

Santa Cruz pushes forward with plan for rail trail

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SANTA CRUZ — Buoyed by several hundred supporters, the Santa Cruz City Council unanimously agreed to push forward with seeking funds to build a segment of the proposed countywide Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail, beginning at Natural Bridges State Beach and ending near the Boardwalk.

The council heard more than a dozen residents, Tuesday speak favorably about a three-mile trail through Santa Cruz to run next to the railroad tracks as part of a more ambitious, complex county-wide plan.

The bigger vision by the Regional Transportation Commission of Santa Cruz County is to build a 32-mile-long rail trail from Davenport to Watsonville at a cost of approximately \$125 million.

In addition to the people who showed up at the council meeting, Mayor Hilary Bryant said hundreds of emails in support of the project have been sent to council members.

The unanimous vote allows the Public Works Depart-

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AMELIA CONLEN,
People Power

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ment to apply for a grant from the Regional Transportation Commission by Oct. 29 that would help the city design and build the trail segment, which is estimated to cost \$5.3 million.

The city would contribute 20 percent, or just more than \$1 million, to the trail's design and construction.

"This is a once-in-a-decade opportunity," Councilman Don Lane said. "This is a golden opportunity here."

Amelia Conlen of People Power told the council her organization has been raising funds from local businesses to help the city build the trail. Conlen said \$145,000 has been pledged or donated in the past week or so, including contributions from Easton Bell Sports, Santa Cruz Bikes and Kelly's Bakery.

"This is the opportunity we've been waiting for 10 years," Conlen said. "We want this trail built as soon as possible."

Supporters believe the proposed bike and pedestrian trail would increase public safety, help the environment and bring a boon to business and tourism.

UC Santa Cruz senior Emily Bonnin, who is on crutches due to a biking accident in September, said Santa Cruz is a dangerous place to ride a bike, noting she's been hit by a car twice while cycling.

The trail could improve safety, she said.

"It's not safe to bike in Santa Cruz," Bonnin said. "We need less of a sketchy traffic corridor."

Head of the California State Coastal Conservancy, Sam Schuchat, said his Oakland-based organization would consider contributing \$50,000 to the city's portion of the rail trail.

In addition, the council voted 4-2 to loosen the rules on cutting down large trees from private properties. Council members Lane and Micah Posner opposed changes to the city's tree ordinance.

The amendment allows greater leeway to cut down trees larger than 14 inches in diameter to those who can show property damage and hardship such as tree roots lifting a driveway or sidewalk.

A tree can be removed if the tree has created "excessive degradation" or brings an adverse effect on personal health such as allergies or physical mobility.

"I have a hard time believing people are going to run around cutting down trees," Councilwoman Pamela Comstock said. "I have more faith in humanity than that."

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