

Multiuse Trail actions of the City of Sebastopol. Beginning November 18, 2014

Summary

The following summarizes the upshot from several Sebastopol City Council meetings related to multiuse trails. It tells a story of a Council that has gradually changed its position. Originally the support for multiuse trails seemed to be firmly in place. But over time, the Council's backing appears to have eroded considerably. They now seem to believe that our community would, instead, place a priority on painted bike lanes along the busy highways and roads, and other markings on residential streets. They have somehow forgotten how many Sebastopolians have come to speak for the trails

What caused this turnaround on the part of the Council? This change in perspective appears to have come from:

- » a reluctance to take on the vocal NIMBYs who balk at "their" streets being used as a trail segment
- » a belief that painted bike lanes on streets and roads, alone, will meet the communities' needs and desires.
- » misinformation about the multi-use trail proposals from staff

Consequently, the multiuse project is being eased to the back burner, with City resources being steered toward completing bike lane projects and other minor biking improvement around town. Council and staff appear to see a demand for the bike lane improvement that no one else has seen. They have somehow forgotten how many Sebastopolians have come to speak for the trails.

The City Council Timeline of Events

As of May 2016, the multiuse feasibility study is a line item in the Capital Improvement budget with zero funding. Nothing will happen until this is funded.

April 19, 2016 Council meeting to approve a \$70,000 bid to design the local street bike markings.

The bid was approved in spite of safety concerns by bike experts about the designs for several streets and questions about the need for others.

February 19, 2016 Council meeting.

Multiuse trails discussion and action originally on the Council agenda for the staff proposals requested December 1, 2015 was removed several days prior to the meeting and postponed until after the next budget cycle. A request for bids was approved for the engineering design of the local street bike markings.



Learning to love biking when young will stay with them a lifetime.

December 1, 2015 Council meeting to give bike infrastructure direction to staff.

Council kicked the multiuse trails can down the road again. Councilperson Slayter and Gurney encouraged completing all project in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan before addressing multiuse trails. The Council declined to have volunteers do outreach to community members concerned about bikers and walkers using public areas, mostly on their street. Staff was directed come up with a plan using professionals, to get price quotes, and return with a plan for addressing this issue. This is essentially the same direction given staff for trails over a year before.

August 4, 2015 Council meeting to set priorities for bike infrastructure.

While the desirability of multiuse trails across town was discussed the primary focus was on completing projects already in the City’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. Several Council comments mentioned the community’s desire “to do something about bicycling in town,” in effect equating markings on roads with multiuse trails. Postponed any decision until after the Hwy116 bike lanes grant results was known in November.

June 16, 2015 9. Public Hearing Fiscal for Year 2015/16 City of Sebastopol Budget

Three member of the public encouraged Council to support of multiuse trails. Portia Sinnott reaffirmed LITE Initiative's willingness to facilitate a neighborhood by neighborhood process to discuss multiuse trails.

HOORAY, HOORAY !!!!!at least for a few minutes.

The Council earmark \$10,000 into next years budget to be used for community outreach in behalf of the multiuse trails. But it was not long before Councilperson Sarah Gurney put a spin on the use of this money. Quote:

the funds should be used "to find out what our neighborhoods want. I am not convinced that our community is committed to this (multiuse trails) as a top priority."

Councilperson Glass and Mayor Slayter concurred!! It seems somehow these City Councilpersons overlooked that in past months the Council chambers were jam packed with trail advocates, and forty plus times community members stood before the Council to encouraging action on the multiuse trails. This is more support than there has been **for** anything at Council in the last couple of decades.

This new direction alters the purpose of the funds to determining community priority. This new goal will diffuse the original focus of community outreach, and is another deflection that will slow progress again.

Three speakers, two accomplished bikers, addressed the benefit of multiuse trails over bike lanes for the great majority of the community.

June 2, 2015 7. Public Hearing fiscal Year 2015/16 City of Sebastopol Budget 8. Public Hearing on Capitol Improvement Program (CPI) (These are two separate budgets)

It gets discouraging

The Budget Committee had \$0 in the proposed budget for multiuse trails and provided faulty logic as to why. In explaining why, Council budget committee member Robert Jacobs stated.

"In the past these feasibility studies have been funded by grants. By taking our time this can be fully funded by grants. This is how we have funded every other feasibility study in the past."

None of this is true. The only other feasibility study the City has done was for the Hwy 116 bike lane by WTrans, for \$68,000, paid from the City's own traffic impact fee fund.

Next, with less than 15 minutes of questions the Council approved the CPI budget. Somehow it included a \$200,000 a match for the Hwy 116 traffic lanes grant. This was \$100,000 more than was stated and agreed to at the April 7, 2015 approval of this grant application. At least three, a majority, on the Council were not aware of this extra \$100,000 added to the fine print when



making the CPI approval vote. Only minutes before this vote Robert Jacob, who is one of the two Council budget committee members summarized as quoted below,

“We have applied for a \$1,000,000 grant to do our current bicycle improvements. Upon approval of that grant the City will have to do a 10% match which means we will have to come up with \$100,000 matching to implement....” (June 2, 2015 Council Video #2, start 32:45)

None of the staff corrected this, and the grant was only submitted days before.

In April, when the grant application was approved Councilman Eder had this exchange with the Engineering Director about the application: (From approved minutes)

Councilmember Eder questioned if the application goes through and the City is approved, what kind of magnitude of local matching would the City be looking at. He questioned theoretically if the project was \$800,000, how much would the City have to pay in local matching funds.

Director Kelly stated the requirement is a 10 percent local match so if the project were \$800,000, it would be \$80,000. She stated the City does have these funds in the traffic fund.

Councilmember Eder questioned if the City is approved and the City has the matching local funds, would the City then proceed forward.

Councilmember Eder stated that is the goal.

None of the three Councilpersons were aware of the extra \$100,000 as late as the August 4, 2015 from Council meeting comments each made. To be clear about what happened; \$100,000 more than required for the grant was added to the Hwy 116 bike lanes grant match, by some unknown persons, without any public process, and without the knowledge of a majority of the Council voting to approve the CIP budget, two being on the budget committee, and staff members present at the Council meeting who had to know what was going on, made no attempt to correct the misperception of the Council or reveal this \$100,000 change in the CIP budget fine print, nor was any of this made clear in staff reports. The City Manager has offered no clarification as to how this can be, or who made the \$100,000 change. He was asked by email on August 18.

Why the concern? It is not so much the hidden process of allocating money. The Hwy 116 bike lanes are needed in our community, but, they are taking away City resources, taking away opportunity to have the cross town multiuse trails that will be used by many times the number of people who will use the bike lanes. Importantly, the multiuse trails depend on the good will of private property owners to develop and the loss of any one parcel can break the chain and end the possibility. The Highway will always be there, the willing property owners will not. These multiuse trails have already gone through six years of delay by the City. This extra \$100,000 is not required and is a \$100,000 that could be used to move these trails years ahead.

May 5, 2015 Public hearing to review the cost estimates for the feasibility study of the proposed trails.

After six month the multi-use trails feasibility study cost estimates was presented to the Council. The planning director's cost estimate was \$80,000 to \$100,000. With some logic, and much misinformation, the Council kicked the can down the road for a few more months. No Action Taken:

The logic was that the Council did not know where things were in the coming budget. Pay negotiations had not been completed with the Sebastopol Polices, and the outcome of County Measure A (road repair) vote was not known along with the portion going to the cities. This made sense. The tenor of most of the Council's comments on the trails was not encouraging however, and based primarily on things that did not make sense.

The misconceptions which the Council relied upon were addressed in an email to Council and staff. They included:

1) The basic qualification to apply for a grant have not been met. A universal requirement to apply for any public funding is that the project is in the agencies Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. These multiuse trails are not. But the Planning Director urged the Council to have the feasibility study **before** the adoption into the Master Plan. This does not work, and no other agency does this.

2) If qualified to apply, it is unlikely we would be awarded a grant. The grant funds available for a feasibility study are rarely given, are focused on regional connections, take years to fund, and our County's quota of funding has recently been used up for many years.

3) The Planning Director suggested that our feasibility study would duplicated the Sebastopol end of the Sebastopol/Petaluma Trail proposal, so advised waiting for that County project feasibility study results. An untrue assumption. They are different trails with different objectives, and will each be in different locations to accomplish their respective goals. The Sebastopol/Petaluma Trail will most likely swing through the Laguna on a route that connects to other planned trails, and there is no way for it to connect through town.

4) Staff failed to mention a significant source of funding. The feasibility for the Hwy116 bike **lanes** was paid for with Sebastopol traffic impact fees. Not grants as Council assumed. **Important!** This source of funds was not suggested to Council for these much more important multiuse trails across town. Staff should have made all these issue clear to Council, but did not.



Multiuse trails can be used by everyone. (Joe Rodota Trail)

Twenty speakers in support

A bright spot for multiuse trails was the number of people that spoke before the Council stressing the importance of the trails to the community and encouraging

moving ahead with the feasibility study. Twenty spoke to encourage the Council to move on this.

January 5, 2015 Council meeting to discuss the \$200,000 Traffic Impact Fee money that was not used for a match to the Hwy 116 bike lane project, as the grant was not awarded to the City. Rather than put this money back in the Impact Fee account the money was directed for use to complete all other road markings for bikes in the Master Plan, which are mostly residential streets in the town core area. This was a very large dollar commitment with little or no public input.

November 18, 2014. City Council: to discuss Complete Streets recommendations for two cross town multiuse trail proposals

Result: The trails were not accepted into the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan as recommended. The Planning Director encouraged the Council to have a feasibility study done **before** adding the trails to the Master Plan. The following motion was approved. While this was not the hoped for bold step forward, it was a step in the right direction.

City Council Action: Directed staff to return with an outline of a public process and preliminary budget to consider the study zone areas from the Joe Rodota Trailhead to south of town; from the Joe Rodota trail to the west of town; for consideration of amendments to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, including any need for initial professional consultant assistance and CEQA Analysis; and that the City Council preference would be for Class 1 when possible and other classes when Class 1 is not feasible; and that staff return this item for Council review so prior to the City budget process so that it can be included in the City Budget proposal for FY 2015-2016.

A hundred plus people came to support the adoption of these trails. The exact number is unknown as the Council chambers, halls and porch were packed, and many not being able to see or hear, left. This was the largest number of people to speak **for** an issue in decades.

Also, nineteen people spoke **against** areas of the trails alignment. The groups were opposed to the trails in areas of personal interest. (NIMBY's) These areas are all publicly owned or public easements. The objections these groups raised were questionable. The council paid attention and hesitant to take any action that seemed controversial.