

1218 Willow Street
San Jose, CA 95125
December 27, 2001 (revised 1/2/02)

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City of San Jose,
50 W. San Fernando St #1100,
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cc: Councilmember Cindy Chavez, Chair
Councilmember Ken Yeager, Co-chair
Jill Escher, President, Walk San Jose
Guadalupe River Task Force Members (by email)
Lisa Killough, Dept. Dir., Santa Clara Co. Parks & Rec.

Dear Mr. Korabiak,

I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to give comments on the Guadalupe River Master Plan map. Nonetheless, I must also protest the process: this map is the result of years of citizen task-force input, and when it was finally created, the task force was allowed only one short informal session for comment (and that was during the busy Holiday season when few could attend).

Before going into the details, let me repeat several points for the record:

- The Guadalupe River Park can be a beautiful, well-enjoyed recreational amenity for downtown and the entire San Jose area, but if it is not well designed and constructed, it might instead become a monument to a missed opportunity.
- This is the Master Plan for a major park. It should be more than just what is to be funded and constructed by this particular flood-control project: it should include the vision of the fully completed park.
- As I've learned the hard way over the years, not everything that is planned gets built, but if a feature isn't shown on the map, it won't get built. People seldom read all of the accompanying text, and even when they do, they tend to disregard points that are not affirmed by a line on the map. All of the dreams and discussions over the last many years mean nothing if they aren't implemented, and they won't get implemented if they don't get put down onto paper.

The Guadalupe River Park is many things:

- a flood-control project,
- an ecological asset,
- a non-motorized, environmentally responsible transportation alternative, and
- a natural oasis in a bustling urban setting that is a recreational amenity of regional importance.

The Santa Clara Valley Water District and the U.S. Corps of Engineers are working together to assure that the flood-control objective is met.

The City is working with the environmental collaborative to preserve and enhance some of the sensitive riparian habitat. I wish that the habitat between San Fernando and Santa Clara could be preserved as well, and also that the plans could be a little more flexible in the loss and replacement of small, low-grade habitats for the overall benefit of the park.

While I am interested in the above as well, my special interest is the trail network. When a trail is well designed and continuous, it becomes well used and much appreciated, like the Los Gatos Creek Trail. A poorly designed trail on the other hand, such as the one along Freeway 87 in south San Jose, can cost as much to construct but is virtually unused and does not serve the public well. The Guadalupe River offers the visual beauty and central location that could make for a fantastic trail that would become one of the key features of the park. But if the trail is broken into numerous short sections separated by impediments to continuing, then it will just become useless pavement on ground that could have been better used otherwise.

I am not trying to make the park into a bicyclist's freeway. My goal is to recommend a design that can accommodate through cyclists, as such a design is also well suited for joggers, skaters, and those in wheelchairs and strollers. And even if one is slowly walking, a smoothly curving and ramped pathway is more enjoyable than numerous flights of stairs and abrupt angles.

I feel especially rushed and frustrated by this process. Many of us have served on the Guadalupe River Task Force for years. We have been giving our input, some of which has been incorporated, some of which has been ignored. And now, when the final plan is done, only a few of us managed to break away from the holiday rush to review the draft plans, and only I was given this opportunity to review this final draft. It's too much responsibility: there are probably many issues I have overlooked that others on the Task Force would wish to address.

Nonetheless, for what it's worth, here are my preliminary comments:

Trail Continuity:

I recognize that it's difficult to lay out a continuous trail along the Guadalupe through downtown, given the many bridges, sensitive habitats, flood-control structures, etc. Having said that, the goal is to develop a network of trails that best accommodates the needs.

Looking at the current plan with its system of paths, it is difficult to figure out which will be the easiest route for through trail traffic.

- Starting at I-280 and heading downstream, I guess the trail user would stay on the right-bank (as viewed looking downstream: the east side), and take the "low path" (the one nearer the creek, down in the creek channel) to go under Woz Way.
- Climb the stairs to the Woz Way right-bank high path.
- Go to San Carlos, descend stairs
- Cross under San Carlos, climb stairs to right-bank high path
- Go to Park Avenue, cross 4 lanes of traffic (at a signalized light?)
- Take ramp down to right-bank low-path, cross under San Fernando and Santa Clara
- Ramp up around inlet at Confluence-East, go to Historic District.
- Cross St. John at grade. Is this a quiet park pathway, or a traffic-bearing roadway?
- Go to Julian, cross this (6 lane?) expressway at grade. There had better be a signal here, but then that adds many seconds (minutes?) waiting for the light.
- Go under the railroad and under Coleman Street.
- Hairpin loop back to the north side of Coleman, cross the creek on sidewalk, and finally get to the continuous trail on the left bank in the Guadalupe River Park and Gardens area.

Stairs are inconvenient for all trail users, but they create a major barrier for bicyclist, skaters, and those in wheelchairs or strollers. There is an alternate route provided in the plans, but it too is awkward:

- From I-280, take the right-bank high path to Woz Way
- Cross the creek on the south sidewalk of Woz Way
- Hairpin turn to the left, ramp down to the creek near the inlet structure
- Hairpin turn to left-bank low path
- Under Woz, under San Carlos, under Park.
- Hairpin turn by overflow outlet structure, come up to Park Ave.
- Cross river on north sidewalk of Park
- Catch the right-bank ramp to the low-path, and continue as above.

This routing avoids the stairs, but it has three sharp hairpin turns that will force most bicyclists to dismount (especially those with kid-seats or kiddie trailer carts), and other trail users will collide with one-another as they “cut the corner”. This route also involves two additional creek crossings on the already crowded city sidewalks, and it still has several at-grade street crossings.

I fear that many trail users will be frustrated by the hairpin turns and the numerous flights of stairs, and will just dash across the several streets at grade. Even where there are signalized crossings, unless the signal timing is tuned for the trail user rather than the vehicular traffic, trail users will become frustrated by the numerous delays and will just dash across the road. I am concerned that we are not only missing an opportunity to create a great recreational amenity, but that we may be creating a safety hazard.

Specific comments and corrections

Refer to the colored bubbles on the accompanying charts. Green bubbles are typos, etc., while yellow bubbles on the chart (and **red letters** in the listing here) indicate more serious critique of the plan itself.

Page 1: I-280 to Park

A. Trail continuation arrow needed

B. This point is the northern terminus of what will soon be a long and continuous trail. At Woz Way, through trail users will have to take the right-bank low-path under Woz and then climb a flight of stairs up to the north side of Woz, OR take the right-bank high-path to the south side of Woz and cross the creek on the sidewalk to the left bank trail, OR dash straight across Woz to the top-of-bank trail on the other side. It has been my experience that trail users often will take this third alternative, even when facing 4 lanes of traffic. (I once found a well-worn trail that crossed Freeway 237 at grade: people were jogging directly across the lanes of traffic because they wanted to get across!) I feel that, for the safety of these trail users, it is best to simply accommodate them and to provide an at-grade crosswalk, as shown in magenta.

B1. This trail west from the left-bank low path: isn't this a flight of stairs?

B2. The trail lines didn't connect up to the sidewalk properly.

C. I believe there is a flight of stairs planned on the right-bank on the north side of Woz Way, but it is difficult to see them in the graphic.

D. Need a ramp up from the right-bank low-path. This has not been included in the plans because of damage to the habitat. However, the trees at this point have died and will soon fall over if not removed first. A trail through this clearing would make the right-bank undercrossing much more accessible.

E. The "Children's Bridge" is part of the trail system, and should be shaded accordingly.

F. Again, unless one is reenacting the opening scene from "Rocky", most trail users are more likely to cross four lanes of traffic at grade than to run down a flight of stairs, cross under, and then immediately climb up a corresponding flight of stairs.

F1. Thanks for coloring adjacent parklands the pale green. To be consistent with the Children's Discovery Museum and others, the building should not be colored.

Page 2: Park to Julian

G. The through trail loops across the "Park Avenue Outlet Plaza" (or crosses the creek on the sidewalk). I understand the goal of making a "river-like" pattern in the pavement, but I also think it is important to guide trail users around the loop (and also divert them so they don't fall down the flight of stairs at the north side of Park Ave.).

G1. Someday I would like to see a trail crossing in the vicinity of Park Ave., perhaps along side the roadway, or maybe even directly underneath the road bridge. There is no habitat there to preserve; such a crossing would not have to be high above the water as the water level is constrained there with the flood-control bypass channel; and such a bridge would enhance the along-the-creek trail experience. It definitely is not part of the current flood-control project, but it would be nice to include ideas for future projects.

G2. If at all possible, have a decent "radius of curvature" on the hairpin turn here, please.

G3. It sure would be nice to avoid the hairpin turns and the crowds on the Park Ave. Plaza. The bypass channel has just exited from a pipe: the width and height is well defined. It should be straightforward to have the trail climb up enough to bridge over the exiting water. (There are restrictions on trail grades set out in the ADA regulations, but I recall that the maximum grade can be higher than the average grade over short distances: this may be such a case.) Again, this wouldn't be part of the current flood-control project, but could be mentioned here so that grants can be sought for future construction.

H. San Fernando is not the busiest street in the area, so an at-grade crossing here is not terrible. However, the piers from the freeway overhead obstruct the view, so it's not the safest crossing, either. This is directly under the freeway, so there is no remaining sensitive habitat. The San Fernando bridge extends a considerable distance from its abutment: it appears straightforward to grade some of the barren ground to provide adequate headroom for an undercrossing.

Again, not part of the flood-control project; include for future grant applications and possible construction.

H1. Need some dashed lines to indicate Freeway 87 overhead.

H2. More stairs? This whole area is being torn up, regraded, and replanted: why not have a ramp (with decent radii of curvature!) to connect the high and low paths?

I. Again with the flight of stairs down, under, and a flight of stairs up: how many times do you think the trail users will put up with that? Santa Clara is a busy and dangerous street: it is important to accommodate those who would otherwise risk life and limb to dash across the roadway.

I1. It is difficult to see the right-bank north-side trail stairs and right-bank high-path trail, due to the shading of the trees.

I2. Those are stairs on the south side, right bank of Santa Clara.

J. This is the northern end of the left-bank trail, and directly across 4-6 lanes of traffic is Confluence Point. Better accommodate the trail users, as they are going to be making a mad dash for it anyway!

K. Thanks for shading in the Los Gatos Creek. Can you also indicate the planned alignment of the Los Gatos Creek Trail? (See “the Los Gatos Creek Trail Master Plan”, 1985.)

L. Better provide some means for the Los Gatos Creek Trail users to get across the street to connect to the Guadalupe River Trail.

M. The paths of Confluence Point and Arena Green are part of the trail system, and should be colored accordingly.

M1. Trail circles around an Ohlone monument.

N. Need trails to connect from the bridge to the through trails. Want to guide trail users around the green, so that they don't cut across it and damage the grass. Connect to both the near and distant trails.

O. The trail line is smudged.

P. Too much shading: can't see the full width of the roadway.

Q. This “Crossing Paths” monument will only make sense if the trails cross, which is only practical if trail users can cross St. John on a diagonal, which is only safe if St. John is primarily a bike/ped roadway with little (if any) vehicular traffic. (See “R”, next.)

R. St. John St.: It was always my intent, and I believe the intent of the Task Force, that St. John St. was to be exclusively, or at least primarily, a bike/pedestrian street. The graphic shows the width of the entire block, both street and bridge, as being narrowed. I doubt that is what is

planned, so this is probably a typo. However, there should be some indication that the road is not meant for routine vehicular traffic. There are a variety of techniques: curb off the roadway and just have a driveway access; have lines of removable bollards; mark off shoulders along the roadway for parking or plantings. Put some indication on the map, even if it's just some asterisks and a note. Given the anticipated extension of Autumn St., greatly increased traffic will cut through and use this route to bypass congestion on Coleman and Julian unless something is done to prevent it. A trail system with an at-grade crossing of a busy thoroughfare each and every block is useless and a joke, and trail users would be better off taking their chances in with the traffic of Almaden Blvd. than to face all of these mid-block crossings.

S. Yes, this is the area that the Task Force discussed adding to the park, so it is appropriate that it be shaded green (thank you!). Question: has the landowner been approached? Seventeen years ago, when I was on the Los Gatos Creek Trail task force, a consultant drew a map with a line across private property to prompt the consideration of various possibilities. The owner saw the line and rallied a hundred citizens against the plan, chanting “confiscation without compensation”, and they nearly sank the entire Master Plan!

T. This will be a very difficult at-grade crossing. Not only are there multiple lanes of traffic, but the road is practically an expressway, and much of the traffic is just exiting or entering a freeway. It will be critical that there be signalized crossings here, and it would really be nice if grade-separated crossings (both banks) could be arranged (now or in the future).

Page 3: Julian to the Guadalupe River Park and Gardens

U. Why is the Old Julian Bridge being removed? I thought there had been discussion about saving it for a trail crossing / creek overlook?

U1. Elevation contours are shown in most places, but not here. Consistency?

V. Doesn't the plan call for grade-separated crossings of the railroad, both left and right-bank?

V1. Be sure to provide adequate radius-of-curvature on this hairpin, for downstream trail users coming on Coleman from west.

V2. Autumn Street is planned to be extended across the railroad property, and this will have an impact on the park design and function. Its tentative/approximate alignment should be shown.

W. Need an “access ramp” trail to connect the right-bank trail with the south side of Coleman.

W1. The right-bank trail loops under Coleman and then hairpins back to the north side of the bridge. This trail is already built.

X. Some blue shading in the bypass channel, please, to distinguish it from trails and contour lines?

Page 4: the Guadalupe River Park and Gardens at Taylor

Y. This trail exists in the GRP&G. Perhaps some alternate trail shading?

Z. Taylor Street and a number of the nearby streets are open to traffic and are not really parkland: don't shade.

Z1. If we have say over what happens here, please include a connector trail from the north side of Taylor to the southbound trail. If such a connection is not provided, then it will soon be worn by trail-users cutting the corner, and that will be a source of erosion and sediment runoff. (If we don't have a say over what happens here, then why is this section included in the Master Plan?)

aa. The Taylor St. / Freeway 87 interchange has been designed (and nearly built). Since this interchange will have an impact on the visitor experience, I think it should be included in the graphics.

bb. Where do these trails go? Are they dead-ends?

Page 5: The Guadalupe River Park and Gardens to I-880/Airport

cc. This is a little dead-end stub of a trail that leads trail users to an unmarked 20-30' precipice. Does it serve any purpose? Is it going to connect to something someday, or provide an overlook view? It needs some sort of treatment: it shouldn't just be "where the sidewalk ends".

dd. Freeway 87 will be completed in the foreseeable future, and an interchange is planned with Interstate 880. The ramps, or at least the construction of those ramps, will have an impact on the trail. Since the plans probably have already been made, might as well include them here.

ee. Thanks for including a scale and compass. Also, thanks for indicating the "reaches" along the top of the graphic.

I wish I had more time to more thoroughly review the plans and my comments. This will be a beautiful park that will provide flood protection and a riparian habitat in the middle of an urban setting. I just hope the citizens of San Jose will enjoy using it.

Once again, thanks for the opportunity to comment on the plans and the map. Please call me (650/424-2448) if I can answer any questions.

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