

West Side walk strains muscles and UA patience

Our view: The University of Arizona should help accommodate walkers who have been using Tumamoc Hill for years

FEBRUARY 13, 2006 12:00 AM

Tumamoc Hill, a popular place for exercise, is at the center of a tug of war.

On one side we have University of Arizona researchers who are angry about hikers leaving trash and human waste in the desert vegetation that scientists have been monitoring for generations.

On the other side we have large numbers of West Side residents who have been using the narrow paved road up the hill for exercise. That, too, has been going on for many years.

The problem is that the hill is not a public park. It's a desert laboratory that's been treated as a public park.

Lately, the hikers became more upset when St. Mary's Hospital, just north of the road up Tumamoc, announced it didn't want the walkers using its parking lot because it needed the space for patients and staff.

So where are all these people supposed to park? And should they continue hiking in a nonpublic area where they've merely been tolerated?

The city recently delayed a plan to build a parking area on Anklam Road, near the Tumamoc entrance, at the urging of Desert Laboratory Director Jay Quade.

Councilman José Ibarra, who represents the area, had advocated creating 22 parking spaces at a cost of about \$10,000.

Ibarra now says he won't push the parking plan until he gets a go-ahead from the university.

That makes sense. There's no point in allocating a penny to this project unless there's a firm UA commitment that the road will remain open to hikers.

In the absence of such a commitment, the city would be wise to look at the possibility of enhancing the "A" Mountain park just south of Tumamoc Hill.

The grade of the paved road up "A" Mountain, or Sentinel Peak, isn't significantly different from that of Tumamoc Hill. The main difference is that it carries more cars, and there's no easy way for pedestrians to get out of the way.

A second problem with the park at "A" Mountain is that it's a popular hangout for gangs.

The city should consider closing the road up "A" Mountain to motorized traffic, at least on a temporary basis, and making it available to bicyclists and pedestrians.

However, before the city considers doing anything whatsoever at "A" Mountain, the university

must decide whether it's going to close Tumamoc Hill to the public.

Closing the road would not win the university many friends. Too many people use it, and the vast majority love and respect the landscape through which the road passes.

In the interest of maintaining good community relations, it would be best to devise a compromise that limits the number of walkers permitted to use the road.

And, in the interest of sanitation, it would certainly help if there were toilet facilities at the end of the road beyond the Desert Laboratory offices.