

The Bear Creek Greenway Trail Corridor and Ashland's Trails Master Plan

For the past several months APRC and city staff, park commissioners and an experienced group of citizen volunteers have been diligently working on Ashland's Trails Master Plan update. Last April, Commissioner Jim Lewis wrote a column for the Park Views that highlighted the process we are following and the work that is being done to update the plan. This month, I would like to highlight one chapter of this plan and describe some changes that are taking place that will emphasize why APRC would regularly need to update the plan. The Bear Creek Greenway trail, or more correctly the expansion of the trail, is today's focus.

The Bear Creek Greenway trail is a paved, 10-foot wide bike and pedestrian transportation asset for our valley. Thousands of citizens use the Greenway trail each month for commuting, recreation or just for fun. Anyone that uses the Ashland Dog Park probably knows that the parking lot for the park is the current southern terminus for the Greenway trail. From the Dog Park you can go north 20 miles along Bear Creek through natural wooded riparian vegetation with many open views. The trail winds its way from Ashland through Talent, Phoenix and Medford and ends north of the Jackson County Expo at Dean Creek in Central Point. The current 20 miles of greenway trail has been a 40-year work-in-progress. The Greenway is made possible by a collaborative effort of five city governments, Jackson County and the Bear Creek Greenway Foundation Board. If you have not used the greenway for a while you should check it out.

Recently an older city planning action, a transportation plan decision and a new property purchase by APRC have energized the plans for expanding the Bear Creek Greenway through Ashland. The current goal is to extend the Greenway trail from the Dog Park through to North Mountain Park (NMP). As you know, NMP is home to multiple ballfields, natural and open spaces, playgrounds and the North Mountain Park Nature Center.

The building of the Verde Village housing development has rerouted a short section of the Greenway trail. The new section works its way around the neighborhood from the Dog Park and up Ashland Creek to Nevada Street. The Nevada Street Bridge crossing over Bear Creek (as covered in the news this past year) would have benefited the Greenway trail as a way to bridge the creek and connect to Kestrel Park on the opposite side of Bear Creek. This connection is currently in a holding pattern and we will have to wait for a future decision to determine if that route is a possible option.

What happened recently was a land purchase, by APRC, of an 11-acre parcel along Bear Creek between Oak Street and North Mountain Avenue. This property provides creek access and a potential trail connection with the Riverwalk open space, which connects out to North Mountain Avenue across from the North Mountain Park Nature Center.

Trail connections can be a slow process. Working with property owners to buy land and secure easements takes time and patience. Sometimes it takes years and even decades to connect the all the dots, but the long-term benefit to the community is usually worth the wait. Urban trails connect neighborhoods. To be able to walk or bike from one neighborhood to the next reduces

motor vehicle traffic, which reduces pollution and conserves resources, which in turn leads to healthier lifestyles in our community.

The citizens of Ashland should be proud of their trail system. Whether you use the Bear Creek Greenway, the Ashland Central Bike Path, a ditch trail, a Lithia Park trail or any of the hiking trails in the forest interface, walking or riding a trail makes for a healthy recreational experience.

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