

**County of Santa Clara**  
**Board of Supervisors**  
Supervisory District Five  
Supervisor Liz Kniss



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BOS-D5-032911-02

DATE: March 29, 2011

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: *Liz Kniss*

Liz Kniss  
Supervisor, District 5

*Mike Wasserman*

Mike Wasserman  
Supervisor, District 1

SUBJECT: Parkland Acquisition Plan 2011 Update

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Consider recommendations relating to the County of Santa Clara Parkland Acquisition Plan: 2011 Update. (Parks and Recreation Department)

- a. Accept status report relating to Parkland Acquisition Plan.
- b. Accept administration's policy recommendations based on the Board of Supervisors Study Session without change.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

The County's future parklands acquisitions should reflect a balance between trails, parks and open space, both urban and rural, and an emphasis on healthy outdoor recreation opportunities for County residents. This has been our practice historically. The Draft Update proposes that we do just that. The policy recommendations in the Draft Update should be approved without changes.

Since 1972, the Park Charter has been one of Santa Clara County's greatest success stories. In that time, the Park Charter has helped grow our County Park system from 7,134 acres to approximately 48,000 acres. In addition, the Park Charter has supported the acquisition of thousands of acres of trails, parklands and open space by cities and other agencies.

The Draft Update calls for "refinement of land acquisition criteria and recommended programs that balances urban and rural outdoor recreation needs". Throughout its history, the Parks Charter has successfully balanced urban and rural projects, a balance that we need to continue.

In our County Park system, Coyote Creek Parkway, Hellyer, Los Gatos Creek Trail, Penitencia Creek, Santa Teresa and Vasona County Parks are unquestionably urban parks. In addition, Ed Levin, Coyote-Harvey Bear, Rancho San Antonio, (Lower) Stevens Creek and Sunnyvale Baylands County Parks are located only moments from urban areas and are heavily used by urbanites.

In addition, although the Park Charter Fund is not being used to acquire our County's next urban park, Martial Cottle, the Fund will be spending at least \$20 million to develop Martial Cottle and at least \$1.5 million per year to operate it.

The Parks Charter has made possible many County partnerships with cities on city projects - over \$39 million worth. Notable urban projects include \$3 million for the Three Creeks Trail, \$14 million for San José's Guadalupe River Park, \$2 million for San José's Lake Cunningham and \$500,000 for San José's Mexican Heritage Plaza. County Parks has partnered with ten of the cities in such projects (all except Monte Sereno, Los Gatos, Saratoga, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills).

In our County's existing Trail Master Plan, urban trails are already the highest priority for acquisition and development: "criteria generally have an urban orientation, emphasizing trails in or near urban areas, that are convenient to access and appeal to a large number of

people.” Indeed, the Parks Charter has funded city trail projects that include the San Tomas/Saratoga Creek, Guadalupe River and Three Creeks Trails. Of course, the Parks Charter has also funded County urban trails such as Coyote Creek and Los Gatos Creek Trails.

An overall lack of resources for all park providers and historic decisions by cities on park priorities have caused some urban and suburban areas to be underserved. The County’s Parklands Acquisition Plan has not caused this issue. Instead, as shown above, the Parklands Acquisition Plan has led to important partnerships with cities and to significant urban parks and trails.

The Park Charter makes possible a parks planning culture in which various agencies play to each others’ strengths. The County’s strengths have been proven in supporting land acquisition and managing regional parks. Cities and regional open space entities all have their roles. Together, this team approach has worked well in this County.

We should retain the word “regional” in the definition of countywide significance. Otherwise, any park project – no matter how local – could be justified as rising to countywide significance.

The Park Charter Fund is funded by all taxpayers within the county. This argues for acquisition of parklands of regional countywide significance over those with only neighborhood significance. The current policy of supporting projects with countywide significance has earned the Parks Charter wide public support. Our residents appreciate regional acquisitions that provide recreational opportunities or preserve open space, even when the projects are not nearby.

It is important to remember that the Parks Charter Fund itself is a creation of Santa Clara County voters that has been re-affirmed by County voters six times, most recently in 2006. We will need to seek voter approval to extend the Parks Charter again. From our track record, the voters have come to expect that the Parks Charter will fund acquisition of regionally significant trails, parklands and open space.

We do not believe that the County’s role in acquiring rural open space has been completed. There are still opportunities to link and expand the County’s existing parks, and there are still critical open space parcels under threat of development. This is not the time to rule out all future open space acquisitions.

Our open space partners cannot “go it alone”. The County Parks Charter was approved by the voters in the same year as voters established the MidPeninsula Regional Open Space District. These agencies, along with POST, the Open Space Authority and other conservancies have historically worked together on acquisitions. Removing the County from the partnership would severely harm these efforts. In addition, MidPen’s capacity to fund acquisitions from its bond issuance is expected to be exhausted within two years; additional acquisition capacity by MidPen will be dependent on further voter approval.

The Santa Clara Valley Habitat Plan depends on some 8,000 acres being acquired for its reserve system by County Parks. Changes to the Draft Update would work to preclude this contribution. If the County were not to go through with the Habitat Plan, the County would likely be sued by the Wildlife Agencies, resulting in spending even more for habitat mitigation than we have agreed to in the Habitat Plan.

I believe that we should seek an “Emerald Web” of parks, trails and open spaces across the entire Santa Clara Valley. Indeed “emerald web” is the language of the Draft Update’s Priority section (chapter 5) and the map of future acquisition areas (figure 5.1) illustrates such an emerald web.

Finally, the Draft Update is consistent with the overwhelming majority of public comments received in the five community meetings sponsored by this Board.

The Draft Update focuses on a balance between trails, parks and open space, both urban and rural, and an emphasis on healthy outdoor recreation opportunities for County residents. This approach has been proven successful in our past acquisitions, has been affirmed by the electorate and has been supported by the public in our community meetings. The policy recommendations in the Draft Update deserve our support.