

## Cupertino agrees to reopen controversial public pathway

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The Cupertino City Council unanimously voted on Feb. 16 to reopen a controversial neighborhood pathway leading into Blackberry Farm as part of a push to create a safer school route for students in the Monta Vista neighborhood. The pathway has been closed for the past five years.

The decision means the city will open the gate at the entrance of the public pathway leading from the Scenic Circle Court into the recreation area at Blackberry Farm, allowing public use from dawn until dusk.

Students and parents say the path provides a safer route to Kennedy Middle School and Monta Vista High School away from the narrow sections of McClellan Road and cars on Foothill and Stevens Creek boulevards. The path is among various routes that the city is looking at in the Monta Vista neighborhood as it begins addressing student pedestrian safety in the notoriously congested area.

Reopening the pathway at Scenic Circle has been controversial in the neighborhood in recent months, with some residents concerned that the secluded route will attract traffic, noise and such illegal after-hours activities as underage drinking.

The city closed the pathway five years ago after neighbors complained about rowdy behavior at the site. Before that, the city installed a gate that could be locked and unlocked by residents to help keep out troublemakers but allow children to walk to school.

"The current paths [to school] are not safe. The path through Scenic Circle is safer, and I'd like to see [the council] move ahead with it ahead as soon as possible," said resident Norm Donovan.

City staff said the hilly nature of the streets in the tri-school area promotes speeding, and many of the hairpin turns are dangerous for bicyclists. A blind "s" curve leading downhill toward the high school on McClellan has been a subject of concern.

"It was breathless how dangerous this was," said Judy Wilson, a Monta Vista parent who used to perform traffic duty along McClellan. "You truly held your breath. It is unbelievable to me that we have not had a tragedy at the bottom of this hill. I hate to sound dramatic, but I would hate to be here when a distraught parent comes in front of [the council] saying that there was a safe park [pathway] alternative where we could have our kids bike and we didn't open it."

Neighbors closest to the pathway's entrance remained opposed to reopening the gate.

"For 30 years, our Scenic Circle neighborhood has been quiet and free of traffic and been a very special place for raising our children. Now it appears things will change. I will look across the street and see parked cars instead of trees. I want to leave our neighborhood as it is," said Steve Moody, a resident near the proposed entrance.

Residents nearest to the gate are worried the new

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path could be used as an alternate entrance into the popular recreation area for people other than weekday students.

"If the gate is left open overnight, there is high probability that the nighttime disturbances of the past from drug and alcohol parties will occur. If the gate is not locked on weekends, holidays or when school is out in the summer, then our neighborhood is likely to take on the character of a congested parking lot," said Max Bokelman, who lives near the pathway.

While the public hearing brought out mostly supporters of the pathway reopening, some said the opinions of residents closest to the pathway should have the most weight.

"It's important to take into account the people on Scenic Circle because they're the people we impact the most. I think there needs to be a little extra weight given to the person who has a house in front of the gate or has a house down the street from the gate. They had a 30-year peace and quiet period that is not going to exist anymore. You're hurting them monetarily with the value of their property," said Mark Burns, who lives near Monta Vista High School.

The council said the city will work to mitigate the impact to the neighborhood by exploring parking restrictions on Scenic Circle and increasing patrols of park employees and sheriff's deputies.

Some residents said the project needs to be completed as soon as possible before a serious accident occurs. No completion date has been announced.

"Taking no action may not have a cost measure, but the ongoing harm that is done is priceless," said

resident Carol Stanek.

The new 200-foot-long trail entrance will connect to the Stevens Creek trail and begin near the old gate at the intersection of Scenic Circle and entrance of Scenic Circle Court. The pathway was the city's shortest school route option and will cost about \$180,000 for construction, materials and environmental compliance, according to city staff. An existing footbridge and path will need to be brought up to code to make them accessible to people with disabilities.

The gate is tentatively set to be open only during normal park operating hours from dawn to dusk.

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