



# Los Altos Town Crier

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## Stevens Creek Trail plan draws detractors in LA



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Photo Eliza Ridgeway/Town Crier

Representatives from Alta Planning + Designs, the Stevens Creek Task Force and Los Altos city staff explored the sunny, undeveloped stretches of land east of Highway 85 as a trail route connecting Mountain View High School to Fremont Avenue.

The Stevens Creek Trail plan drew both detailed and big-picture critiques from residents at a Los Altos City Council study session last week. Some even raised a fundamental objection to linking the city to a regional trail system. At question was a feasibility study and route recommendation that directed the path along Fremont Avenue in Los Altos.

While many in the standing-room-only crowd did not reveal their allegiances, approximately a dozen residents from the vicinity of Fremont Avenue reported concerns about the trail overall and criticized the recommended route.

The Stevens Creek Trail, intended to link the Santa Cruz Mountains to San Francisco Bay along Stevens Creek, is designed to serve bicyclists and pedestrians. Plans for the project have been developing slowly for decades.

The council hired consultant Alta Planning + Design to work with the Stevens Creek Task Force, composed of Los Altos residents, to develop a feasibility study for the Los Altos leg of the trail.

The city of Mountain View has completed 4.5 miles of a planned 6-mile stretch from Shoreline Park to Mountain View High

School. Jeannie Bruins, co-chairwoman of the city's Stevens Creek Trail task force, estimated that the Mountain View trail is expected to reach the school in 2015.

From there, the trail could theoretically pass through Los Altos, connecting with Cupertino in the vicinity of Foothill Expressway.

The 18-month feasibility study explored different routes a trail might take through Los Altos and, ultimately, recommended a route that would extend along the creek east of Highway 85 from Mountain View High School to Fremont Avenue, where it would depart from the creek to trace Fremont to Grant Road to Foothill Expressway. The study recommended two-way, 10-foot-wide multiuse paths for cyclists and pedestrians, separated from the road by a barrier.

"Yes, this is an expensive alternative, and probably more costly than some of the others," Bruins said of the estimated \$6.7 million project. But she noted that, "For the segment east of (Highway) 85, because it becomes a regional trail, it opens up to additional sources of funding we don't have access to when going down city streets."

Grant-funding proposals are a big part of the trail development process – for instance, \$85,000 in grants and \$20,000 in city funds paid for the feasibility study.

Task force member LaNae Avra said that as a resident of the area surrounded by the proposed path route, she supported it as a resource for her bike commuting. "I'd definitely welcome that (leg) of the trail as a much safer alternative."

But many of those who spoke last week questioned whether Los Altos should connect to a regional train system at all or criticized the specific route proposed.

"It's hard to support any plan in which a path runs in and out of our city," resident David Lambourne said. "Do we want this within our city? ... Any pathway provides an easy entry into our city for the criminal element."

Neighbors described Fremont as a busy street already unfriendly to pedestrians and bicyclists, and expressed doubt that a street-side trail – particularly a two-way trail, as planned – would improve safety. In particular, critics noted that the trail would traverse the crosswalks of multiple busy intersections on Fremont Avenue, and might necessitate removal of at least some of Fremont's distinctive and abundant trees.

The task force recommended an engineering study of the approved route, but council members expressed hesitation.

"People are very concerned about keeping Los Altos pretty much like it is," Councilman Lou Becker said. "I think it needs more study."

"We want to encourage bicycling on the whole Peninsula. On the other hand, do we want to become part of a bigger community?" asked Councilman Ron Packard.

At a meeting after press deadline Tuesday, the council is scheduled to consider sending Councilwoman Megan Satterlee and Mayor Val Carpenter to meet with representatives of Mountain View, Cupertino and Sunnyvale to discuss trail-route options.

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