



Parks and Waterfront Commission

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Worksession Item

WORKSESSION
February 11, 2014

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Parks and Waterfront Commission
Submitted by: Jim McGrath, Chair, Parks and Waterfront Commission
Subject: Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Funding

INTRODUCTION

For the last six months, the new Parks and Waterfront Commission has reviewed the condition of Berkeley's fifty-two parks and other recreational facilities, with an increasing sense of alarm. Since 1982, the citizens of Berkeley have supported a number of different tax measures that provide additional funding for their parks including Measure HH in 2008 by a vote of over 77%. However, these measures have failed to keep up with the increased maintenance needs of the parks, and there is a long list of needed projects in almost every park and facility.

The tax measures provided funds for maintenance outside of the City's general fund, which continued to pay for recreational programs. But even with these measures, staffing for facilities and infrastructure maintenance for parks and waterfront has dropped from 105 full time equivalent positions in FY 2002 to 78 in FY 2013, with a loss of personnel in both areas.

While the parks tax has supported maintenance staff, the capacity of the tax to underwrite major maintenance efforts has deteriorated along with our aging and much used facilities. Currently the Parks Recreation & Waterfront Director Scott Ferris estimates that over \$30 million in capital and major maintenance projects remains unfunded over the next five years.

PUBLIC INPUT

The Parks and Waterfront Commission held three public meetings in different locations to solicit public input on setting priorities for the parks. Each of these meetings was well attended, and the last one was standing-room only. We also received significant testimony at our regular meetings in August and November. Dozens of people offered their observations at those meetings, and others sent letters and emails. It is clear that the people in Berkeley love their parks and want them maintained at a higher standard.

RECOMMENDATION

At a regular meeting of the Parks and Waterfront on Wednesday, December 11, 2013, the commission took action to recommend that the City Council consider submitting to the voters a proposal to increase funding for maintenance and improvement of Berkeley's parks (M/S: Catalfo/Brostrom; Aye's: Brostrom; Brower; Catalfo; Howard; McGrath; McKay; Mester; Veneziano; No's: None; Abstain: None; Absent: Boland).

We understand that elements of this proposal will be subject to public opinion polling and may be adjusted to reflect public opinion. We hope that you consider this Commission an ally in that effort, and continue to consult with us in crafting any measure that is eventually submitted for the November 2014 ballot. We realize that it may be difficult to get approval for two measures, but our Parks need funding for both maintenance that can be raised through an increase in the parks tax, and for capital improvements that would qualify for a bond measure, which has significant financial benefits, particularly at current interest rates. We think the funding measure should have the following provisions:

- a. **Increase the maintenance tax by approximately 10%.** The park maintenance tax generates about \$9.3 million in revenue, but that is not sufficient to cover existing personnel and major maintenance projects. As a result, the condition of the parks is deteriorating, and expensive repairs are required for facilities such as the James Kenney Community Center where dry rot has spread. We estimate that such an increase in the maintenance tax would generate enough funds to prevent additional layoffs in the next budget cycle, and would cover maintenance and operations of a renovated Willard Pool. We further recommend that the Council consider a Personal Income Growth Tax measure similar to that in the Library Tax.
- b. **Engage Berkeley citizens as volunteers in our parks.** Currently Berkeley Partners for Parks coordinates volunteer efforts. We realize that volunteers sometimes make life more difficult for staff, but we are convinced that each park is part of a community, and that engaging park users is essential to success. We think that stronger cooperation between City staff and volunteers would improve communication, and help park users appreciate the contributions of the staff. Recognizing volunteers as partners would also foster a sense of stewardship of public resources, and has proved successful in Oakland and San Francisco. We support establishing a volunteer coordinator.
- c. **Develop a plan for long-term sustainability of the parks.** The City's Open Space and Recreation Element, prepared in 1988 and revised in 1992-3 and 2001, does not provide a robust look forward for managing the parks. The City is aware of this deficiency, noting that "... much of the data included in the element (park facilities status and acreage, for example) is now outdated."

Because the Open Space and Recreation Element does not include detail on the uses that should be encouraged at Cesar Chavez Park, or along the Santa Fe right of way, we recommend that the plan be updated to reflect those newer parks, and include a blueprint for the sustainability of the Parks going forward. We recommend that the plan develop a mini-business plan for each significant facility, and metrics that identify users, and areas in which facilities can be re-envisioned to save maintenance costs.

- d. **Ensure accountability and transparency.** The Commission recommends that the Council establish, as part of any ballot measure, an accountability measure that articulates the metrics for measuring improvement in the parks, a body to review those measures, and an annual report process with an opportunity for public comment. We believe this measure will improve communication, and long term support for the parks.

BOND MEASURE

The Parks and Waterfront Commission also recommends that the City Council consider submitting to the voters a bond measure for improvement of Berkeley's parks. We have identified the following priority projects. This list is not exclusive, and will address some of the most pressing major maintenance projects and provide greater equity in distribution of parks throughout the city.

- A. Re-open Willard Pool and complete major maintenance projects at King and West Campus. We support efforts to repair these three pools to address the equity issues associated with having pools that are hard to reach from some areas, and to make sure that all children learn to swim.
- B. Set aside funding for a possible shortfall in insurance funding at Berkeley Tuolumne Camp. It is likely that there will be costs to rebuild the Camp to newer standards and avoid flood-prone areas and restored habitat. While insurance will cover most of the rebuilding, some additional funds may be necessary.
- C. Rose Garden Park. Rose Garden Park is one of the oldest parks in Berkeley, and was selected to receive funding from the East Bay Regional Park District's measure WW. However, there are important safety and historic elements that are not covered by that measure.
- D. Cesar Chavez Park. At 90 acres, Cesar Chavez is Berkeley's largest park. It is also relatively closer to West Berkeley, which lacks parks. Maintaining the landfill's integrity during the post-closure process limits options for intensive recreation, but the paths, landscaping, and erosion control all need attention. Bringing the paths up to Bay Trail standards will provide significant benefits for the disabled community, as the park is tied into the upgraded Bay Trail recently completed, and to the Berkeley Outdoor Recreation Program (BORP)

which encourages recreation for those in wheelchairs and adaptive bicycles. We support these improvements, including the ongoing solar calendar project.

- E. Live Oak. Live Oak Park is rather large, at 5.5 acres, and is centrally located near commercial areas. It has some of the most heavily used and intensive recreational facilities, with tennis, volleyball and basketball courts, and a popular recreational center. We recommend funding for the most pressing upgrades to the art and recreation center.
- F. Aquatic Park. Aquatic Park consists of nearly 33 acres of land and nearly 68 acres of water, making it the second largest park in Berkeley. It is venerable—old—having been constructed during the WPA in 1935-37. It is also the home to the Berkeley Outdoor Recreation Program and the landing for the bicycle and pedestrian bridge that provides access to the waterfront. There have been a number of recent improvements at the north end, but the trails on the west side are not friendly for those with disabilities, and circulation is badly impaired due to deteriorated culverts (often called tide tubes.) We support funding for the tide tubes, paving and landscaping to improve accessibility.
- G. James Kenney is one of the few parks located in West Berkeley. It is 4.2 acres in area, and includes basketball, volleyball, and tennis courts, a gymnasium, a recreational center, and a children's playground. We support funding for repair of the deteriorated building, the most pressing court repairs, and other improvements.
- H. Bay Trail spur in the Marina. Providing full compliance with the ADA in all of Berkeley's parks is an enormous and expensive challenge. But the director of the BORP programs at Aquatic Park has recommended that improvements to the Bay Trail are one of the highest priorities for accommodating the greatest number of people with the widest range of disabilities. Recreational programs run from the BORP center at Aquatic Park can now reach the South Basin. We support completing the Bay Trail spur in the marina to connect to Cesar Chavez Park, and improving the paths at Cesar Chavez Park, which would make the entire waterfront accessible to those with disabilities.
- I. Ohlone Dog Park. Work has been under way at Ohlone Park, and we support supplemental funding to allow completion of the dog park and upgrading the trash receptacles and benches, called for in the public meetings.
- J. Open Space Plan. We support an update to the General Plan Open Space and Recreation Element, and/or initiating the development of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, to include a public process that reviews all facilities and recreation programs, and develops a vision for the future of Berkeley Parks. The Master Plan is to identify strategies to provide access to recreation and open space that is equitable, fiscally sustainable and environmentally

responsible for all Berkeley citizens. The plan is to be coordinated with Berkeley city goals for sustainable systems and resources, financial viability and management and long-term reduced maintenance. Planning for completion of the Santa Fe Right-of-Way and improvements to Cesar Chavez Park are to be included.

- K. Santa Fe Right of Way. Berkeley's Open Space plan has called for a community planning effort for Santa Fe Right of Way, but that plan has not been completed. We support a community planning effort and implementation of at least a first phase of improvements.
- L. Mini Grants. We support establishing a mini-grant program for small projects that engage local communities.

CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

The Commission considered the following important criteria in establishing the list of priority projects.

- **Equity:** addresses a perceptible imbalance in the delivery of recreational resources City-Wide.
- **Community Needs:** meets the needs of an underserved community, group, or neighborhood that has not benefited from parks improvements or has waited a long time for the improvements.
- **Net benefit:** benefits a large cohort of users or increases the number of users.
- **Serve multiple user cohorts:** will attract users of various ages, serve families, provide safe play for children and be accessible to the disabled.
- **Pressing and preventative repair:** needs immediate repair that will cost more if delayed.
- **Ready to implement:** has passed the planning stage including environmental review if required and is good to go.
- **Visible.** Corrects or improves an obvious need or eye-sore.
- **Outcomes:** identifies results and returns within a practical time frame.
- **Cost effective:** leverages funds and qualifies for grants.
- **Economic benefit:** will stimulate nearby development and business
- **Sustainable maintenance:** keeps up with inflation and staff costs.
- **Encourages volunteer collaboration.**

CITY MANAGER

See City Manager companion report.

CONTACT PERSON

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