

Santa Barbara County Trails Council

July 3, 2011

Ms. Valerie Olson, Chair
Goleta Valley Planning Advisory Committee
123 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Initiation Draft Goleta Valley Community Plan

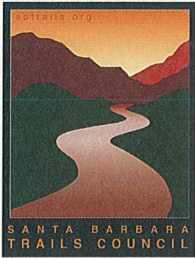
Dear Ms. Olson,

The Santa Barbara Trails Council (Trails Council) is a broad based trails advocacy group consisting of hikers, equestrians and mountain bikers. The Trails Council was formed in 1967 to advocate for planning and construction of new trails and to help organize work parties to maintain existing trails. The Trails Council Board of Directors includes members with substantial expertise in trail planning, design and construction. The Trails Council is currently involved in trails design and construction projects in the City of Goleta, on the Gaviota Coast and in both the Santa Barbara and Carpinteria foothills. One of our goals is to help provide the citizens of the Goleta Valley with a high quality urban and rural trail network. Over the last 40 years, the Trails Council has worked cooperatively with the County on planning for, improving and maintaining the County's trail system and hopes that the County will maintain its historic commitment to providing a high quality trails system.

The Trails Council would like to commend the Goleta Valley Planning Advisory Committee (GVPAC) and Planning and Development (P&D) staff for their hard work on the Initiation Draft East Goleta Community Plan. We are also thankful that some of the Trails council early comments were incorporated into this Initiation Draft Plan. We understand that many long hours of effort went into the drafting of this plan.

The Trails Council has prepared a series of comments on the initiation draft trails section of this plan as detailed in the attachment. These comments focus on three areas:

1. Include Limited Additional Background Information on Trail Issues: Community plan text and discussion provides important background information to support the plan's policy recommendations. Such text has historically been read by County staff and decision-makers in conjunction with the policies to help provide direction for policy implementation. The plan currently provides only very limited contextual background for trails. The Trails Council has suggested some modest text additions to provide basic information on trails and to help support trail acquisition and development policies. Long after the current County staff has departed the P&D and GVPAC members are no longer closely involved with such matters, such text will be critical in informing the



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public, property owners, future County staff and decision-makers over the context of the policy recommendations.

2. Proposed Trail Map Additions: The Trails Council recommends changes to the base map, depiction of additional trails and some minor corrections. Even for those very familiar with the geography of the Goleta Valley, the current map is difficult to use; labeling of basic physical features (e.g., roads, creeks) would greatly help orientation. The Trails Council also strongly recommends inclusion of both additional clearly mapped trails and trail opportunity areas as explained in the attachment.
3. Proposed Policy additions/ Amendments: The Trails Council has included in number of recommended new policies and adjustments to currently proposed policies. Although the 1995 Goleta Trails implementation Study and 1993 Community Plan addressed trail issues, after 18 years it is clear that those policies and proposals have not resulted in substantial expansion of the community's trail network. Provision of foothill trails has been particularly challenging. Therefore, the Trail council believes that a strong policy context, including both clear mandates and meaningful incentives, is essential if real progress is to be made on expanding the community's trail network.

We hope that these comments will be useful to the GVPAC, County staff and the decision-makers when considering the Initiation Draft Community Plan. The Trails Council greatly appreciates the efforts of the GVPAC and P&D staff on this issue. We look forward to working cooperatively with you all as this project advances through the process.

Sincerely,

Dan Gira, Vice President
Santa Barbara County Trails Council

- cc. Jeff Hunt, Director, Long Range Planning Division
Erika Leachman, Senior Planner
Janet Wolf, 2nd District Supervisor
Cecilia Brown, 2nd District Planning Commissioner
Brian Roney, Parks Director
Claude Garciacelay, Parks Planner

Attachment 1

Santa Barbara Trails Council Technical Comments

Initiation Draft Goleta Valley Community Plan

Existing Recreational Resources: Pages 105-106; Trails Discussion: This discussion appears to provide an initial overview of some of the trail planning issues facing Goleta. However, the subsection is identified as “Existing Recreational Resources”. We recommend that this discussion be amended as set forth further below and moved to a new “Trails Planning and Acquisition Issues”. This discussion should be replaced by brief summary of key existing trail systems along the following lines:

Existing Major Trails (Suggested Replacement Text): The eastern Goleta Valley contains a number of important existing trails. These include:

Obern Trail: This Class I bike trail with limited onroad segments and segments of parallel pedestrian paths is heavily used by cyclist, runners, pedestrian and occasional equestrians and runs for approximately 4 miles generally along Atascadero Creek connecting Modoc Road with Goleta Beach and UCSB.

Maria Ygnacia Creek Trail: This Class I bike trail receives moderate use by cyclist, runners and pedestrians and extends runs for approximately 3 miles along Maria Ygnacia Creek and connects areas north of US Hwy 101 and Hollister Avenue via an underpass with the Obern Trail.

County Campus Trail System: Approximately 3 miles of offroad hiking trails straddle the hills on both sides of Hospital Creek and provides access to steep undeveloped lands with excellent ocean and mountain views in the lower foothills.

More Mesa/ Atascadero Creek Trails System: Over 2 miles of offroad trails traverse the County’s 35 acre More Mesa Park and 20 acres of Flood Control District land along Atascadero Creek, connecting to unauthorized trails and a major coastal access point on privately owned lands on More Mesa.

Tuckers Grove: This 1.5 mile long trail traverses oak woodlands alongside San Antonio Creek in Tuckers Grove County Park. The trail connects with the Via Chaparral on and offroad trail and the San Marcos Foothills Preserve.

San Marcos Foothills Preserve: Approximately 4 miles of trails traverse the ridges, mesas and canyon headwaters of Atascadero and Cieneguitas Creeks on this 200 acre reserve.

Rational for Adding Additional Discussion: The current initiation draft plan provides almost no information on existing key trail systems. This lack of information does not provide futures users of the Community Plan with sufficient information to understand existing trail resources. The 16 year old Goleta Trails Implementation Study provides useful information, but is not readily available to readers of the Community Plan and in any case, the trail system has evolved over the last 16 years. Some contextual information will improve the usefulness of this section to future readers.

Trail Planning and Acquisition Issues (Suggested Additional Text): Hiking, biking, walking and running are very popular activities in Santa Barbara County. The eastern Goleta Valley has an excellent “backbone system” of Class I bike trails along Atascadero, Maria Ygnacia and San

Antonio Creeks and a network of urban area trails on the County Campus and More Mesa. However, the connectivity this system could be improved by linking the San Antonio Creek bike trail with the Tuckers Grove Park and the County Campus Trail System and by linking County Campus trails with those on the San Marcos Foothills Preserve. Additional major opportunities for urban trails include the expansion of the More Mesa Trail system and provision of coastal access if More Mesa is developed or acquired by the public. Should the San Marcos Hollister or South Patterson Agricultural Blocks ever be proposed for non agricultural development, these areas could also provide important urban area trail links.

The most challenging trail planning issue in the eastern Goleta Valley is how to provide a network of foothill trails such as those found in Santa Barbara or Montecito. Since the closure of the San Antonio Creek Trail in the 1980s, there are no public foothill trails to provide access through the foothills and into Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) in the entire Goleta Valley. The Slippery Rock and Fremont Trails once provided historic access, but have long since been closed. However, acquiring and developing the currently proposed alignment of the Slippery rock Trail faces major challenges related to existing private property issues. The planned San Antonio Creek Trail continues to present a major opportunity for provision of access into the foothills and to LPNF if and when properties along this proposed trail develop (e.g., 3m Ranch), and may also offer opportunities for connectivity with the San Marcos Foothills Preserve. Because of the prevalence of equestrian uses, the Maria Ygnacia Creek watershed may offer opportunity for creation of an equestrian only trail system. To address these challenges, this Plan provides for consideration of additional foothill trail opportunities (refer to Figure 25) and includes polices to exact trails where possible and provides incentives for dedication of trails.

Rational for Additional Language: The above discussion is intended to supplement or replace existing text on pages 105-106. This discussion will help frame and support the planned future trails depicted Figure 25 and the proposed policies and provide a linkage between proposed policies and Figure 25.

Proposed Changes/ Additions to Figure 25: The Trails Council request the following changes to Figure 25:

Base Map: Label major roads and physical features to provide some orientation for users (i.e., similar to Figure 24). Add and label all major creeks and to help with foothill trails planning, add a color code all lands currently owned by LPNF or the Bureau of Land Management. Label major existing parks (e.g., Tuckers Grove, San Marcos Foothills Preserve, More Mesa) and trails (as discussed above) or key to numbers in legend.

Additional Proposed Offroad Trails: Please amend Figure 25 to depict the following trails:

- Historic alignment of the Slippery Rock Trail as depicted on the County's original 1980 Parks Recreation and Trails Map. Given the difficulties facing acquisition of the currently proposed alignment and the exemption of this trail corridor from County Agricultural Element policies, the Trails Council believes it should be depicted on this map and labeled "Historic Slippery Rock Trail Alignment".
- Windy Gap Trail and Maria Ygnacia Equestrian Trails should either be shown as lines on the map, or if insufficient information is available at this stage to support such lines, depicted as opportunity areas by dotted lines around the watershed and appropriately labeled. It is important for users of this Community Plan to have a more precise idea of

where these trails may be planned for rather than rely on an undefined policy reference only as set forth in Policy PRT-EGV-5.7.

- Maria Ygnacia Creek Trail connection to Cathedral Oaks Road should be shown on the map as an important connection if or when the Christmas Tree Farm is rezoned from agriculture and approved for development.
- The potential for connectivity of trails on the San Marcos Foothills Preserve with the proposed San Antonio Creek Trail should be depicted on this figure.
- Change the Modoc Road Open Space and More Mesa Park and Flood Control Trails to “Existing Offroad Trails” where these trails currently exist.

Rational for Recommended Changes to Figure 25: Figure 25 will become the primary reference point for future users of this Community Plan, including the public, property owners, County staff and decision-makers when considering future trails planning issues. It should provide a complete easy to use base map that clearly depicts both key physical and trail features. For example, reference to a potential Maria Ygnacia Creek equestrian trail of windy gap trail are difficult to understand without showing where the creek or windy gap is and at least the concept under consideration (i.e., dotted lines around approximate location). Maps of such a previously proposed equestrian trail system in Maria Ygnacia Creek watershed may exist in County archives. Depiction of the historic Slippery Rock Trail alignment may allow its exaction as subdivisions along this alignment are proposed.

Proposed Policy Amendments/ Additions: The Trails Council recommends the following additions and changes to enhance the County ability to create a high quality urban and rural trail system in the eastern Goleta Valley:

Amend Policy PRT-EGV-5.2 as follows: The County shall foster and support the work of private community trail organizations for the planning, design, construction and maintenance of trails in the Goleta Valley. This should include facilitation of any required permits, coordination on grants, fostering trail volunteers, provision of available staff time and County equipment to assist in such projects and other efforts to provide new trails and maintain the existing system. The County may also foster creation of a Goleta Trails Foundation to fulfill this roll.

Rational for Change: Establishment of a Goleta Trails Foundation may be a worthy idea and can be pursued if and when area residents determine this is a community goal. However, trails planning should not be left just to a future foundation that may or may not be created. Because of declining County Parks Department budgets it is clear that development of new trails and maintenance of the existing system will require efforts by both the County and community organizations. Based on Tails Council experience with developing other trails projects, it is important that adopted policy recognize the important role of such community organizations and provide at least general direction on how the County will facilitate such work.

Amend Policy PRT-EGV-5.3 as follows: The County Parks Department or other groups pursuing implementation of the trails systems shall refer to Figure 25 and the text and policies of this Community Plan for guidance and direction. Additional information may also be found in the Goleta Trails implementation Study and Implementation Guidelines, the EIR on this Community Plan and the County’s PRT Maps.

Rational for Change: The Community Plan should be the primary guiding document for implementing new trails in the eastern Goleta Valley and thus the background discussion, maps and policies should be as complete as possible. The Community Plan EIR will hopefully identify

impacts, mitigation measures and other information that should be considered as part of trails planning and design. While a useful background document, the Goleta Trails Implementation Study is already 16 years old and does not address a number of the trails proposals currently under consideration or that may arise in the future.

Amend Policy PRT-EGV-5.4 as follows: The County shall consider development of trails on public lands wherever feasible. Where trail corridors cross both public and private lands, primary consideration should be given to siting the trail on public land, consistent with appropriate resource protection, sound trail design practices and provision of trail amenities such as views and natural beauty.

Rational for Change: This policy as currently proposed does not reflect the trails currently proposed on Figure 25 or those additions suggested by the Trails Council as many or most of these proposed trails cross both private and public land. The revisions are intended to maintain an emphasis on using public land where feasible and appropriate, but also note that other factors are important as well.

Amend Policy PRT-EGV-5.9 as follows:

a. The County shall review all General Plan Amendments, Rezones and Conditional Use Permits for opportunities for provision of trail corridors, connectors and trail heads and shall require easements for provision of such facilities consistent with those depicted on Figure 25 and with the intent of policies PRT-EGV-5.1, 5.7 and 5.8 and the discussion in the Trail Planning and Acquisition Opportunities section. Trail siting and design shall be coordinated with the County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Committee (CRAHTAC), the property owner and community organizations. Where appropriate and roughly proportional to the scale of the project, the County should also require such projects to fund construction of the trail and associated facilities (e.g., bridges, parking, etc.).

b. For other discretionary permits (e.g. tract maps, development plans), the County shall require dedication of new trails as depicted on Figure 25, the PRT Maps or as set forth in Policies PRT-EGV 5.7 and 5.8 and as consistent with other applicable Comprehensive Plan policies. Trail siting and design shall be coordinated with the CRAHTAC, the property owner and community organizations.

c. At the earliest feasible time in the development process (e.g., pre-application), all projects that involve existing or proposed trail corridors or present the opportunity for creation of such corridors shall be forwarded to CRAHTAC for review and comment.

Rational for Change: The County retains significantly expanded powers of exaction when considering legislative acts and conditionally permitted uses, including broad ability to require provision of trail easements and in some case trail construction. Because these powers are much broader than under standard permits such as tract maps, the Trails Council recommends separation of these types of permits to make clear that a higher standard will be applied to such actions. This policy would ensure that all such projects are reviewed for provision of public trails and related facilities consistent with the Goals and Polices of this Community Plan. As currently worded, Policy PRT-EGV-5.9 does not clearly mandate exaction of trails but appears to authorize County staff to review the appropriateness of such trails; the policy needs to be strengthened if it is to be effective in exacting trails. This policy also relies too heavily on the outdated Goleta Trails implementation Study and the PRT Maps, which don't show many opportunities that may arise with a General Plan Amendment, Rezone or Conditional Use Permit such as change from agricultural to residential or commercial zoning or the construction of a hotel or guest ranch

under a CUP which may open up trail opportunities. These changes also make clear the County's ability to require construction of these facilities as appropriate. Subsection "C" has been added to ensure that CRAHTAC, the County's official trail advisory body, is involved early on in development review in order to prioritize trail planning considerations.

Add to Policy PRT-EGV-5.9 as follows: The County should also consider provision of incentives for projects that propose dedication of critical links along foothill trail corridors , including priority processing, development impact fee discounts and where appropriate, limited increases in development where consistent with resources protection and applicable general plan policies.

Rational for Change: If creation of a foothill trail system is an important goal for the community, then provision of additional meaningful incentives to property owners may be a necessary component in creation of such a system. In particular, given the lack of available public funding for easement acquisition and the opposition of some property owners to new trails, monetary incentives such as some potential for increased development rights and a priority for permit processing could provide a key tool in actually creating a foothill trail system. As worded above, this policy opens the door to considering such incentives, but leaves the authority with the County to determine if the trail corridor is a "critical link" and also mandates consideration of resources and policy issues.

Create new Policy PRT-EGV-6.6 as follows: The County shall protect public road Rights of Way (ROW) and other public property for use for trails and trail head parking. Prior to relinquishing any ROW or public property, the property shall be reviewed for use as a trail corridor or trailhead and, if determined appropriate, its use for trail facilities protected. All such ROW that supports trailhead parking or access shall be protected from encroachment (e.g., landscaping, fences, boulders). The County shall strive to maintain public parking within such ROW with parking restrictions imposed only where necessary to protect public health, safety and welfare.

Rational for Change: The County has in the past inadvertently surrendered ROW that has historically functioned as public trails; this has occurred in Summerland, Mission Canyon, Montecito, along the Gaviota Coast and near More Mesa. Property owners near trail heads often place landscaping or boulders within public ROW to increase privacy, limit parking near their homes or petition the County to post the area for no parking. The County does not always consider the impacts of such actions on trail users. This policy would ensure that trail users receive consideration as part of any such actions.