May 22, 2012

To: Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
From: Garnetta Annable, Spokesperson
Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space
Re: COUNTY PARKS ACQUISITION POLICIES WITHIN URBAN AREAS

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of many community leaders, elected officials, and organizations who have a long history of supporting the creation of an outstanding system of regional parks, trails, and open space lands here in Santa Clara County, we are writing in response to the Board of Supervisors’ request for public comment regarding the County’s Parks acquisition policies within urban areas.

We have heard that this subject will be agendized for Board action at its June 5th meeting. Given the great importance of the issues involved, we did not want to wait until the agenda has been posted before making our views known to you.

We are sending you our comments and recommendations now, so that you will have ample time to consider them.

PART 1: SUMMARY OF OUR COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggested Criteria for County Decision Making Regarding Urban Parks and Trails: Integrity, Effectiveness, and Vision

Although there are a number of different issues involved, we believe that ultimately there are three basic criteria that should guide the Board of Supervisors’ decision making with regard to the County’s roles in urban area parks and trails acquisition:

1. Integrity,
2. Effectiveness, and
3. Implementing the vision of an excellent countywide system of regional parks and open space lands, linked by a network of regional trails.
Summary of Our Recommendations

Our basic recommendations are as follows:

1. Reaffirm the central role of “countywide significance” in County parks and trails activities and the use of the County Parks Charter Fund

2. Within urban areas, focus the County’s limited Charter Fund resources on completing critical missing links in existing trails – including the Coyote Creek Trail, Three Creeks Trail, and the Five Wounds Trail – which will provide the greatest overall public benefits

3. Address the needs of parks-deficient urban neighborhoods with parks and trails of countywide significance

4. Enhance the County’s leadership and support for urban trails

5. Enhance coordination with cities to address urban parks needs

Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space
PART 2: SUGGESTED BASIC CRITERIA FOR DECISION MAKING

Basic Criteria for County Decision Making: Integrity, Effectiveness, and Vision

Although there are a number of different issues involved, we believe that ultimately there are three basic criteria that should guide the Board of Supervisors’ decision making with regard to the County’s roles in urban area parks and trails acquisition:

1. Integrity,
2. Effectiveness, and
3. Implementing the vision of an excellent countywide system of regional parks and open space lands, linked by a network of regional trails.

Integrity

The role and importance of integrity arises in at least two different ways

1. The Integrity of Adopted County Plans and Policies

Over the past four decades, virtually every major parks and trails plan and policy adopted by the County has affirmed and reaffirmed that the County’s role with regard to meeting the parks and recreation needs of Santa Clara County’s residents has been that of providing of parks and trails of countywide significance.

[see Attachment A: “An Introduction to the Santa Clara County Parks Charter Fund and Current Issues Regarding Its Use”]

Regional or countywide significance has been the cornerstone for County parks and trails policy in such documents as:

a. “A Plan of Regional Parks for Santa Clara County” — which was adopted as part of the County’s General Plan in 1972 and has provided the vision that has guided the implementation of the countywide parks and trails system ever since.

b. The “Parks and Recreation” chapter of the County General Plan (revised and adopted 1995) — with which proposed parkland acquisitions using the County Parks Charter Fund must be consistent, as specified in voter-approved ballot measures.

c. The “Strategic Plan for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation System” (adopted 2003) — which defines the mission of the County Parks Department, the vision it is seeking to implement, and how it will seek to implement that vision.
In addition to being a long-standing cornerstone of County parks and trails plans and policies, countywide significance has also guided the County’s actual use of the County Parks Charter Fund.

The “Acquisition History” report recently prepared by the County Parks Department concluded that of the 62 land acquisition projects within the urban area that received funding from the County Parks Charter Fund since 1990, all of them were projects of countywide significance.

So neither long-standing County policies nor actual County acquisitions over the past twenty years support the use of the Charter Fund for small neighborhood parks, lacking in countywide significance.

Every Board of Supervisors over the past twenty years has upheld the integrity of adopted County parks and trails plans and policies through their decisions regarding the use of the Charter Fund. It is important that the current Board do so also.

2. The Integrity of the County’s Obligations to the Voters

The County Parks Charter Fund – the primary source of funding for the acquisition, development, operation and maintenance of the County park system – exists because voters throughout Santa Clara County have approved its creation and extension in six separate elections over the past forty years.

Each time the Board of Supervisors has put countywide ballot measures before county voters to create or extend the County Parks Charter Fund, the ballot language has required that the Charter Fund be used only for projects that are consistent with the County General Plan.

The most recent County Parks Charter Fund extension ballot measure, approved in 2006 by 71% of the voters, included the following provision:

“The county shall not acquire real property for any park purpose until the Board of Supervisors has determined that the acquisition is in conformity with the adopted county parks and recreation element of the general plan.”

According to the County Parks Department, all of the 62 urban area parks and trails land acquisitions funded by the Charter Fund over the past 20 years have been projects of countywide significance. There is no reason, therefore, that the voters would have expected that the money they were approving for the Charter Fund would be spent for small neighborhood parks. That would be a major departure from 40 years of consistent, adopted County policy – and at least 20 years of consistent County practice.
Since it is likely that the County may seek voter approval for further extensions of the County Parks Charter Fund in future years, it is important that the County maintain the integrity of its commitment to honor the will of the voters.

Asking the voters to approve public funding for one purpose, and then using the money for something else, would be a violation of the public’s trust.

In all of the public forums and online polls conducted by the County Parks Department over the past two years, the public has repeatedly responded overwhelmingly that the completion of existing planned trails was its highest priority for County involvement within urban areas (along with protection and enhancement of riparian areas).

It would be another breach of faith with the residents of Santa Clara County if the Board were to ignore this clear direction from the public – which the Board solicited – by diverting County Parks staff and financial resources into providing small neighborhood parks within unincorporated islands – for which there was very little public support during the past two County Parks Department outreach processes conducted over the last several years.

**Effectiveness**

In addition to maintaining the integrity of adopted plans and policies and commitments to the voters, County decision making regarding the Parks Charter Fund should be guided by the goal of maximizing the effectiveness of the Fund’s use.

Although it may currently appear that there is a substantial amount of unspent money in the Charter Fund, it is insufficient to fund all of the urban trail projects of countywide significance that are currently waiting to be implemented – including several important trail projects near parks-deficient neighborhoods.

These projects, when completed, will provide not only significant recreation benefits, but also significant transportation, air quality, and climate change mitigation benefits, due to their potential to be used by large numbers of county residents, both for recreation and transportation purposes.

Diverting County staff and financial resources to create small neighborhood parks within unincorporated islands – which may entail ongoing, long term County funding – is not an effective use of the limited amount of money available in the Charter Fund.

If the County wishes to provide enhanced leadership in meeting urban parks and trails needs, it should focus its attention on urban trails projects of countywide significance that have not yet been completed. These are the projects that have the potential to provide the greatest recreation, transportation, and public health benefits and most effectively meet the needs of Santa Clara County’s current and future residents.
Implementing the Vision of a Countywide System of Regional Parks and Trails

Great parks, trails, and open space systems are often the result of big, bold visions and plans, that are implemented, piece-by-piece over a number of years, and even decades.

Such has been the case with regard to the regional parks and trails system in Santa Clara County.

Four decades ago, visionary leaders from throughout Santa Clara County came together to develop a master plan for an interconnected, countywide system of regional parks and trails, within both urban and rural areas, that would meet the long term needs of our ever-growing population.

That vision was expressed in “A Plan of Regional Parks for Santa Clara County,” which has provided the basic blueprint for the great regional parks, open space, and trails network that has evolved in this county over the intervening years – and continues to evolve.

It has been a vision that has served Santa Clara County well and has withstood the test of time.

As Santa Clara County’s population continues to grow, and as many places in Santa Clara County continue to transition from suburban toward urban, it is important that County parks and trails efforts continue to be guided by and focused on the critical elements of that big, bold vision of a regional parks and open space system, linked by a network of trails of countywide significance – in both urban and rural areas.

Now more than ever, the County needs to be focusing its attention, its leadership, and its limited resources on the “Big Picture” – by working to support and facilitate the completion of the major elements of the countywide system, and avoiding the distractions, diversions, and lost opportunities that would result from the County becoming involved with the provision of small, neighborhood parks.

PART 3: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. REAFFIRM THE CENTRAL ROLE OF “COUNTYWIDE SIGNIFICANCE” IN COUNTY PARKS AND TRAILS ACTIVITIES

The Board of Supervisors should clearly and unequivocally reaffirm long-standing County plans, policies, and practices that state that the County’s role in meeting Santa Clara County’s current and future parks and recreation needs is that of providing parks and trails of “countywide significance.”

Friends of Santa Clara County
Parks, Trails, and Open Space
For the past four decades, the County has consistently articulated the importance of countywide significance as the guiding principle for the County parks system and the County Parks Department. That principle has been reaffirmed in every major plan and policy the County has adopted regarding parks and trails — including the County’s General Plan and the County Parks Department’s Strategic Plan.

And for at least the past twenty years (the timeframe for the Parks Department’s recent analysis), every Board of Supervisors has adhered to these plans and policies through the actions it took with regard to the expenditure of funds from the County Parks Charter Fund (i.e. the parks and trails acquisitions they authorized within urban areas of Santa Clara County were only for projects of countywide significance).

There is no compelling reason that the current Board of Supervisors should now make a radical departure by abandoning or modifying these long-standing plans and policies that have been repeatedly reaffirmed by previous Boards through the plans and policies they adopted and the acquisitions they have authorized.

2. **WITHIN URBAN AREAS, FOCUS THE COUNTY’S LIMITED RESOURCES ON COMPLETING CRITICAL MISSING LINKS IN EXISTING TRAILS**

Santa Clara County’s “Plan of Regional Parks,” which was first adopted four decades ago, set forth a very bold and ambitious vision for a countywide system of parks and trails to meet the needs of Santa Clara County’s growing population.

The vision of that ambitious plan has served as the basic blueprint for countywide parks and trails acquisition and development activities ever since.

As a result, with the active involvement of the cities and other agencies, great progress has been made toward building an outstanding, interconnected system of regional parks, trails, and open space areas for current and future generations.

But, despite the significant progress that has been made over the years, much remains to be done to complete the implementation of that grand blueprint, particularly with regard to completing the missing trail links within the urban area.

Among the important urban trails with critical gaps that should be receiving priority attention by the County Parks staff are the:

- Coyote Creek Trail,
- Three Creeks Trail — that will provide a much-needed east-west connection between the Coyote Creek, Guadalupe River, and the Los Gatos Creek Trails, and
- Five Wounds Trail
In addition, now is the time the County should be working to assure that there are safe and convenient trail links to the Berryessa BART station that is currently being planned near Coyote Creek. These trails can serve both transportation and recreation purposes.

All of these urban trails have the potential not only to provide important recreational benefits for a great many people, but will also provide transportation, air quality, and greenhouse gas emission reduction benefits as well.

Parks Department staff time and/or funding spent looking for small neighborhood park sites in unincorporated areas is time that will be taken away from other important projects which have the potential to benefit far more people and provide a wider array of public benefits.

The County does not have sufficient financial or staff resources to do everything that may be requested of it. It needs to prioritize how it uses its limited funds and staff resources so that they provide the maximum public benefit.

Both of the public outreach processes conducted by the County Parks Department over the past several years have received the same feedback from the public – Give highest priority to completing the gaps in the existing urban trails system.

The Board asked the public for this feedback, now it should heed it.

3. ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF PARKS-DEFICIENT URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS WITH PARKS AND TRAILS OF COUNTYWIDE SIGNIFICANCE

Some urban neighborhoods (both in cities and unincorporated areas) are parks-deficient.

The County Parks Department has identified two unincorporated islands (unincorporated areas that have not yet chosen to annex into the surrounding city), portions of which are parks-deficient, according to the Department's analysis. The total number of parks-deficient residents within these two islands account for less than 1% of Santa Clara County's total population.

The question before the Board, if it wishes to improve access to parks and trails in these two areas, is whether it should change 40 years of consistent County policies and at least 20 years of consistent actions by Boards of Supervisors in order to do so.

Or, can recreation opportunities in those areas be improved in ways that are consistent with the policies and practices that have guided the County for the past several decades – and which will simultaneously improve recreation opportunities for many thousands of others?
We strongly believe that, for numerous reasons we have already articulated in this letter, that it is preferable to do so in ways that are consistent with existing County plans, policies, and practices.

The County’s General Plan very clearly states that:

“The provision of public regional parks and recreation facilities of countywide significance both in urban and rural areas shall be the responsibility of county government.” (Policy C-PR 15)

and

“The provision of neighborhood, community, and citywide parks and recreation facilities should be the responsibility of cities and other appropriate agencies.” (Policy C-PR 16)

And the “Strategic Plan for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation System” states that the mission of the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department is:

“to provide, protect and preserve regional parklands for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of this and future generations.”

If the County were to begin providing small neighborhood parks, it would be contrary to these and various other adopted County plans and policies.

To provide consistency between the County’s policies and its actions, these plans and policies would need to be amended to allow exceptions for the County to provide small neighborhood parks.

Going through the process of making these changes in County plans and policies would divert staff resources or funding in the County Parks Department that could otherwise be used for other, more beneficial purposes – such as working on the completion of missing links in our urban trails network (as discussed above).

It would also divert County Planning Office staff from their current work on the Health Element of the County’s General Plan.

Rather than diverting County staff resources to look for small neighborhood park sites for the County to acquire and to amend various existing plans and policies to allow for such acquisitions, it would be far preferable for the County to focus on the completion of parks and trails projects of countywide significance that are located within or near parks-deficient urban neighborhoods.

For example, several of the incomplete major urban trails of countywide significance mentioned earlier (Coyote Creek, Five Wounds, Three Creeks) are located in the general vicinity of the Alum Rock area.
Completing these trails, and connecting them into neighborhoods of East San Jose, would help to address parks deficiencies in these areas – without having to create permanent changes in longstanding County plans, policies, and practices.

Instead of diverting County Parks staff and funds into further studies and activities related to the provision of small urban parks, the County should direct the Parks Department to prepare a report on the status of implementation efforts on major urban trails of countywide significance and how their completion could help address the needs of parks-deficient urban neighborhoods.

4. ENHANCE THE COUNTY'S LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT FOR URBAN TRAILS

We have not yet seen the final recommendations that came out of the Board's Housing, Land Use, Environment, and Transportation (HLUET) Committee.

But we support the recommendations regarding this subject that were contained in the County Parks staff report to the HLUET Committee on April 12, 2012.

5. ENHANCE COORDINATION WITH CITIES TO ADDRESS URBAN PARKS NEEDS

We have not yet seen the final recommendations that came out of the Board's Housing, Land Use, Environment, and Transportation (HLUET) Committee.

But we support the recommendations regarding this subject that were contained in the County Parks staff report to the HLUET Committee on April 12, 2012 – with the proviso that the County's role in meeting urban parks needs should only involve the provision of parks and trails of countywide significance.

Attachments:

Attachment A: An Introduction to the Santa Clara County Parks Charter Fund and Current Issues Regarding Its Use
Attachment B: Basic Principles for County Parks Charter Fund Parkland Acquisitions Within Urban Areas
Attachment C: Endorsements for the Basic Principles Proposed by the Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space
PART 1: OVERVIEW

The County is Seeking Public Input Regarding the Appropriate Uses of the County Parks Charter Fund in Urban Areas

At the direction of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, the County Parks Department has been seeking public input regarding appropriate uses of the County Parks Charter Fund in urban areas.

Long-standing County Parks Policies are Threatened

The County Parks Charter Fund is the primary source of funding for the County Parks Department’s acquisition, development, maintenance, and operations activities within both rural and urban areas.

Since its initial creation by the voters forty years ago, the County Parks Charter Fund has only been used for parks and trails projects of countywide significance, that provide benefits to residents throughout Santa Clara County. The provision of neighborhood, community, and citywide parks and recreation facilities has been the responsibility of the cities, and other agencies such as local school districts.

Some members of the Board of Supervisors are seeking to change these long-standing County policies and practices to eliminate the requirement that projects funded by the Charter Fund must be of countywide significance. They would like to be able to use the Fund for small neighborhood parks within their supervisory districts.

Maintaining the Integrity of the County Parks Charter Fund and the County General Plan

The proposed changes to the County Parks Charter Fund acquisition policies would undermine the integrity of the Charter Fund by allowing it to be used for purposes the voters have never been asked to approve when extension of the Charter Fund has been put before them.

This could erode the widespread public support that the Charter Fund has had from voters over the years – and reduce the prospects for voter approval in the future. (In 2006, the Charter Fund extension received 71% approval from the voters.)

The proposed changes would also undermine the credibility of the County’s General Plan and the County Parks Department’s Strategic Plan – both of which clearly state that the County’s role in meeting the parks and recreation needs of our county’s residents is that of providing regional parks and trails that are of countywide significance.

Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space
Meeting Current and Future Countywide Needs

Santa Clara County currently has a population of around 1.8 million people. Projections from the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) indicate that our county’s population may grow by almost half a million more residents over the next twenty years.

During that same time period, we will be facing increasing challenges in responsibly managing our county’s natural resources, as climate change alters our natural environment.

In an era of limited financial resources for local governments – and for the County Parks Charter Fund – it is important that the Charter Fund’s resources be used wisely in order to maximize its benefits in meeting both current and future countywide needs in urban and rural areas.

Expenditure of funds from the Charter Fund for small, neighborhood parks that would benefit relatively few people would divert money that would otherwise be used for parks and trails of countywide significance that would benefit far more people. It would also divert money needed to meet the increasing challenges of responsibly managing our county’s diverse natural resources as climate change continues to occur.

The Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space

The Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space is an informal coalition of individuals and organizations that believes the creation of a countywide system of interconnected rural and urban parks, trails and open space areas is essential to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of Santa Clara County – for the benefit of current and future generations.

With the financial resources needed to create that countywide system rapidly shrinking during the present economic downturn, it is more important than ever that the County Parks Charter Fund be used wisely – in accordance with long-standing County policies.

And it is also more important than ever that the many organizations and individuals that support the creation of that countywide system let the Board of Supervisors know that we are united in our commitment to seeing that the Charter Fund is used only for parks and trails of countywide significance – in both urban and rural areas.

We welcome your support in that effort through your endorsement of the “Basic Principles” for the appropriate uses of the County Parks Charter Fund prepared by the Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space.

We also encourage you to make your views known to the Board of Supervisors through your own letters, emails, and calls.
Part 2: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Plan of Regional Parks

Since 1972, when the County adopted “A Plan of Regional Parks for Santa Clara County” as part of its General Plan, the County’s role in meeting the parks and recreation needs of Santa Clara County’s residents has been to provide “regional” parks that are of countywide significance, i.e. that serve the recreational and open space needs of residents from throughout the county.

The provision of neighborhood and citywide parks has been the responsibility of the fifteen cities, working with other agencies – particularly school districts, whose many school sites throughout the urban area have afforded opportunities for joint use by both students and other residents of their nearby communities.

The Plan of Regional Parks – and its division of roles and responsibilities between the County and the cities – has served as the basic blueprint for the outstanding countywide system of regional parks and trails that residents of Santa Clara County enjoy today.

County General Plan

The fundamental policies regarding the division of roles and responsibilities between the County and the cities for the provision of parks and recreation lands and facilities have been adopted or reaffirmed by prior Boards of Supervisors as part of the County’s General Plan in both of the comprehensive General Plan reviews that have occurred since the Plan of Regional Parks was adopted.

The “Parks and Recreation: Countywide Issues and Policies” section of the County’s current General Plan clearly articulates the division of roles and responsibilities between the County and the cities in the following policies:

C-PR 15: The provision of public regional parks and recreational facilities of countywide significance both in urban and rural areas shall be the responsibility of county government.

C-PR 16: The provision of neighborhood, community, and citywide parks and recreational facilities should be the responsibility of cities and other appropriate agencies.

[Note: The reference to “other appropriate agencies” in policy C-PR 16, as explained in the background text for that section of the General Plan, does not include the County]
If the Board of Supervisors were to begin providing neighborhood parks of only local significance, it would be contrary to these General Plan policies and would undermine the credibility of both the County and its General Plan.

**County Parks Charter Fund**

In order to assure a predictable, ongoing source of revenue for the County’s regional park system, the Board of Supervisors in 1972 asked County voters to approve an amendment to the County Charter – the “constitution” that provides the basic framework for the functions of County government.

That amendment, which was approved by the voters in a countywide election, established the County Parks Charter Fund which annually sets aside an assured amount of money from the County General Fund to support County parks land acquisition, development, operations, and maintenance.

The ballot measure approved by the voters assured funding for a specified number of years. In six separate elections since its initial approval, voters have overwhelmingly supported the extension of the County Parks Charter Fund.

The most recent extension approved by voters occurred in June 2006 when voters approved County “Measure B,” which extends the Charter Fund through the end of FY 2021. This extension was approved by an overwhelming 71% of the voters countywide.

The Voters Guide mailed to the homes of all registered voters prior to the June 2006 election regarding Measure B included the following “Impartial Analysis from the County Counsel”:

> “The purpose of this measure is to ensure that a minimum amount of money be placed into the County park fund for acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of County parks.”

The text of the ballot measure approved by the voters includes the following provisions:

1. “The Board of Supervisors shall appropriate the money in the county park fund for the acquisition, development, or acquisition and development of real property for county park purposes and for the maintenance and operation of county parks.”

2. “The county shall not acquire real property for any park purpose until the Board of Supervisors has determined that the acquisition is in conformity with the adopted county parks and recreation element of the general plan.” [emphasis added]
With regard to the latter provision of the ballot measure requiring consistency with the parks and recreation element of the County General Plan, it bears repeating that the General Plan states that:

C-PR 15: The provision of public regional parks and recreational facilities of countywide significance both in urban and rural areas shall be the responsibility of county government.

C-PR 16: The provision of neighborhood, community, and citywide parks and recreational facilities should be the responsibility of cities and other appropriate agencies.

Use of the County Parks Charter Fund monies for neighborhood parks – as has been proposed by some members of the Board of Supervisors – would not only violate the provisions of the County Parks Charter Fund ballot measure approved by voters, but would also violate the policies of the County General Plan.

**County Parks Strategic Plan**

In 2003, following over 2½ years of effort and community outreach, the Board of Supervisors adopted a “Strategic Plan for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation System.”

The mission of the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, as stated in the adopted Strategic Plan is:

“To provide, protect and preserve regional parklands [emphasis added] for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of this and future generations.”

The vision statement of the Strategic Plan reads as follows:

“We create a growing and diverse system of regional parks, trails, and open spaces of Countywide significance [emphasis added] that connects people with the natural environment, offers visitor experiences that renew the human spirit, and balances recreation opportunities with resource protection.

The County’s role in meeting the parks and recreation needs of Santa Clara County residents was very clearly articulated as being that of providing regional parks of countywide significance – not of duplicating the role and the efforts of the cities by providing neighborhood parks of only local significance.

Arbitrarily changing or ignoring these policies would essentially negate the “Strategic Plan for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation System” adopted by the Board of Supervisors after over 2½ years of effort and extensive community outreach.
County Parks Charter Fund Acquisition Priorities
Community Outreach Process - 2009

In June 2009, the Board of Supervisors directed the County Parks Department to undertake a review of the acquisition priorities of the County Parks Charter Fund.

The County Parks Department, together with a hired consultant, conducted an extensive review of County parks and recreation plans and policies and held five community workshops throughout the county to receive public input regarding the parks acquisition priorities for the County Parks Charter Fund.

The overwhelming feedback obtained from those public outreach sessions, reported to the Board in 2011, was that the County should continue to focus on the provision of parks and recreation areas of countywide significance - in both rural and urban areas.

Many people, from throughout the county, participated in this community outreach process. Failure of the Board of Supervisors to follow the guidance provided by the public during this outreach process will call into question the sincerity of this - and future - County efforts to obtain community input.

County Parks Charter Fund Acquisition Priorities
Community Outreach Process - 2011

Apparently not satisfied with the community input that was received from the public outreach process initiated in 2009 and concluded in 2011, the Board of Supervisors subsequently directed the County Parks Department to conduct another round of public outreach, focused on the use of the County Parks Charter Fund within urban areas.

The motion adopted by the Board at that time, although claiming to reaffirm long-standing County policies regarding the use of the Charter Fund, notably omitted the phrase “of countywide significance,” which has been the cornerstone of County parks policy for the past four decades.

By omitting that cornerstone phrase, it has opened the door to allowing the use of the Charter Fund for small, neighborhood parks which will divert resources away from meeting far greater countywide needs.

CONCLUSION

We are at a very critical juncture in Santa Clara County’s decades-long efforts to create an interconnected system of regional parks, trails, and open space lands - a system whose importance will continue to grow over time.

To meet current and future challenges, we need to continue to focus the County Parks Charter Fund expenditures exclusively on regional parks and trails of countywide significance - in both rural and urban areas.
Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR COUNTY PARKS CHARTER FUND
PARKLAND ACQUISITIONS WITHIN URBAN AREAS

About the Friends

The Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space is an informal coalition of individuals and organizations that believes that the creation of a countywide system of interconnected rural and urban parks, trails and open space areas is essential to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of Santa Clara County.

Purpose of These Basic Principles

The Basic Principles in this document were prepared in response to a request by the County Board of Supervisors for public input regarding appropriate uses of the County Parks Charter Fund for parkland acquisitions within urban areas of Santa Clara County.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR COUNTY PARKS CHARTER FUND
PARKLAND ACQUISITIONS WITHIN URBAN AREAS

The Friends of Santa Clara County Parks, Trails, and Open Space supports the following Basic Principles and urges the Board of Supervisors to adopt them as part of the County of Santa Clara Parkland Acquisition Plan.

Principle #1: Consistency with Voter Intent and with County Plans and Policies

The County Parks Charter Fund should only be used in ways that are consistent with:

a. The Charter Fund ballot language approved by the voters,
b. The County General Plan’s parks and urban development policies
c. The County Parks Department’s Strategic Plan

Principle #2: Countywide Significance

The County Parks Charter Fund should only be used for parks and trails – in rural and urban areas – that are of countywide significance.

Principle #3: Parks Deficient Areas

High priority should be considered for proposed urban parkland acquisitions of countywide significance within or near areas that are parks deficient.
BACKGROUND

The County Parks Charter Fund

The County Parks Charter Fund is the primary source of funding for the Santa Clara County Parks Department. Over the past forty years, it has been one of the major sources of funding for the expansion of Santa Clara County’s regional parks, trails, and open space system – both in rural and urban areas.

It was initially authorized by voters throughout Santa Clara County in 1972 for the purpose of acquiring, developing, operating, and maintaining lands for the County parks system. Voters have subsequently authorized the extension of the Charter Fund on six separate occasions – most recently in 2006, when its extension was approved by an overwhelming 71% of county voters.

Charter Fund Parkland Acquisitions

Historically, the County Parks Charter Fund has been used to fund acquisition of lands for parks and trails – of countywide significance – in both rural and urban areas.

The County has used the Charter Fund to work with numerous other agencies and organizations to create a growing network of regional parks and open space areas within rural areas of the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Diablo Range, and their foothills, connected by a regional trails network that includes the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

Within urban areas and along the Bayfront, the Charter Fund has been used by the County to work with the cities and others in creating a major urban trails network that includes the Bay Trail, Los Gatos Creek Trail, Coyote Creek Trail, Penitencia Creek Trail, San Tomas Aquino Creek Trail, and the Guadalupe River Park and Trail. Many of these trails provide connections to the regional parks, trails, and open space areas in the hillsides and Baylands – or are planned to do so in the future.

While much has been accomplished over the past forty years to create an outstanding countywide system of interconnected regional parks, trails, and open space areas in Santa Clara County, much remains to be done – both in rural and urban areas.

This important unfinished work includes efforts to complete the missing gaps in the countywide trail system within urban areas, through projects such as the Three Creeks and the Five Wounds Trails in San Jose, and others that will link the urban area to hillside parks, trails, and open space lands. It also involves a number of important land acquisitions and trail connections in the hillsides and mountains.

As Santa Clara County’s population, recreation, and natural resource management needs continue to grow, it is critical that:

a. The Charter Fund’s integrity is maintained – i.e. that it be used only for purposes that are consistent with what voters authorized – so that it retains widespread public support, and

b. Its limited resources are used wisely – on projects of countywide significance – to maximize their benefits for both current and future generations.

Friends of Santa Clara County
Parks, Trails, and Open Space

October 27, 2011
**ENDORSEMENTS FOR THE "BASIC PRINCIPLES" PROPOSED BY THE FRIENDS OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY PARKS, TRAILS, AND OPEN SPACE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former County Supervisors</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blanca Alvarado</td>
<td>Larry Ames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dianne McKenna</td>
<td>Garnetta Annable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Simitian</td>
<td>Eric Carruthers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie Wilson</td>
<td>Gloria Chung Hoo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committee for Green Foothills</td>
<td>Larry and Pat Coons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Stevens Creek Trail</td>
<td>Tom Ferrito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt (FROG)</td>
<td>Jim Foran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenbelt Alliance</td>
<td>Julie Hutcheson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Almaden Quicksilver County Park Association</td>
<td>Trixie Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara County League of Conservation Voters</td>
<td>Pete Kutas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrive! Morgan Hill</td>
<td>Bob Levy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kitty Monahan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vicki Moore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connie Rogers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don Weden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beth Wyman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>