



Santa Clara County
COUNTYWIDE TRAILS MASTER PLAN
Update

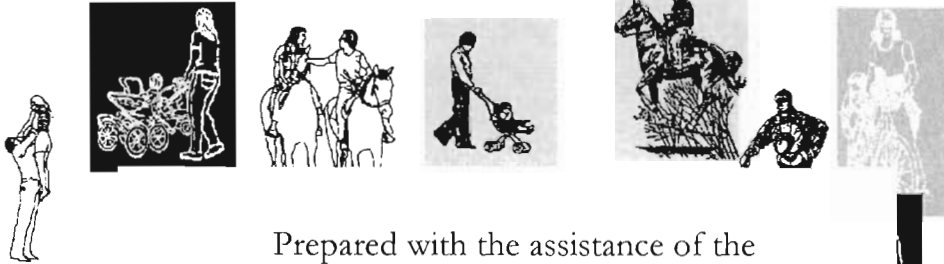


Final Report
Santa Clara County Trails Plan Advisory Committee

Adopted November 14, 1995
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors



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COUNTYWIDE TRAILS MASTER PLAN
 Update



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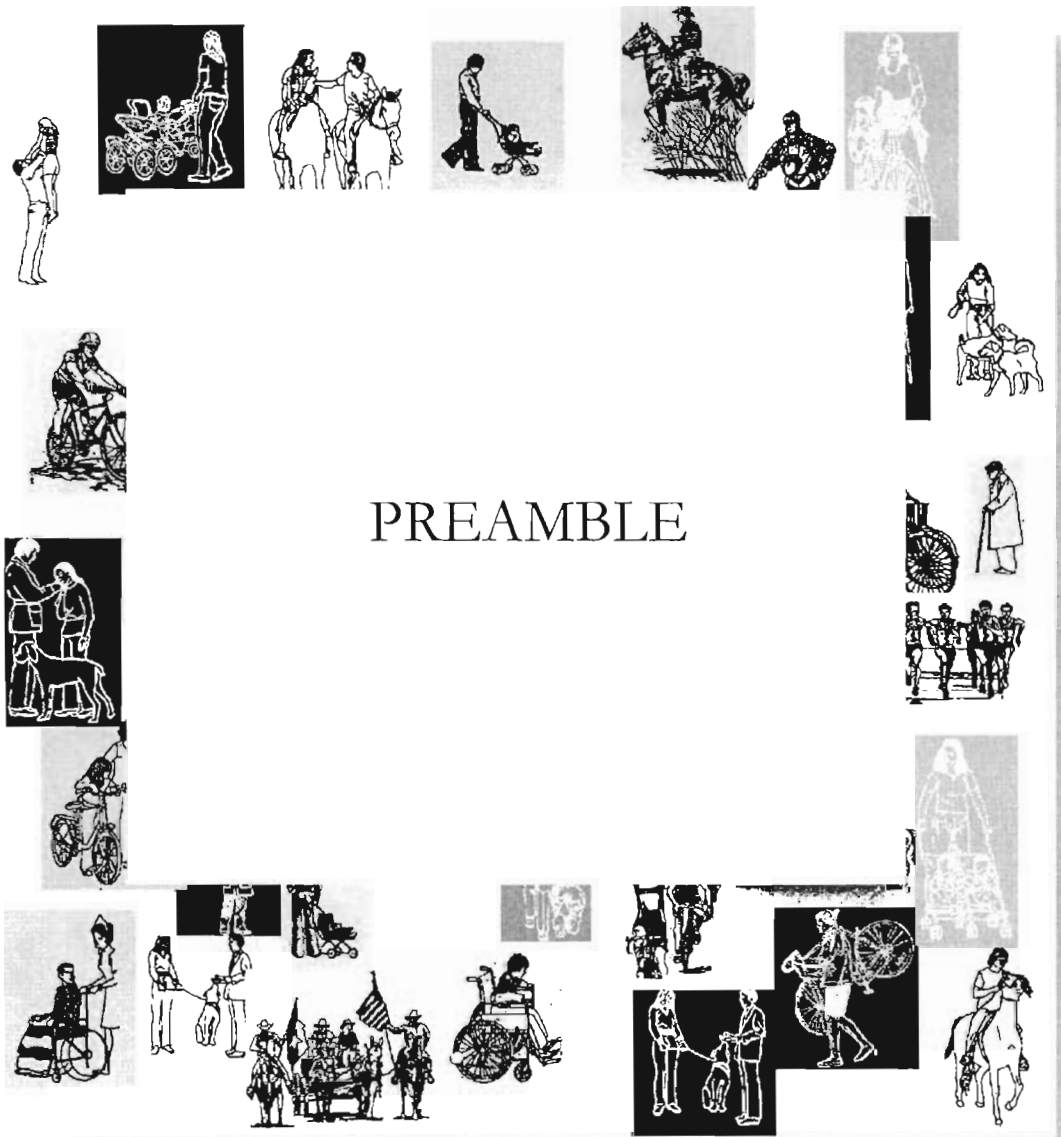
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PREAMBLE

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**PREAMBLE: THE SPIRIT OF THE COUNTYWIDE TRAILS MASTER PLAN
UPDATE**

The spirit of the 1995 Countywide Trails Master Plan Update is one of cooperation and respect for divergent viewpoints. A collective goal of the plan update is that this plan will direct the County's trail implementation efforts well into the twenty-first century with a balanced regard for the public good and individual desires for privacy.

The Trails Master Plan Update affects a trails route map and policies for a countywide system that has been part of the County's General Plan since 1980. This update, and the Advisory Committee of citizens that authored it, embodies a spirit of collaboration.

For this plan to realize the County's vision of providing a network of trails that connects cities to one another, connects cities to the County's regional open space resources, connects County parks to County parks, and connects the northern and southern urbanized regions of the County, the plan identifies a contiguous trail system. To accomplish this objective, planned trails necessarily traverse lands in both public and private ownership. With an eye toward accommodating the burgeoning need for trail opportunities for a rapidly growing and urbanizing population, this plan's policies clearly recognize that a significant portion of the proposed trail system passes through, along, or close to private lands.

The intent of the plan's policies, therefore, is to direct the County as it incrementally implements the plan while adhering to these five beliefs:

- to build a realistic trail system that effectively meets the needs of County residents;
- to respect private property rights through due process in the detail planning and design of trails;
- to provide responsible trail management; inform the trail user that the idea of "shared-use" includes respecting adjacent land uses;
- to accept responsibility for any liability arising from the public's use of County trails; and
- to implement trails involving private property only when the landowner is a willing participant in the process.

By following these beliefs while implementing the trails section of the General Plan, the County will, over time, build an effective system of trails that gains momentum as it grows and also build trust in government.

It is the Trails Plan Advisory Committee's hope that their hard work and dedicated two-year effort in updating the Countywide Trails Master Plan is not an exercise in futility. When followed, this plan and its policies will ensure the way the master plan is used will balance the public good with private property rights. When followed, this plan also provides multiple benefits - physical and mental health, recreation, relaxation, transportation, education - to all the future generations of Santa Clara County residents.

Achieving such goals requires ongoing support and mutual cooperation from all sides: agencies, landowners, and communities. Respect for others must be the rule of the trail. This respect must permeate all aspects of trails planning, from its inception as part of the General Plan, through the acquisition of land, through the design and construction process, and all the way through operations, maintenance, and use.

IMPLEMENTING THE COUNTYWIDE TRAILS MASTER PLAN AND LIMITATIONS ON THE USE OF EMINENT DOMAIN

For trails to be acquired by the County of Santa Clara, the power of eminent domain shall only be used in accordance with the policies of the Board of Supervisors as contained in the Eminent Domain Element of the Acquisition Policy, Parks and Open Space adopted on April 24, 1990 (see also Appendix F). For trails, the use of eminent domain would only apply:

- whenever the action would serve the convenience and mutual interests of both a consenting seller and the County.
- to acquire trails and trail easements only in non-rural areas located within city boundaries, including unincorporated areas within those boundaries, and any areas bordering the San Francisco Bay.

WHAT THIS PLAN IS -- AND WHAT THIS PLAN IS NOT

A goal of the Trails Plan Advisory Committee was to find middleground. This was done through a dedicated process that required trust among Committee members and trust in the process itself. The resulting trails policies are generally more lengthy and more detailed than those found elsewhere in the Santa Clara County General Plan with regard to any one specific topic.

The result of the Committee's cooperation and trust is a Santa Clara County Trails Master Plan Update that is:

- A General Plan guide that modifies the trail routes identified in 1980. Some routes have been added, some eliminated, and some altered.
- A reasoned identification of trail routes that minimizes, where possible, reliance on private lands. Use of public lands and rights-of way is emphasized.
- A trail system composed of routes that are of countywide significance. Planned trail routes support the recreation, transportation, health and welfare, and science education goals of the County.
- A pattern of trails for the future with priorities for the present. Priority trails reflect the needs of an urban population desiring convenience in accessing a trail system.
- An elaboration of trail policies that respects the need for due process, notification, and ongoing cooperation where private land is involved. Trail policies recognize that any public trail planned on or near private land involves unique considerations and may require special planning and management.
- A plan that represents a give-and-take among conflicting interests where trust in government has traditionally not been strong. Policies that mandate rules and procedures for trail implementation are provided to assure that, when followed over time, trust builds between the people and their government.

However, the result is also a Santa Clara County Trails Master Plan Update that is not:

- A detailed plan of trail alignments that have been personally walked and approved by all involved.

This level of analysis logically occurs sometime after a General Plan has been approved and should include individual property owners and local communities as appropriate. Policies within the plan so dictate.

- An acquisition plan.

Piecing together a countywide trail network one small segment at a time is a difficult, time-consuming, and fragile process. Failure to obtain a few critical links in a proposed trail can disrupt the continuity of the trail and thus delay, and possibly even prevent, its eventual completion. The fragility of this piecemeal

process makes it all the more critical that opportunities be met as they arise, for they may not arise again for many years, if ever.

- A randomly drawn set of lines on a map that encompasses the entire county.
Carefully considered criteria were called upon by the Committee to assure that proposed trails were not routed capriciously, but only where needed, useful, and with minimum impact.
- A comprehensive map and set of guidelines for all the recreational trails in the County's parks and open space reserves or for trails within an individual City's jurisdiction.

This plan does not mandate that jurisdictions other than the County government are required to follow the policies and guidelines that follow. This plan represents a coordinated, backbone system of trails and policies about implementing them that link the County's resources with its populace and the populace to one another.

- Everyone's dream plan.

Many individual comments were heard by the Committee for more trails, more connections, and more trail opportunities within the variety of landscapes of the County. Many individual comments were heard by the Committee that trails are not needed, that trails should be planned only in cities in urban areas, and that public trails are not compatible with rural land uses. The policies, trail routes, and priorities contained in this plan strike a balance between these conflicting viewpoints.