

Marin Independent Journal: \$2 million OK'd to improve steps, paths and lanes for walkers

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A federal grant was tapped Tuesday for nearly \$2 million to repair steps, paths and lanes to help people get around on foot.

The money is coming from Marin's \$20 million share of a \$100 million federal pilot program aimed at making improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians that encourage people to get around without a car.

The Marin Board of Supervisors approved a list of walking lanes in Larkspur, Mill Valley, Sausalito and Tiburon as the first Marin pedestrian projects to get money from the grant.

Mill Valley received the largest share - \$983,800 - to improve six lanes, from fixing steps to repairing drainage problems.

The lanes run through residential blocks, acting as short-cuts or passageways between streets.

Supervisor Steve Kinsey, one of the shepherds of the grant, said the projects not only make it easier for people to get around on foot, they improve what could be critical escape routes in case of a fire.

But Supervisor Susan Adams questioned why all 13 of the projects on the list were from only four communities, all south of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard.

Deputy Public Works Director Craig Tackabery said those towns had already been working on plans to improve the paths and lanes and were ready to start construction. Supervisor Charles McGlashan, a Mill Valley resident, said they were "ready to jump on the dime."

He said they were ready with plans and community backing so that construction can begin soon.

McGlashan stressed the projects need to get built by 2010, before the deadline when studies will be conducted to show the effectiveness of the improvements and the federal grant.

Most of the improvements generated by the grant are related to bicycle use, but when officials were drafting the plan for the \$20 million, many city representatives complained that more money was needed to be improve lanes and paths.

Victoria Talkington, a former Mill Valley planning commissioner, helped put together her town's proposals.

She said Mill Valley was ready to win the grants and noted the improvements are an important part of the community's efforts to combat climate change.

"They relate to the huge challenge our entire community faces with global warming," she said.

Many of the Mill Valley steps and lanes were created to give pedestrians a walking route to get from their hillside homes to train stops, Talkington said.

Ingrid Holmsen, who lives near Mill Valley's Marion Lane, said the path is in dire need of repair. It is overgrown with shrubs that have turned it into "a jungle," and steps are broken and a bridge needs to be repaired or replaced.

She said that repairs should increase use, especially by local school children. "I think kids might use it to get down to Old Mill," she said.

Marin is one of four U.S. communities picked for the demonstration project.

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