CITY OF
SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

Memorandum

TO: Rules Committee

FROM: Councilmember Pierluigi Oliverio

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: May 9, 2013

Approved: _____   Date: 5-9-13

RECOMMENDATION:

Schedule a study session to discuss the Three Creeks Trestle Bridge. The study session will have potential outcome to direct public works and parks department to select an alternative engineering firm to do additional analysis of the existing trestle structure located within the Three Creeks Trail.

BACKGROUND:

Individuals in the community have raised alternative viewpoints after the city council voted unanimously and discussed this item on March 26, 2013 and April 9, 2013. These alternative viewpoints should be backed up by an engineering study to safeguard against cost overruns and liability to the city.

The structure itself is not a historic landmark, yet there continues to be a sense of nostalgia for some individuals including myself. Back in 2007, when advocating for the purchase of this land for the trail I stated that, "this parcel also includes a beautiful trestle bridge that goes over a creek. Making the bridge safe for pedestrians and bicycles is the first priority." It has always been the first priority since the bridge is the only way to connect the Three Creeks Trail and Los Gatos Creek Trail.

Further due diligence could delay connecting the two trails from September 2014 to September 2015. A delay could jeopardize some or all of the $1.67 million in grants for this project. Any loss of grant funding would reduce the amount available for improvements to this trail, including the bridge and/or the future Del Monte Park.

The council should consider a second opinion if a validated scenario exists to preserve the existing structure at a lower cost than previously detailed. The outcome would be a seismically safe structure with no potential liability for the city.

City Council has supported the building of a new bridge based on an engineering study, Public Works/PRNS evaluation of the engineering documentation, and their subsequent recommendation. Further support for the staff recommendation was provided by Save Our Trails, the advocacy group for the trail. The engineering study stated a new bridge would be the following: substantially less prone to fire, would not impede the creek, would have lower maintenance costs in personnel and ongoing repairs, and would last an additional 25-35 years.

The same engineering study has raised questions that the scoring matrix has mathematical errors and the integrity of the engineering firm has been called into question.

There are challenges to preserving the existing structure due to the lack of maintenance by Union Pacific and the various fires over the years which led to further decay of the wood. There could be a potentially less expensive way to preserve the existing structure and there is only one chance to get it right.

Total cost is important since money spent on preserving the wood structure could end up in smoke if there is a fire again. Another fire could result in disconnecting the two trails for a year, (assuming funds are available for repair or replacement of the bridge after a fire). Homeless encampments have been in this immediate area for decades and thus bring the risk of fire.

The additional review should include all wood beams be tested by boring/drilling rather than visual inspection with random sampling. More accurate testing will safeguard against cost overruns that could occur if rehabilitation is chosen. This will allow Council to make a final decision with both eyes open. Additional review should also include the consequences of removing creosote timbers from the creek and any environmental damage to the area if the creosote timbers caught fire.

Prior to the second council vote, I asked my colleagues if they would be interested in a holding study session to examine this topic in depth, however at that time there was no interest for further discussion. The Council may now wish to reconsider having this discussion brought back for a further detailed review allowing for another opportunity for public input.