. Best Management Practices will be used during construction activities and incorporated in the project design to control erosion and sediment runoff. In the event that previously undocumented cultural resources are encountered during project construction, work will cease within thirty feet of the find until a qualified archaeologist has evaluated the find and implemented appropriate treatment and disposition of the artifact(s).

The trail will be built with volunteer labor. The volunteers will mostly cut the tread by hand with shovels and rakes, and some simple retaining walls to support the loose dirt. The volunteer groups have flagged the trail and have started some poison oak clearing while the plant is dormant. California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance is currently posted for public review through San Mateo County.

General Plan/Vision Statement

Natural Beauty

- Our natural surroundings inspire us to play, create, and contemplate.
- Our actions today preserve and enhance Belmont's beauty to make it even lovelier for our grandchildren.

Fiscal Impact

The project is listed in the 2009 budget as a priority calendar project with a budget of \$40,000 that includes the materials for the trail construction. The project is funded from the Planned Park Account.

Public Contact

This project was presented before the Parks & Recreation Commission on December 3, 2008.
The project was presented before the Planning Commission on February 17, 2009.
Posting of City Council Agenda.

Recommendation

The presentation is an update and no action is required.

Alternatives

1. Refer back to staff for more information.

Attachments

- A. Excerpt from minutes from Park & Recreation meeting 12-3-08.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jack R. Crist
City Manager

**Attachment A:
Excerpt from Minutes of Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting 12-3-08**

C. “Open Space Update and Discussion

PRD Gervais said this item was placed on the agenda to open up discussion on the open space trails and start a dialogue for future planning efforts. He noted there are over 300 acres of open space in Belmont with an extensive trail system. PRD Gervais displayed a diagram showing the proposed trail and current trail around Water Dog Lake. He reported the trails groups are starting on this project and he thought more improvements could be considered on the trails. He would like to see the addition of benches and more accessible trails to accommodate all ages; particularly on the wide Lake Road trail.

C Shjeflo stated this is a big area of interest for him. He noted the new trail around Water Dog Lake is a good idea and, if possible, he would like to see it made more accessible so people of all ages could use it. He pointed out the City does not own the Lake so large improvements would probably not be appropriate. He agreed the Lake Road trail has a lot of potential for making improvements because it has the width to accommodate many users. He suggested improving trails that lead off from the end of Carlmont Canyon.

C Rafi commented his Science Class at Ralston School used the trails at Water Dog Lake. He noted it is a great area but with improvements it could be a phenomenal park. He supported making the trails more accessible for various users and installing benches.

C Sullivan expressed his appreciation for the whole open space area. He noted there are currently three areas – Water Dog Lake, John Brooks and Hidden Valley and he supported the idea of having one name for the entire open space area. C Sullivan said the area is getting more use and that improvements could make it more accessible. He thought it would be valuable to do outreach to get more people in the community involved in the efforts of improving the trails.

C Shjeflo stated he may be able to recruit Boy Scouts to assist with the trail building.

Patty Ciesla, of Passion Trail Bikes, described the improvements made this year with the volunteer trails builders. She said boy scouts or youths can assist with the trail building but adults must be with them. She noted many of the volunteers came from other Bay Area cities. She invited Commissioners to participate in the one of the upcoming work days. She stated she would like to see a trails plan completed.

PRD Gervais supported the idea of coming up with one name for the area and that could be considered in the future.”

