

From: Jeanne Sparks <jeanne.sparks@icloud.com>
Subject: May 17 BOS Agenda Item #7, Letter in support of the Santa Maria River Levee Trail extension
Date: May 16, 2022 at 10:10:00 AM PDT
To: sbcob@countyofsb.org
Cc: dwilliams@countyofsb.org, ghart@countyofsb.org, jhartmann@countyofsb.org, bob.nelson@countyofsb.org, steve.lavagnino@countyofsb.org

May 16, 2022

Dear Chair Hartmann and Supervisors Williams, Hart, Nelson and Lavagnino:

I am submitting my guest commentary that was published in the Santa Maria Times on May 14, 2022. I hope you will consider the history behind the opening of the 2002 segment of Santa Maria levee trail, originally called the Santa Maria–Guadalupe Bike Trail, and the need to complete the trail 20 years later.

I urge you to approve completion of the trail on the levee from Santa Maria to Guadalupe as it was envisioned more than 30 years ago when it was placed into the County's Circulation Element.

Now is the time to complete the trail that will provide an exceptional recreational asset to the Santa Maria Valley, a feature that will come to define the valley, a resource people will remember when thinking about the beauty of the valley.

Your decision on Tuesday will shape the look and feel of the Santa Maria Valley for decades to come. I urge you to complete the trail.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Sparks

Associate Director, Santa Barbara County Action Network

Former Fifth District Executive Assistant from 1991 to 2003

Guest Commentary by Jeanne Sparks published in the Santa Maria Times on May 14, 2022

“Tell supervisors to expand Santa Maria River levee trail to Guadalupe”

It's a travesty that we don't have a trail on the levee from Santa Maria to Guadalupe when it had been proposed more than 30 years ago, but it's not too late.

I was working in the Fifth District Supervisor's Office in 1992 when the City of Santa Maria proposed moving forward with a plan to establish a levee bikeway that was in the county regional plan. It would take coordination between the county and the city since the county owned and maintained the levee and the city would provide access to the public.

The county's Flood Control District worried about liability, but that issue eventually was resolved.

What was not resolved was the opposition from farmers who feared crops would be spoiled since farm fields are next to the levee, and they believed having a trail on the levee would attract people and dogs to romp in their fields.

However, their argument does not hold water. People and dogs can already access their fields. And many bikeways and walkways already run beside farm fields in the Santa Maria Valley because farm fields are ubiquitous in our valley.

Farmers say a better alternative would be to put a bikeway next to Highway 166, but that road runs between farm fields. How are those fields different from fields next to the levee?

Highway 166 is unsafe and unpleasant for pedestrians and cyclists from the heavy, noisy trucks that regularly travel that road. It does not have the serenity and beauty of the riverbed.

The lack of safe trails and bikeways in the Santa Maria Valley is an injustice to the people who live here, the majority of whom are people of color. County supervisors, especially those who represent this area, should be pushing for this levee trail to be extended to Guadalupe just as Supervisor Tom Urbanske pushed for the initial segment of the trail to be created.

That segment, from Suey Crossing Road to North Blosser Road, was opened on Jan. 11, 2002, after years of efforts by the Fifth District Office and the City. Urbanske and I hoped that the trail would eventually be extended after the first segment was opened and it grew in popularity.

We are at that point now. There is a large constituency of county residents who would like the trail to be opened.

On Tuesday, May 17, the Board of Supervisors will consider whether to extend the trail to Guadalupe. Supervisors will decide whether to create a wonderful recreational and transportation asset for the residents of the north county or whether they will cave to pressure from powerful agricultural interests.

It's a sad fact that lower-income residents of the north county, many of whom are farmworkers, have fewer recreational opportunities than wealthier south county residents. For example, Santa Barbara has over 130 miles across 52 trails while residents of Santa Maria have a mere eight miles of trails in two areas.

North county supervisors have often lamented that the north county doesn't get its fair share. Here is an opportunity for north county supervisors to provide some greatly needed recreational opportunities for their constituents and for south county supervisors to stand up for environmental justice.

Will they do it?

I hope so. Maybe if enough people speak up on Tuesday at the Board of Supervisors hearing or send letters to the board by Monday, supervisors will do the right thing. It is item number seven and is expected to come up at 3 p.m.

Go to countyofsb.org or sbcn.org for details on how to make your voice heard.

I hope you will help make this opportunity a reality.

Jeanne Sparks is the associate director of Santa Barbara County Action Network. She served as the Fifth District executive assistant from 1991 to 2003.