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East Bay Regional Park District

Trails User Working Group

Meeting Notes August 21, 2020 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. (via Zoom)

Meeting Attendees:

East Bay Regional Park District: Brian Holt, Devan Reiff, Sean Dougan, Amanda Sanders, Suzanne Wilson, Lance Brede, David Phulps, Erich Pfuehler

Moderators: Lou Hexter, Maria Mayer (MIG, Inc.)

Working Group Members: Rick Rickard, Joseph Mouzon, Luana Espana, Gary Fitts, Jess Brown, Norman La Force, Scott Bartlebaugh, Simone Nageon de Lestang, Austin McInerny, Bonnie Lewkowicz, Jim Hanson, Helen Burke, Morris Older, Mary Barnsdale, John Aaron Graves, Emily Scholz, Pam Young, Adele Ho, Linus Eukel, Sean Burke, Mimi Wilson, Jess Brown

A meeting of the Trail User Working Group was held August 21, 2020, via Zoom. Lou Hexter acted as the moderator for the meeting. The following is a summary of the items discussed. The meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m.

I. Welcome from the Park District

Brian Holt welcomed everyone to the first Trail User Working Group. The Park District is currently very busy responding to the challenges of the year, fighting wildfires within district parks, providing appropriate pandemic response all while many staff members working from home. A short overview of the Park District and Trails planning at the district was provided. The Trails User Working Group was created as a result of a Trails Workshop in October 2019 which had a resulting request from the Board Members to have a Trails Working Group to obtain perspectives from a variety of user groups. There is interest in reaching a group consensus on new trail construction issues to smooth the process of upcoming Land Use Plans. General Park District goals for Trails User Working Group include discussing how can the Park District can best improve and expand the Park District's trail network in a manner that is protective of the environment, provides a safe user experience, and meets the recreational interests of all trail users. Park District staff attending the meeting were introduced including Devan Reiff, who will be the lead for this group.

A poll was taken to see if the group agreed to recording the meeting. It was voted in favor of recording with one dissent. The meeting was recorded and links to a YouTube channel where it can be viewed by the public will be made available.

Lou Hexter of MIG was introduced as the moderator for the Working Group and welcomed the meeting attendees. Lou reviewed the objectives and agenda for this initial meeting of the Working Group.



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2. Introductions

Each of the 22 working group members provided introductions for themselves and the user group that they represent. Attendees were asked to state their name, the organization(s) they are affiliated with, what their trail interests are, and one line regarding their hopes for the Trail User Working Group. These were captured on the Mural virtual whiteboard which has been uploaded to the Group’s shared folder.

3. Discussion of the Trails Users Working Group Mission

A group discussion was held regarding the mission for the Trail Users Working Group. The initial proposed mission statement provided was “The Working Group will work directly with Park District staff to evaluate various trail interests, constraints, and conflicts that influence the planning, design, and implementation of new natural surface trails.” Discussion followed regarding if the group would be only focused on new trails, or on rerouting existing trails also. Some members said that it is important that current parks and trails are included to work on alleviating trail conflicts. Feedback was provided from the moderator that the group’s focus will be on future trails, but the group can talk about best practices from current trails, as the same sort of issues apply to future trails and rerouting trails.

A conversation took place regarding if camping along trails should be added to the group’s charge. Staff replied that all camping planning goes through different planning processes. CEQA is a challenge for opening up new trails. The Park District wants staff to easily navigate through CEQA processes to build, improve, and maintain our trails, and adding in camping as another component would make it exponentially more difficult.

Suggested language to add to the mission statement included “How can we best improve park trails without compromising the safety or enjoyment of any diverse group of trail users”. Questions arose in the discussion including information requests for how the Park District currently plans trails, and the types of issues that are taken into consideration. Also, what the definition of a natural surface trail is, and requested data points on user group percentages. **Lou Hexter** stated that the Park District will synthesize the group’s comment into a revised statement after considering the various remarks, and that discussion of the mission could be the first agenda item at the next meeting.

4. Ground Rules

Lou Hexter read through the proposed ground rules for operating the Working Group. In general, these were approved by the members. There was some discussion related to the notion of consensus in the context of this Working Group process. One suggested definition of consensus for the group was “The willingness to go along with the decision either in active support of it or in not opposing it”.

There was conversation regarding speaking to the public and the media. It was suggested that if working group members speak to the public and/or media that they will state that they are representing themselves, and not the Working Group as a whole, nor the District.

There were many suggestions for possible site visits either with the group or individually. Recommendations included McCosker property, Wildcat Gorge, Curran, Meadows Canyon trails via Lone Oak trailhead in Tilden, Roddy Ranch, Crockett Hills, Concord Hills. One member reminded the group that to be an inclusive site visit, the location needs to be usable to those with disabilities.



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5. Working Group Composition

The group discussed the Working Group composition including types of user groups currently within the group and additional groups that should be considered for participation. It was mentioned that guests can be invited to provide specific perspectives for certain topics.

People with non-mobility disabilities --, for example, people with autism or hearing impairments -- are not represented in the current group. The Alameda County Development Disabilities Council may have a contact.

It was also mentioned that a representative that has knowledge of intellectual disabilities would be positive for the group.

The need to include youth as a user group was brought up by multiple people—the suggestion was that young people should be involved, including those from underserved populations. Two programs were suggested as possibilities— Cycles of Change and Rich City Rides. There was a suggestion to include parents of young children to share their viewpoint.

Others felt a need to include a wider variety of different cultures. Suggestions included adding members who are Latino, Korean, Middle Eastern, or other unrepresented ethnicities. Brionna Noble of Mulatto Meadows who recently led a multiracial group trail ride in Anthony Chabot was suggested as a possible addition.

Professional dog walkers were proposed as distinct user group. Molly Kenefick with Doggy Lama Petcare, and Diane Livoti with Metro Dog were given as possible commercial dog walkers for addition to the working group.

Some members feel that hikers are historically underrepresented in these types of groups, and more representation of this perspective is needed.

6. Next Steps

Scheduling of the next Trail User Working Group was discussed at length. It was decided to have the next meeting in either November or December this year.

Devan Reiff mentioned that the Park District will be setting up a DropBox account for this group's use. If there are materials that the group would benefit from viewing, they can be sent to Devan Reiff (dreiff@ebparks.org) and they will be posted to the DropBox account. The Park District is also listening for questions they can help answer. Lou Hexter shared the whiteboard visuals that Maria Mayer captured during the discussion. The visual will be distributed after the meeting.

The frequency of the meetings is suggested to be approximately every three months.

Agenda items and meeting themes for the next meeting were discussed. A variety of suggestions were brought up including finalizing the mission statement, having an overview of current trail practices including positive examples of where trails are working well, topic-based meetings, and the option of having point/counter-point discussions.