



**City of Edmond  
Police Department  
Crime Analysis / Planning and Research**

August 26, 2004

Subject: Trail Crime Survey

Chief Ricks,

Here is my report on trails and their effects on public safety. Even though there is a lack of statistical crime data from the police departments that I contacted, there is an abundance of independent studies available on this subject.

Respectfully,  
Officer Bruce Leehan

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## MUNICIPAL TRAILS AND PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS

Officer Bruce Leehan  
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August 16, 2004

The construction of municipal trails has been a concern for residents in many areas across the U.S. Such concerns vary from public safety to property values. These concerns however, appear to be unwarranted.

While researching this topic I surveyed six police departments, from Houston Texas, to Boulder Colorado, and as far north as Elk Grove Illinois. Every department I contacted does not track crime in regard to their municipal trail system. There was no raw crime data to analyze. However, most of those departments had anecdotal information that over a period of ten years or more, there were only a few infractions, most of which were minor. (i.e. littering, leash violations, etc.) These crimes were infrequent and did not cause an increase in the crime rate. Trail enhancements such as good lighting, easy access for emergency vehicles, and keeping the area free of obstructions contributed to the safety of the trail. If criminals know they can be seen they tend to avoid areas of increased visibility. Other enhancements such as location signs make it easier to report any emergencies occurring on the trails.

While there is a lack of raw crime data, there is an abundance of independent studies on the subject. I included summaries of two studies in this report.

### Colorado State Park / State Trails Study (summary attached)

In 1995, The Conservation Fund and Colorado State Parks State Trails Program conducted a study on greenways and their effects on property values. The study was to determine what effect, if any, the presence of urban trails has had on public safety to property owners who lived next to a trail and on property values of homes located within one block of a trail. The study also evaluated the level of public acceptance for urban trails and their effect on the quality of life in these neighborhoods.

Results of the survey show that "urban trails are regarded as an amenity that helps to attract buyers and to sell property. For residents of single family homes adjacent to a trail:

- 29% believed that the existence of the trail would increase the selling price of their home (and 43% said it would have no effect).
- 57% of the residents felt that the trail would make the home easier to sell (with 36% saying no effect).
- 57% of these residents had lived in their homes prior to construction of the trail

- 29% of those surveyed were positively influenced by the trail in their decision to buy the home.
- Results were similarly positive for residents who lived near but not adjacent to the trail..."

"Of the real estate agents interviewed:

- 73% believed that a home adjacent to a trail would be easier to sell
- 55% agreed that the home would sell for more than a comparable home from a different neighborhood
- 82% of real estate agents used the trail as a selling point
- 100% believed trails are an amenity to the community around it...

"No public safety issues could be directly linked to the trail. Only one resident interviewed was concerned with this issue, and none of the officers interviewed believed trails had any effect on public safety...."

"[In summary,] concerns that urban trails might adversely affect [sic] public safety and property value in surrounding neighborhoods are not substantiated by the results of this study. The effect of a trail is beneficial, rather than detrimental."

*The Impact of the Brush Creek Trail on Property Values and Crime*

Santa Rosa, CA, Michelle Miller Murphy, Sonoma State University, (1992)

"The purpose of this study was to determine what effect, if any, a bicycle/pedestrian trail has on property values and crime rates. Concerns by local property owners that proposed trails may negatively affect property values or increase crime prompted this survey. Due to its 9 year existence, the Brush Creek Trail, built along Brush Creek in Santa Rosa's Rincon Valley, was selected as the focus of this survey...."

"Seventy five residents were surveyed on how long they had lived in the neighborhood, how the trail has affected their overall quality of life; what effect the trail would have on selling their homes, what effect the trail had in their decision to buy their homes; how the trail has affected their privacy, and what problems, if any, they have had with crime caused by trail users. Additionally, interviews were conducted with apartment and mobile home park managers near the trail, real estate agents with listings adjacent to trails, and law enforcement agencies; fifteen other cities were contacted for information on surveys regarding the effect of trails on property values and crime..."

- 64% of respondents felt the trail increased the quality of life in the neighborhood, with another 13% saying "no effect"
- 33% said the trail would make their home easier to sell, with 49% saying "no effect"
- 23% said the trail would make their home sell for more, with 69% saying "no effect"

“Of real estate agents:

- 19% said homes next to a public trail would sell for slightly more, with another 48% saying "no effect"
- 61% of real estate agents said they use proximity to trails as selling points

"The law enforcement agencies had no data to determine crime statistics; survey results from 15 other cities showed only a small number of minor infractions including illegal motorized use of the trail, litter, and unleashed pets.

"The study shows neither increased crime nor decreased property values due to trails. On the contrary, the most overwhelming opinion by residents along the Brush Creek Trail is that the trail/creek has a positive effect on the quality of life in the neighborhood."

These two studies are consistent with many others that I researched on the Internet, in that the effects were positive and there was great acceptance by residents living close to trails. Trails are regarded as an amenity and due to little or no public safety issues being linked to the trails, area residents feel their quality of life has increased. The economic benefits are also apparent from these studies. Some realtors surveyed used the trails as a selling point and others indicated that homes were easier to sell and that the homes would sell for more than homes not located near the trails.

I was unable to make a connection between increasing crime rates and public trails, and it seems that public safety concerns are unwarranted.

## Resources

[www.americantrails.org/resources/adjacent/sumadjacent.html](http://www.americantrails.org/resources/adjacent/sumadjacent.html)

[www.americantrails.org/resources/adjacent/OmahaStudy.html](http://www.americantrails.org/resources/adjacent/OmahaStudy.html)

[www.railstrails.org](http://www.railstrails.org)

[www.americantrails.org/resources/adjacent/NYneighborsSPR00.html](http://www.americantrails.org/resources/adjacent/NYneighborsSPR00.html)

[www.EasternTrail.org](http://www.EasternTrail.org)

[www.bonneville-trail.org](http://www.bonneville-trail.org)

City of Houston Police department, Crime Analysis / Research /Planning

Oklahoma City Police Department, Crime Analysis

Tulsa Police Department, Crime Analysis

The City of Boulder Police Department, Crime Analysis

Elk Grove Village Police Department, Records Division

The City of Plano Police Department, Records division

**The Effect of Greenways on  
Property Values and Public Safety**

**A Joint Study by:  
The Conservation Fund  
and  
Colorado State Parks  
State Trails Program**

**The Conservation Fund  
Sydney Shafroth Macy, Colorado Director  
Leslee T. Alexander, Project Manager**

**Colorado State Parks  
State Trails Program  
Stuart H. Macdonald, Director  
Chris Ford, Greenway Trails Planner**

**March, 1995**

## **PURPOSE**

The study of Property Values and Public Safety (herein known as the study) was to determine what effect, if any, the presence of urban trails has had on public safety to property owners who live adjacent to a trail and on property values of homes located within one block of a trail. The study also evaluated the level of public acceptance for urban trails and their effect on the quality of life in these neighborhoods.

The need for the study arose due to concerns expressed by several different neighborhoods over the proposed construction of new trails. These concerns included fears that the presence of an urban trail might lower property values and also create a risk to public safety, thus adversely affecting the quality of life in the neighborhood. These concerns are similar to concerns voiced in the past over proposed trails that are now established and accepted.

## **TRAIL PROFILE**

The metro-Denver area has hundreds of trails which connect together to create an expansive and constantly growing system. Trail users vary from commuter bicyclists to couples taking an evening stroll through the neighborhood. Though many types of trails located in different areas of the city were looked at, only five trails were considered for use in the study: the Franklin Street foot-path, which runs along Franklin Street as it passes through Cherry Hills Village and Greenwood Village; the Highline Canal Trail, located in Aurora; the Lee Gulch Trail in the Windemere neighborhood; the Weir Gulch Trail, located in the Barnum neighborhood of west Denver; and the Willow Creek Trail, located in southeast Denver.

The Franklin Street footpath is a small, infrequently traveled trail. It was difficult to obtain data that was pertinent for use in the study due to its size. The Lee Gulch Trail would have been appropriate for the study, but it was difficult to ascertain whether the individuals interviewed were referring to the Lee Gulch Trail or the southeastern area of Highline Canal Trail, which passes in close proximity.

The trail segments chosen for the study were the Highline Canal Trail, the Weir Gulch Trail, and the Willow Creek Trail. These trails represent the variety of trails in Metro-Denver. Each study area is under two miles long and the composition of the surface of the trails ranges from dirt or crusher-fines to asphalt or concrete. The trails run along natural waterways and are surrounded by a combination of indigenous plants and recent landscaping. Though these trails are located in residential neighborhoods, they also cross busy intersections and pass through commercial and retail areas.

For residents of single family homes adjacent to a trail, 29% believed that the location of the trail would increase the selling price of their home. 7% of the residents felt that the trail would make the home easier to sell. 57% of these residents also had lived in their homes prior to construction of the trail, yet 29% of those surveyed were positively influenced by the trail in their decision to buy the home.

None of the residents of townhomes, apartments, and condominiums adjacent to a trail thought the trail would decrease the selling price of their home, and 42% thought that it would increase the selling price of their home. 755 of the residents lived in the area prior to the construction of the trail, and 17% were influenced by the trail to move to the area.

In regard to public safety, only one resident was concerned with their situation. They lived on the connection of a trail to a park and had experienced some vandalism and damage to their property. As a result, they chose to put up more lights around their house in an attempt to ward off trespassers. This effort proved successful and, despite the annoyance, they felt that the trail increased their quality of life. The patrol officers did not have concerns for public safety along the trails when the trails were used during regular daylight hours.

No public safety issues could be directly linked to the trail. The most serious issues of late have been graffiti and tagging at underpasses. None of these incidents were focused towards other trail users and usually occurred when there were no other people on or around the trail. The officers doubted there would be a concern for public safety due to the constant passage of people on the trails. It was also mentioned that people rely on their automobiles, and would be more likely to congregate in a parking lot.

In summary, concerns that urban trails might adversely affect public safety and property value in surrounding neighborhoods are not substantiated by the results of this study. The effect of a trail on the neighboring property is beneficial, rather than detrimental. The general opinion is that trails are an amenity to the neighborhoods around them; they increase the desirability of property and provide a space for young children and adults of all ages to run and play.

One point of concern regarding trails should be mentioned. Though the general opinion is that trails are an amenity, almost half of the people interviewed either did not use the trail discussed, or were not aware of its existence. It appears that greater community involvement should be recruited for future trails to truly be an useful aspect of a neighborhood.