PRESERVATION ACTION
COUNCIL OF SAN JOSE

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www.preservation.org

March 4, 2026

Historic Landmarks Commission
City of San José Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
200 East Santa Clara Street, 3rd Floor Tower
San José CA 95113-1905
VIA EMAIL (planningsupportstaff@sanjoseca.gov)

RE: Item 6.a. FIVE WOUNDS TRAIL AND COYOTE CREEK TRESTLE STATUS REPORT

Dear Commissioners,

The Preservation Action Council of San Jose (PAC*SJ) appreciates the opportunity to review and provide comments on the Five Wounds Trail Project and its potential impacts to the historic Coyote Creek Trestle. PAC*SJ strongly supports the planned conversion of the former Western Pacific Railway right-of-way into a new bicycle/pedestrian corridor linking Coyote Creek Trail, Lower Silver Creek Trail, the Five Wounds Neighborhood and Berryessa BART. However, we strongly object to the City's proposed demolition of the Coyote Creek Trestle as part of this project. Based on the findings of a Historical Resources Evaluation (HRI) completed by TreanorHL (July 2023) and a Structural Evaluation by GHC (August 2023), two viable preservation alternatives exist to accommodate a pedestrian/bicycle crossing of Coyote Creek without requiring the demolition of the historic structure.

Historical Resource and Structural Evaluations

PAC*SJ concurs with the HRE finding that the Coyote Creek Trestle meets eligibility criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) under Criterion A/1 at the local level for its association with the industrial development of San Jose; and as a San Jose City Landmark under Criteria 1, 4 and 6 as a significant example of early 20th century pile bent timber trestle construction. The subject trestle is one of only two extant pile bent trestles in Santa Clara County and the only one remaining in San Jose. As noted in the integrity discussion, the original timber is still in place at most parts of the structure. Furthermore, despite the removed rails, new metal supports, and recent fire damage, it continues to maintain sufficient integrity of materials to convey its historic significance.

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The Structural Evaluation finds that the Coyote Creek Trestle is in no immediate danger of collapse absent a seismic or exceptional wind event, and that it is feasible to safely retrofit for either a new pedestrian/bicycle crossing or as a self-supporting but decommissioned landscape element meeting all applicable life-safety standards. In the later scenario, a new pedestrian bridge could be constructed alongside the decommissioned trestle structure at an equivalent or lesser cost than the demolition and replacement of the historic resource.

Envision San José 2040 Cultural Resource Policies

The Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan acknowledges the importance of historic resources in the Land Use and Transportation chapter: "*The preservation of appropriate remnants of a city's past provides multiple benefits important to the health and progress of the city. Historical resources: Are instructive, telling the story of a community's past; Provide a sense of civic identity and unique character; Are typically an interesting and pleasing aesthetic in the urban environment; Can generate economic advantage for a property or neighborhood; Give a community a sense of permanency.*"

Numerous General Plan policies have been adopted for the purpose of reducing or avoiding impacts related to cultural resources. The trestle's demolition would conflict with many of these policies, most specifically:

> *Policy LU:13-2: Preserve candidate or designated landmark buildings, structures and historic objects, with first priority given to preserving and rehabilitating them for their historic use, second to preserving and rehabilitating them for a new use, or third to rehabilitation and relocation on-site;*
>
> and
>
> *Policy LU:13-4: Require public and private development projects to conform to the adopted City Council Policy on the Preservation of Historic Landmarks.*

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Should the project continue to propose demolition of the Coyote Creek Trestle, we concur with the consultants' findings that the project would have a significant impact on historical resources under CEQA. We note that the cost of completing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to address this impact would be roughly four times the cost of preparing a Categorical Exemption for rehabilitation of the historic resource.

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Conclusion

We therefore urge the Historic Landmarks Commission to review and support one or both of the two options for retrofit of the existing trestle, to meet historic preservation goals and qualify for Categorical Exemption under CEQA. If and when an Environmental Impact Report for the Five Wounds Trail Project, we encourage the HLC to provide public comments in support of these preservation alternatives.

Sincerely,



Ben T. Leech
Executive Director
Preservation Action Council of San José

cc: Dana Peak, Historic Preservation Officer
Liz Sewell, Trails Manager, PRNS
Keith Ball, Save Our Trails