



City of San Antonio

Legislation Details (With Text)

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| | | In control: | Public Safety Committee |
| On agenda: | 6/3/2015 | | |
| Title: | A Briefing and Possible Action on a Request from District 8 Councilmember Ron Nirenberg to to direct City staff to Develop a Strategy for Bolstering Safety and Security throughout the Howard W. Peak Greenway Trails System. [Xavier Urrutia, Director of Parks and Recreation Department & Anthony Trevino, Interim Chief of Police] | | |
| Sponsors: | | | |
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DEPARTMENT: Police

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Anthony L. Treviño, Jr. and Xavier Urrutia

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUMMARY:

On February 18, 2015, Councilman Ron Nirenberg issued a Council Consideration Request (CCR) to direct City staff to develop a strategy for bolstering safety and security throughout the Howard W. Peak Greenway Trails System (Trails System) with input and guidance from the Parks and Recreation Department and Linear Creekway Advisory Board. The request includes consideration of a security camera system, additional staff and/or Trail Watch Program resources, emergency blue light devices, and an intensive public education campaign.

BACKGROUND:

The Trail System is a growing network of multi-use hike and bike trails that wind through natural landscapes along San Antonio creeks. There are currently 47 miles of developed greenway trails open to the public, and an additional 39 miles of paved, multi-use trails are planned on Salado, Leon, and Medina River Creeks and other San Antonio waterways through various sales tax propositions. The CCR authored by Councilmember Nirenberg and signed by Council members Treviño, Saldaña, Krier, and Lopez cited the Trails System as a quality-of-life issue and requests a proactive strategy for safety as a way to protect and sustain the investment in the linear creekway parkland.

Uniform Park Police patrol the Trail System (developed and undeveloped) by bike, All Terrain Vehicles and vehicle patrol at the trailheads, seven days a week, from 6:00A.M. to 10:00PM. Occasionally, covert officers patrol the trailhead parking lots to deter and provide surveillance in an effort to build cases against suspects in

vehicle burglaries. Park Police have mounted game cameras at Valero, Fox, Bamberger, Buddy Caulk, Lady Bird Johnson, and W.W. McAllister Park trailheads. Cameras are reviewed periodically based on criminal activity. Surveillance is reviewed for possible suspects and Park Police Officers work with SAPD Property Crime Detectives to build cases for arrest warrants.

The Parks Department implemented a Trail Steward Program in spring 2013 and launched a Trail Watch Volunteer Program in June 2014. Collectively, these programs have been beneficial in increasing visibility on the greenway trails and promoting a safe environment throughout the Trails System. Both programs assist with identifying greenway maintenance needs while serving an overall observe and report function directly to Park Police. The programs are managed in tandem for maximum service delivery to engage and educate the public on park rules, proper trail usage and etiquette, and provide safety tips and assistance such as the distribution of trail maps and emergency water.

Trail Stewards are non-law enforcement staff who traverse the four primary creeks which comprise the Trails System seven days a week at various times with a focus during non-peak public use with the goal to include greenway tributaries as those trails are constructed. Trail Watch Volunteers occupy the Trails System at various dates and times and to date there are nearly sixty (60) participants enrolled with a goal of seventy-five (75) by the end of Fiscal Year 2015. Both Trail Stewards and Trail Watch Volunteers are easily identifiable with a standard uniform and go through an orientation provided by Park Police and volunteers must also pass a background check. Since the Trail Watch Volunteer Program launch, volunteers have dedicated over 1,300 hours of service and activity is updated on a monthly basis.

Research on Emergency Call Box systems used by other cities and used previously within the City of San Antonio Park System had revealed mixed results. While their use in Woodlawn Lake and Espada Parks was ultimately abandoned due to vandalism and prank calls, other entities have reported some positive results, creating a sense of safety among people they serve. While personal cellular phones will continue to be the primary tool used by people in need of assistance, Park Police and Parks and Recreation staff recommend use of emergency call boxes in remote areas where cell phone coverage and trailhead access are limited.

Park Police also recommend expanding a layer of surveillance security utilizing a camera system that would record activity at all trailhead parking lots 24 hours a day. This infrastructure improvement will be incorporated into all future trailhead development as a standard feature.

Parks and Recreation staff have recently made strides toward ensuring the continued safety of trail users by selective thinning of vegetation to increase visibility and working with ITSD to implement a 911-locator signage system that trail users can reference when describing their location to 911 operators in an emergency. Parks staff have also implemented a trail safety public education campaign starting in 2014, with the tag line “Play it Safe”. The campaign, communicated through media, events and printed materials, offers helpful tips, such as traveling with a partner, not using earbuds and being aware of one’s surroundings. Parks staff recommends continuation of this campaign and added outreach efforts in 2015 to emphasize the campaign’s messages regarding trail safety.

Other Park Police recommendations include the installation of vehicle burglary warning signage at all trailhead parking locations, the use of undercover police officers, researching if supplemental trailhead lighting is needed, and expanding coordination between Park Police and the SAPD Auto Theft Section. Current and future staffing levels will also be reviewed during the summer.

To adequately fund an effective package of trail safety enhancements, Council recently approved the use of \$100,000 of Proposition Two (2010) funding for park security along the Greenway Trail system, as part of the

FY15 mid-year budget adjustments. These funds were received to be utilized for the implementation of recommendations endorsed by the Public Safety Committee.

A meeting was held on May 26, 2015 in which members of the Parks Board, Linear Creekway Parks Advisory Board (LCPAB) and the public were asked to give input on the proposed trail safety enhancements. Those who attended voiced their support for the staff's recommendations and the LCPAB endorsed the measures.

RECOMMENDATION:

In conclusion, SAPD and the Parks Department are in support of implementing additional measures and resources to bolster Linear Creekway safety, including the following actions:

- Expand the use of “game” cameras to all greenway trailhead parking locations
- Expand public education by renewing “Play it Safe” campaign and installing vehicle burglary warning signage at all trailhead parking locations
- Install emergency call boxes in remote areas
- Continue Trail Steward and Trail Watch Volunteer Programs
- Continuation of 911-locator system and greenway vegetation management for trail user visibility
- Continue the use of Park Police, including undercover police officers
- Expand coordination between Park Police and the SAPD Auto Theft Section
- Research the need for supplemental trailhead lighting and make adjustments or additions where appropriate