

January 7, 2014

Mayor Chuck Reed and Councilmembers, City of San José
200 E. Santa Clara St.
San José, CA 95113
sent via email

re: Council Agenda 1/14/14, item 4.6: the Three Creeks Trail Pedestrian Bridge Project

Dear Mayor Reed and San José Councilmembers,

On January 14th, you will be asked to approve the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for demolishing the historic wooden train trestle in Willow Glen and for replacing it with a prefabricated steel truss. However, the IS/MND you have been sent is incomplete, and it is inappropriate for you to be asked to approve it in its current state.

The comment period for the IS/MND was publicly announced to be through the 19th of December, but Staff then took the highly unusual action of preparing and submitting their report and recommendations early, based only on the comments received through the 16th. I trust that Staff will abide by their statement that they “will issue a supplemental memo describing [the further comments] and adjust the recommendation as needed to address the comments”, because once they read all of the properly submitted comments, they will find information from a number of individuals, including a State-listed historian, describing the historic significance of the trestle. Several of these letters point out that the Initial Study only considered a historic evaluation from 2004, while around 2008 the official archives of the Town of Willow Glen, full of details about the trestle, were discovered in a warehouse. And these archives reveal a quite interesting story:

- The Willow Glen Trestle is not simply some “common design” trestle, but rather is one that was designed and built to the unique conditions of the time and place: the post-World War I shortage of materials, the financial constraints of a business just emerging from bankruptcy, and the need to quickly be able to serve the canneries that were opening in Willow Glen and across San Jose.
- The trestle was built to be strong enough to carry freight, but only if the trains were run “dead slow”. This caused traffic congestion, which led to the “grade separation” movement and the eventual incorporation of the Town of Willow Glen.



the trestle in 1955

- The trestle was built by Western Pacific, a rival to the near-monopolistic Southern Pacific Railroad. For decades, the Southern Pacific tracks ran down 4th St., right through the center of San Jose, but when their franchise expired at the turn of the last century the City began pressuring SP to relocate their tracks. The '06 Earthquake and the World War delayed matters for a while, but then the State Railroad Commission recommended that Southern Pacific loop around town by sharing the tracks with the rival Western Pacific. However, because of the unique design of the Willow Glen trestle, this was not feasible, and so Southern Pacific had to build its own crossing of the Los Gatos Creek – the bridge near San Carlos St. that is still in use today.
- It took some years for Southern Pacific to build their tracks around San Jose, and during all those years, Western Pacific was serving the canneries of the area. It was very profitable for Western Pacific – their “cash cow” – and it enabled Western Pacific to fully emerge from bankruptcy and to expand.
- By the 1930s, Western Pacific had a network of lines going from the Bay Area eastward across the Sierras, providing an alternative to the Southern Pacific monopoly. If the Willow Glen trestle were just a “common trestle”, Western Pacific would not have had the lucrative cannery business pretty much to themselves, the railroad robber-barons might have gone unchallenged, and the entire Bay Area may have developed entirely differently.

Thus, the incomplete IS/MND is inaccurate in stating in Section V that “The project will not have a significant impact on cultural resources, and therefore no mitigation is required”.

Furthermore, it is not even possible to “mitigate” the demolition of a historic structure down to “insignificant impact” by some measure such as putting up a plaque or sign. I believe your legal counsel can inform you that you, the Council, does have the prerogative to demolish historic structures by deciding that doing so is “for the better good of the community”, but also that

California State law requires that, instead of simply approving an MND, the City must do a full Environmental Impact Report to fully and fairly evaluate the alternatives.

I appreciate the desire by Staff and the City to move quickly: you have to “use or lose” some soon-expiring grants from the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) and the State of California (a Roberti-Z’Berg “Prop. 40” grant). However, the SCVWD grant was given for the *restoration* of the trestle, not its demolition, and the Prop. 40 grant was intended for land acquisition – and there now are parcels available in the area that could quickly be acquired for the benefit of the community. If these grants are used for their intended purposes, I would expect that the City would have improved success with future grant applications and also would enjoy more community support.

In light of all the recently discovered historic documentation, I urge that you do not rush to approve an incomplete Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration. On the other hand, if your intent truly is to demolish the historic Willow Glen Trestle, then publicly say so rather than hide behind misleading agenda items, and direct Staff to prepare a proper Environmental Impact Report as required by California State law.

Saving this truly historic structure and adapting it to serve as the connection between the Los Gatos Creek Trail and the Three Creeks Trail would be a benefit to the entire community. The trestle can be restored, preserved, and maintained for less than the cost of the replacement bridge – the City-commissioned engineering report gives all the details on how.

San José is a historic city – the first civilian town in the State of California and its first Capitol: let’s preserve what history that we can. Please, help save this reminder of our colorful past, and transform this historic trestle from a hidden gem into an iconic gateway to Willow Glen and a showpiece for all of San Jose.

Thank you,

Dr. Larry Ames,

past member, Los Gatos Creek Streamside Park Committee
and a friend of the Willow Glen Trestle: Larry@WGTrestle.org

cc: California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW): Dave Johnston
Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB): Brian Wines
US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE): Cameron Johnson
the National Marine Fisheries Service (MNFS): Darren Howe, Gary Stern
San José Planning Director Joe Horwedel; Dept. Dir. Laurel Prevetti, John Davidson
San José Public Works: David Sykes, Jennifer Maguire

San José City Manager: Ed Shikada

San José Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services (PRNS):

Director Julie Edmonds-Mares, Deputy Director Matt Cano, trails Yves Zsutty

San José Transportation Dept.: Director Hans Larsen, bikes John Brazil

Santa Clara Supervisor Cindy Chavez

State Senator Jim Beall

the Community: District 6 Neighborhood Leaders Group (D6NLG)

Creek & Trail Advocates: Save Our Trails; Friends of the Willow Glen Trestle;

Friends of the Los Gatos Creek; Citizens for a Livable San José (CalSJ)

SCVWD: Boardmember Barbara Keegan; staff Sarah Young, Sue Tippetts

Engineers: CH2M-Hill: Program Manager David Von Rueden; SJ State: Jim Ammon

Environmental: Shani Kleinhaus (Audubon Society); Richard McMurtry; Terri Balandra;

Alice Kaufman & Jeff Segall (Committee for Green Foothills); Trish Mulvey

Historians: Jean Dresden and Marv Bamburg (Willow Glen), Brian Grayson (PAC*SJ),

Steve Cohen, Marcus Salomon and Franklin Maggi (SJ), Susan Blake (Campbell),

April Halberstadt (County), Wayne Donaldson (State)

Legal: Susan Brandt-Hawley, CEQA

Media: Barbara Marshman, Carol Rosen, Janice Rombeck, Mary Gottschalk