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The purpose of this report is to seek the Council's approval to add an additional item, which is not budgeted, to the 1999/00 Annual Plan. The item is an \$80,000 property purchase to support a future cycleway project, within the City Streets Capital programme. A report on the proposed property purchase is being submitted to the Parks and Recreation Committee.

#### **MERIVALE CYCLE ROUTE - LOCATION AND HISTORY**

As far back as 1976 a potential bikeway was identified "generally paralleling Harewood/Papanui Roads and Rossall Street, and to re-route a portion of cycle traffic away from the busy Bealey/Papanui intersection".

Interest in the proposed Merivale cycle route was rekindled in 1996 when the Parks Unit began looking seriously at property purchase in the Merivale area to create additional green space and parkland. The properties they expressed the most interest in were back to back on Office Road and Rugby Street. The connection of a park-link from Office to Rugby would permit an almost continuous series of road, park and path connections from the Waimairi School overbridge to the Carlton Mill crossing signals, as shown in the attached diagram. While there is no direct connection across the railway lines for cyclists at the moment, there may be in the future. However, despite this, the cycle route picks up the "catchment" between Rossall Street and Papanui Road.

The only "missing link" is a possible public pathway through Elmwood School. The school was cautiously positive to such a path when contacted in 1996, but it was felt the path should not be progressed further until the park-link was more certain.

Parks Unit purchased the Rugby Street property in 1998 and have plans to develop the site. It was not expecting the Office Road site to become available for purchase so quickly. Subsequently, Parks Unit budget reserves are unable to meet the necessary deposit for the property.

As City Streets has always accepted that it would be contributing financially to the project, Parks Unit approached City Streets for short term financial assistance.

## **CITY STREETS' SUPPORT**

The proposed property purchase has City Streets' support. The proposed route, when completed, will offer non-arterial connections for all properties bounded by Rossall Street, Railway Cycleway, Blighs and Papanui Roads, to Carlton Mill crossing signals. It will also allow direct access to St Andrews College, Heaton Intermediate, Elmwood School, Rangi Ruru School and St Margaret's College, with access broken only by the crossing of Heaton Street. The route does appear on the cycle network plan, but was given a lower priority as it was identified only as a potential route, with no current usage.

At this stage it is impossible to predict the potential usage, but based on Railway Cycleway data, it would seem most likely that there will be collision reductions on Papanui Road, and a slight modal shift as some parents would allow their children to cycle (and possibly walk) on this non-arterial route.

The City Streets unit believes the route has a lot of merit, however it does not appear in the unit's budget for 1999/00, or the five year programme. Rather than miss the opportunity to purchase the Office Road property, City Streets is willing to make available \$80,000 to the Parks Unit, subject to this Committee's approval.

This sum is broadly equivalent to the value of the land that would be occupied by a cycleway corridor between Office Road and Rugby Street, and therefore a contribution at an appropriate time is justifiable - if the need for the project is accepted.

However, to enable \$80,000 to be made available in 1999/00, without, at this time, adding \$80,000 to the 5 year programme, other project(s) will need to be reprogrammed. This can be achieved through the 3/6 month review process, when the level of achievement of individual projects will be better known.

At this point, the Council's approval (or otherwise) is sought so that negotiations can continue.

## **PARKS UNIT COMMENT**

As indicated within the report, the Council has recognised the shortfall of reserves within the Merivale area and has afforded priority to the purchase of suitable properties for this purpose within the precinct. The property in Rugby Street was acquired at a price of \$750,000 and an option to acquire the property in Office Road was received from the owner should he sell. The owner has now asked the Council to exercise its option.

At the time the acquisition of both properties was supported by the Council, it was clearly understood that there would be a significant contribution by the City Streets Unit towards the development and acquisition of the cycleway route. Addition of the cycleway and park extension connecting Rugby Street and Office Road is seen by Parks Unit as critical to good parks planning in the Merivale area.

As the Reserves budget is fully committed this financial year and given that if the option is not exercised, the opportunity to acquire it will be lost, it will be necessary to purchase the property on terms. In talking to the owners, they have confirmed that they were prepared to consider this option but that they would require a minimum deposit. In view of there being no funds available for the purchase, the Council has little bargaining power and unless the deposit can be secured from Cycleway funds there is little prospect of acquiring the property and securing this important link in the cycleway network.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Council approve a new budget item of \$80,000 for the 1999/00 year to part fund the purchase of the Office Street property, as part of the Merivale cycle route.
  2. That this sum be accommodated by a reprogramming of other City Streets capital project(s) through the 3 or 6 month reviews.