NAMED BEST CAMPUS NEWSPAPER IN CALIFORNIA FOR 2022 BY THE CALIFORNIA COLLEGE MEDIA ASSOCIATION

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

Spartan Daily

SERVING SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY SINCE 1934

WWW.SJSUNEWS.COM/SPARTAN_DAILY

Volume 160 No. 27

City council approves creek sweeps

City approves agreement to remove unhoused residents from Coyote Creek

By Alina Ta
STAFF WRITER



ALINA TA | SPARTAN DAILY

San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan presents a certificate to those recognized as Climate Smart Champions at San Jose City Hall Tuesday.

San Jose city councilmembers approved an agreement on Tuesday to sweep the houseless population in Coyote Creek to continue maintenance of the area.

City and Santa Clara County District Valley Water representatives discussed with councilmembers on how to move houseless communities away from areas surrounding Coyote Creek.

Valley Water supplies water and flood protection while maintaining water streams to Santa Clara county, according to its website.

Valley Water has multiple flood management projects including the Coyote Creek Flood Management Measures Project and Coyote Creek Flood Protection Project, according to an agreement between the city and the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

The purpose of these projects is to prevent flooding around surrounding homes, schools, businesses and transportation networks, according to the agreement.

Bhavani Yerrapotu, deputy operating officer for Valley Water, said the organization is working on the Coyote Percolation Dam Replacement Project.

The goal for this project is to replace the Anderson Dam tunnel by 2024, according to a Valley Water webpage.

Yerrapotu said the work zone for the Coyote Percolation Dam Replacement Project overlaps a nine mile stretch of area between Oakland Road and William Streets.

She said Valley Water estimates that there are around 120 to 200 houseless people currently living in those areas.

"So it is a pretty heavily encamped area," Yerrapotu said.

She said this is why Valley Water is planning to collaborate with the city.

"Valley Water is not a service provider of those types of services," Yerrapotu said.

Andrea Flores Shelton, deputy director in the Community Service Division for San Jose's Department of Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services, said the department will be assisting Valley Water as the organization continues to replace the dam.

Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services is the department which helps support the community by supporting recreational services, social opportunities and outdoor spaces in over 200 locations in San Jose, according to its webpage.

"PRNS provides a range of services to encourage and enhance the cleanliness of the city," Shelton said. "That includes the responsibility for conducting abatements of encampments of unhoused people under certain circumstances."

Abatements, also known as sweeps, are when encampments of houseless people are swept and removed from streets, parks and waterways, according to an audit of San Jose's homeless assistance programs.

Shelton said the department will help Valley Water move houseless people away from the work zone next to Coyote Creek by doing sweeps and outreach

CITY COUNCIL | Page 2

CITY COUNCIL

Continued from page 1

to homeless communities.

Outreach services help give certain basic needs, including temporary housing, emergency health services, transportation, case management, financial support and more, to houseless individuals, according to the same agreement.

Shelton said outreach services is a part of Valley Water's agreement to fund a team to do outreach services in the areas of the encampments.

She said the outreach group will collect the names of houseless people living in those areas.

"[This] will then give us a better idea of the housing and resources needed for the people in the area," Shelton said.

Ragan Henninger, deputy director for San Jose's Housing Department, said the kinds of services a houseless person will receive during outreach will depend on their individual situation.

Henninger said there will be multiple options available.

She said some of the services they will provide is family reunification and "diversion" services, which is a one time financial assistance.

Henninger said houseless people may also be referred to the city's existing interim housing communities.

Shelton said if there are houseless people that are not willing to leave the area, Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services will refer them to an ongoing list of people who are available to continue working with them.

Omar Passons, deputy city manager for San Jose, said both Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services and Valley Water will have a public meeting near the work zone to directly inform houseless residents and to answer their questions to support open communication.

He said after the meeting, city officials will begin working to move houseless people from the work zone in May.

Passons also said the work will cost around $4.8 million.

Councilmember Peter Ortiz said it's great to see the city working on flood management after the floods in 2017.

On Feb. 21, 2017, floods created an estimate of $100 million in damages in downtown San Jose, according to a June 20, 2019 Mercury News article.

Ortiz said he is also concerned that the work has too short of a timeline to be completed.

"I think looking at the numbers, we're talking about between 120 to 200 people that will need to be contacted and in an attempt to build trust first initially and then get them to understand where they need to move and then find a location for them," he said. "That's quite an undertaking. That takes time."

Passons said it is important to realize that the work will be done in teams.

Councilmember Domingo Candelas, who used to advocate for Valley Water, said he thinks the flood management measures are important for protecting houseless communities.

"I think these flood management measures are critical because it's going to protect the communities who live along the creek that are largely historically disadvantaged from flooding," he said.

Follow the Spartan Daily on Twitter @SpartanDaily