JUNE 2023 VOLUME 53 NUMBER 6

ECO-LOGIC

The Official Newsletter of the Tri-City Ecology Center



SHOULD THE PICKERING GATE BE OPENED FOR VARGAS PLATEAU ACCESS?

By William Yragui – Mission Peak Conservancy

EBRPD acquired 1,000 acres at Vargas Plateau in Fremont around 1995, and Abel Vargas sold the property to the district at a discount and in so doing donated over $1 million of appraised value to the Park District. The district acquired another 200 acres at the Rose Ranch on Morrison Canyon Road in 2010. The district has invested nearly $7 million to develop Vargas as the newest Regional Park in Fremont.

Two residents of Morrison Canyon and Vargas Roads filed a 2008 lawsuit predicated on unsafe roads. By the late 2010s, hundreds of daily cut-through commuters took Morrison Canyon Road to bypass afternoon traffic jams on I680 N, but this endangered pedestrians and bicyclists on the road. Soon after the park opened in 2017, the city of Fremont held hearings on how to improve safety and facilitate park access. The city attorney and public works director determined that Morrison Canyon road could not safely carry two-way traffic and in 2018 they converted the road to a bike/pedestrian trail. The city council voted to make the trail permanent on December 1, 2020.

Residents near Canyon Heights Drive depend on the Morrison Canyon Trail and the Pickering gate near Vallejo Mill Elementary to walk and bike to the park. But the landslides on New Year's Eve forced the road to close, and it has remained closed for the last five months. The city still hasn't provided a repair timeline or a repair estimate for this important multimodal trail.

The lower gate on Morrison Canyon would add an extra mile round-trip for residents north of Pickering.

Despite this, the city was very selective and limited in its polling, sending letters to a few properties within a few hundred feet of the gate to ask for their support in closing the Pickering gate. The city doesn't seem to have any concern for the needs of the broader community, especially residents near Vallejo Mill Elementary and Stenhammer Lane.

We believe that the city council needs to be reminded of the important service that regional parks provide for our community. We're asking the board of directors of EBRPD to help us ask the city council to restore pedestrian and bicycle access to Vargas Plateau Regional Park by repairing the Morrison Canyon Trail. We'd also ask the city and the park district to work together to formally open the Pickering gate and open up 30 parking spaces along the city-owned lot at the intersection of Pickering and Canyon Heights Drive.

Finally, there are three additional properties in play that we ask the park district to purchase. These are the 87 acres owned by Bill Hartkopf and offered to the district. We also ask the park district to purchase the adjacent SFPUC 10 acres and the ACWD 5 acres. The acquisition of these properties will provide a staging area for access to Vargas Plateau.

Please consider sending any comments to – EBRPD