

Briannon Wilfong/Tumamoc Hill repaving project

TUCSON, Ariz. -- Tumamoc Hill is now open to the public after undergoing a renovation project of repaving the trail, with more renovation ideas now in the works.

Tumamoc Hill, its trail, and its laboratory have been a part of Tucson's history since the establishment of the city. The Tumamoc Hill's Desert Laboratory was built in the 1900s, for desert plant physiological ecology. Research from the top of Tumamoc would take place every day from that day forward.

Tumamoc Hill trail recently underwent a renovation project, providing new pavement to the steep 1.5-mile road trail. The repaving was vital to make the trail more walkable and safer for hikers as well as the researchers at the Desert Laboratory at the top of the hill.

The project to repave Tumamoc Hill was started in December and from there, The University of Arizona, as well as donors from the Tucson community, helped raise money for the repaving.

"The project cost about \$200,000...the UA agreed to pay \$100,000 of it," Margie Gudaitis, the Associate Director of Development in the College of Science at the UA, said.

A generous donation given by Edith Sykes Lowell and David Lowell encouraged others of the community to donate to the repaving project.

Sykes Lowell is the granddaughter of Godfrey Sykes, one of the early scientists of Tumamoc Hill.

“We wanted to set it up as a crowd funding project because Tumamoc Hill is really important to all of Tucson,” Gudaitis said. “We wanted to let people participate in a way that was meaningful for them.

There is not a formalized group or fundraising vehicles for Tumamoc, according to Gudaitis. With the repaving project, this was a way to create an opportunity for the community to support Tumamoc.

With this project, there is now a newly formed donor group, “Friends of Tumamoc”, who donate because of their love of Tumamoc Hill and regularly support the hill. Some of the first donors of this group are those who donated in the repaving project.

The project was officially launched on Jan. 1, 2019 and the trail was closed on Jan. 22, 2019. Within that time, the remaining \$50,000 was raised for the completion of the project, according to Gudaitis.

The trail was re-opened on Feb. 6, 2019. The community greatly anticipated the re-opening of the trail, according to Gudaitis.

“[The trail] is part of their everyday life,” Gudaitis said.

With the newly repaved road, there is hopes to keep the relatively steady number of people who walk the hill daily, possibly even increasing the number of people who visit Tumamoc because of the improvement to the trail, according to Gudaitis.

“[We] walk three times a week,” Phil and Karin Lukins, regular walkers of Tumamoc Hill, said. “Nice quick hour walk and then back to work.”

People who regularly walk the trail find the repaving of Tumamoc are appreciative of the new pavement and safer trail.

“[The repaving] is really nice,” Karin Lukins said.

With the repaving project being the first renovation project for the hill, there are more restoration ideas for Tumamoc in the works.

There is hopes of creating a visitor’s portal at the base of the hill, according to Gudaitis. There are plans of re-doing the boathouse that sits at the base of the trail and turning it into an exhibition space for visitors.

“To really open up opportunities for lectures, and maybe even that being a place that field trips could happen, education for kids as well,” Gudaitis said.

Ideas for an outreach building that would include public restrooms and meeting spaces, a community garden and shaded seating around the Tumamoc Hill shrine are also being talked about as future projects for the hill, according to Gudaitis.

“You talk about the road being the first thing and the most visible thing that we could have done to make that change, but I think that the visitor portal and redoing the base of the hill will be a really big one and then two, there’s so many things that we want to do for the Desert Laboratory,” Gudaitis said.

The first step of being able to bring more of the community to Tumamoc Hill was the repaving of the trail and now with the new ideas of other projects, the hope is that an even larger number of Tucson will visit the hill.

“Renovating within the footprint of what already exists there will not only improve some of the research that’s up there...how can we better bring the community into what’s happening,” Gudaitis said.

The trail is open to the public to walk or hike daily from 4 a.m. – 10 p.m. Walkers and hikers are required to stay on the paved road.

