

Status of the Proposed "Grotto Trail"

January 2005

Background on the Trail

The Fisher's Creek Neighborhood Association (FCNA) has been working the development of a trail access route to the area formerly known as the "Grotto" for a couple of years. Support for this came from both formal and informal discussions throughout the FCNA neighborhood. The Grotto Trail Project is a proposal to extend the current path (located between the new park and 180th Avenue near the center of the neighborhood behind Hiddenbrook Terrace homes along Fishers Creek) down to an area known as the "Grotto," on the southwest side of the neighborhood. This would be at no cost to the homeowners, as the Vancouver/Clark County Parks Department agreed to incur all costs and liability. Last year, the FCNA began to focus more time and attention to the development of the Grotto Trail.

In June 2004, the FCNA published a report on the proposed trail (available online at the FCNA website: www.fisherscreek.org). The report outlined the proposal and addressed some of the issues by citing valid independent research from various public agencies and educational institutions. The report concluded that the development of the trail would be a positive enhancement to the neighborhood for a variety of reasons.

It had been determined that the best location to construct the trail (essentially a narrow footpath no more than 3 feet in width) was adjacent to Fisher's Creek on the north side. The property is owned by the Hiddenbrook Community Association (HCA), who would have to grant the Parks Department an easement in order to build the trail.

In the meantime, the property on which the "Grotto" was located was purchased by a local developer. The developer's intent was to build high-end townhomes on the property, which would be a gated community without public access. Although homes will be built on the property, portions of the wooded area along Fisher's Creek would remain, and a trail through this area constructed at the expense of the developer.

The ultimate plan was to connect the developer's trail to a trail constructed along the HCA property. This would provide a continuous trail network in the neighborhood, and the *only* public access to the old "Grotto" area.

Support & Opposition to the Trail

At about the same time the FCNA's report was published, a small group of individuals opposing the trail began to go door-to-door in the HCA neighborhood soliciting petitions opposing the development of the trail. Much of the opposition came from some of the few homeowners living on the north side of Fisher's Creek, along with others who resided in homes on the south side in the Gentry's development. Apparently, they collected a number of signatures (unknown what the exact number was) in opposition. These were subsequently presented to the HCA Board.

Following this, volunteers from the FCNA conducted a door-to-door campaign in the HCA neighborhood providing copies of its report, answering questions, and discussing the proposal. The FCNA also circulated a petition of *support*, along with a petition in which those who signed the original opposing petition could *withdraw* their opposition. The results were:

Petition Supporting the Trail:	59 households (77 signatures)
Petition Withdrawing & Now Supporting:	27 households (41 signatures)
<i>Total Supporting the Trail:</i>	<i>86 households (118 signatures)</i>

The result was that the majority of homeowners living in the HCA neighborhood supported the proposed "Grotto Trail." In addition, 83 individuals from outside the HCA (but living in the FCNA neighborhood) signed the petition in support of the trail.

Decision by the Hiddenbrook Community Association

Following this, last summer the FCNA formally presented the results of its petition to the HCA Board. Unfortunately, the HCA Board was unwilling to accept either the FCNA's petitions in support, or those of the opposition. In addition, the HCA Board had a number of questions concerning the potential trail, and wanted an opportunity to have these addressed directly by public officials and others.

In August 2004, the FCNA sponsored a townhall-type meeting concerning the proposed trail. All interested residents of the HCA were invited to attend and ask questions. Representatives from the Parks Department, Vancouver Police Department, Vancouver City Attorney's Office, FCNA Board members, Nelson Development (the developer of the "Grotto" property) and other public officials were on hand to answer questions and address concerns.

It was agreed at the conclusion of the meeting that the Parks Department would meet (on-site) with the residents living on the north side of Fisher's Creek, as well as other interested HCA residents, to specifically map out a trail route that would have the least impact on those residents. This was done in October.

Current Status of the Proposed Trail

Not long after the meeting, the HCA Board advised the FCNA that it would only grant an easement if the majority of HCA homeowners approved it. In November 2004, the HCA Board distributed a ballot measure with background information on the proposed trail. The document included statements both in support and in opposition to the trail. The Board asked residents to vote during its November meeting.

Although the HCA has not formally notified the FCNA of the results, information provided by one member of the HCA Board was that 50 ballots were cast: 25 in support and 25 against. This represents more than a third of the residents, but falls well short of the majority. The FCNA has been told that the HCA Board will give residents another opportunity to vote by January 15, 2005.

The FCNA continues to support the proposed "Grotto Trail," as an additional amenity to this wonderful neighborhood. It is hoped that the homeowners will make an informed decision based on the facts. Even after the homes have been built on the old "Grotto" property, attractive and serene green spaces will remain untouched along Fisher's Creek. Since this area will be private property with no public access, development of a trail would be the *only* access. Should it fail, residents the FCNA neighborhood will never again be able to enjoy this beautiful area.