



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF VENTURA

GOVERNMENT CENTER, HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
800 SOUTH VICTORIA AVENUE, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA 93009

July 31, 2012

Board of Supervisors
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

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SUBJECT: Conceptual Support for the Ventura River Parkway, Direction to Staff to Streamline the Processing of Conservation Subdivisions

RECOMMENDATION:

- A) Adopt a policy position of conceptually supporting the creation of a Ventura River Parkway
- B) Direct the County Executive Officer to streamline the processing of conservation subdivision applications

DISCUSSION:

On July 18th I hosted a meeting at the Government Center in which eight State, federal, and local organizations presented their plans, projects, and overarching vision for the creation of a Ventura River Parkway. Much as the California Coastal Conservancy's plan for a Santa Clara River Parkway has led to the successful creation of a network of over 3,000 acres of conservation lands along that river, the Ventura River too can become a valuable asset and resource that augments conservation, recreation, tourism, and water quality.

While at present there is no single adopted plan for a Ventura River Parkway, two conceptual planning studies are available to guide parkway efforts. The first is a comprehensive analysis of the lower river prepared by the Cal Poly Pomona school of Landscape Architecture, the second is a Ventura River Parkway brochure produced by the California Coastal Conservancy. Both documents are available on the website of the Friends of the Ventura River, a nonprofit umbrella organization acting to facilitate creation of the parkway, see: <http://friendsofventurariver.org>

In seeking Board support for adoption of a policy position of conceptually supporting the creation of the Ventura River Parkway, it is not intended that this action indicate County support any specific project. Rather, we would be indicating our broad conceptual support for the creation of a parkway through the future actions of multiple organizations working cooperatively with private property owners along with the independent efforts of multiple

governmental agencies. Our vote would essentially be an endorsement of the goal of creating a Ventura River Parkway and an encouragement of those efforts.

With regard to river parkways, one tool that has been instrumental in the success of the Santa Clara River Parkway has been our Board's enactment of conservation subdivisions. This process allows the creation of a conservation parcel that does not meet the zoning ordinance's minimum parcel size if that lot is dedicated to riparian conservation. Along the Ventura River, one conservation subdivision application is currently in process, and it is expected that conservation subdivisions will be very useful to land conservancies and private property owners in creating additional conservation properties.

It has been brought to my attention that while conservation subdivisions are a welcome County regulatory relaxation, the time and cost to process these subdivisions can sometimes be excessive. Given the environmentally beneficial nature of conservation subdivisions, it seems appropriate that a streamlined application process be enacted to facilitate these subdivisions. I recommend that we direct the CEO to create a streamlined process for handling conservation subdivisions that eliminates or reduces processing steps and time. Some thoughts that come to mind are: greater use of CEQA statutory and categorical exemptions, lesser standards of review when no additional developable lots are created, concurrent and expedited review by County agencies, and greater management attention to assuring prompt application processing and to guiding applicants through the process.

In conclusion, a Ventura River Parkway offers many of the same benefits of the Santa Clara River Parkway, combined with the opportunity to increase trails and recreation, connect existing public access sites, and support tourism. Our Board can bolster these efforts by expressing conceptual support for the Ventura River Parkway and streamlining the application process for conservation subdivisions.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Bennett
Supervisor, First District