



P.O. Box 13673, Berkeley, CA 94712      [www.bpfp.org](http://www.bpfp.org)

*Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative*

---

*PO Box 2801, Berkeley, CA 94702*

*Earth Island Institute Restoration Initiative*

*2150 Allston Way, Suite 460, Berkeley, CA 94704*

**Berkeley Climate Action Coalition Land Use Working Group**

**Ecology Center, 2530 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, 94702**

October 16, 2013

**RE: Vision for Berkeley's Parks, Completing the Santa Fe ROW in South Berkeley, and Partnerships for Parks and Parklets**

Dear members of the Parks and Waterfront Commission:

We are submitting the following comments to assist the Parks and Waterfront Commission (PWC) in development of recommendations for the "future of parks and facilities," which we understand to be a potential parks bond or tax measure. These comments are submitted on behalf Berkeley Partners for Parks (BPFP), the Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative (BCGC), the Berkeley Climate Action Coalition Land Use Working Group, and the Earth Island Restoration Initiative, who are signatories to it. In the following recommendations, we set forth an outline of criteria and projects that we believe meets community-based and partnership objectives that may be overlooked the current Parks and Recreation Department staff-driven recommendations. While improvements are certainly needed to existing park facilities, and we are aware that Staff have identified almost \$60 million in deferred maintenance projects, we believe that a Parks Bond/Measure (Measure) should not be predicated only on improvements to existing parks, as this approach is piecemeal and lacking in vision for the future of our city and thus would put it on uncertain grounds to garner sufficient public support for its approval by the voters. We would like to offer the PWC the elements for this missing vision that we believe will be broadly supported by Berkeley citizenry.

**Proposed Criteria for Parks Bond.** We encourage the PWC to regard our city's parks as part of an emerging public *open space network*, connected and/or complemented by greenways, bike boulevards, community gardens, and creeks, all which gives parks a more integrated context, and one that enhances their value and utility, as well as the City's sense

of resilience and sustainability (particularly in response to the implications of climate change). In parallel with contextual perspective, we urge the PWC to assemble a Parks Measure package that is based on publically vetted selection criteria that would prioritize for improvements that serve to fulfill:

- 1) **Multiple objectives** (e.g., recreation, alternative transportation, neighborhood identity, and food security);
- 2) **Capacity to engender and leverage partnerships** and other funding sources and/or sweat equity to implement improvements; and partnerships with non-profit youth and community organizations for maintenance (e.g. Berkeley Youth Alternatives and the Ecology Center, BFPF and BCGC);
- 3) **Fulfillment of other plans' relevant objectives** including the Berkeley Climate Action Plan, Pedestrian and Bicycle Plans, General Plan and Downtown, which provides for multiple benefits and further validates improvements in the absence of an Open Space/Parks Plan;
- 4) **Community Resilience and Sustainability** as measured by projects that incorporate features like community gardens (food security), green infrastructure, and/or drought-resistant, native, and low maintenance planting; and
- 5) **Geographic equitability**, where areas like South Berkeley and selected commercial areas are lacking in parks/open space resources relative to the remainder of the City.

Berkeley's parks need much more than improvements for aging facilities; they need a new open space vision that brings in fresh ideas and renewed energy, one that incorporates the criteria of partnership, sustainability, and resilience. This would be a vision that reflects sustainability, partnerships, and providing community-building connectivity and multiple benefits.

**Proposed Projects.** We recommend the following two projects be included in the Parks Bond/Measure package as they reflect the aforementioned criteria and a broader vision for the City's parks:

1. **Completing the Santa Fe Right of Way (ROW) as a "Garden Greenway" in South Berkeley** (see below for overview and attached for background).
2. **Seed funding for building parklets** that would be established on the commercial sections of Telegraph to help in its revitalization), Shattuck Ave (to further the Downtown Open Space plan), and/or Adeline -- in partnership with neighboring businesses who would agree to maintain them.

We would especially like to highlight the importance of planning and implementing the South Berkeley Santa Fe Right ROW as a leading project in the proposed Park Bond, as it amply fulfills the noted criteria, is part of a regional greenway (extending to Richmond) and is a vacant land owned by the City of Berkeley since 1977. As Exhibit 1 attests, the community has been developing a vision for this fenced off public space that includes community gardens/linear urban farms and a greenway for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Furthermore, South Berkeley needs more open space; Berkeley as a whole needs more community gardens; and the 7-mile Santa Fe ROW/Ohlone Greenway should be completed through South Berkeley.

South Berkeley has the fewest parks of any area in Berkeley and is in deficient of places to play, walk and bike, for community gardening, or just to sit and enjoy more natural

surroundings relative to the rest of Berkeley. This segment of the Santa Fe ROW, stretching from Dwight Way to Oregon Street, (see map below) -- would fulfill that need. It is owned by the public but unused for almost 40 years while the remainder of the Santa Fe corridor north of Dwight Way to the City's border with Albany has been developed with a combination of parks, community gardens and the Ohlone Greenway. Indeed, this is the last segment of the 7-mile Santa Fe ROW corridor, stretching from Spiral Gardens (at Sacramento Street) to the Bay Trail in Richmond that has not been developed as a greenway. Creating this final link in this East Bay greenway is an opportunity of a lifetime for the City of Berkeley and its citizens.

The Santa Fe Right of Way community planning effort for the past five years has been a partnership of a variety of organizations and has a steering committee that periodically meets regarding planning efforts. The South Berkeley Santa Fe Right of Way's partners and stakeholders include:

- Berkeley Partners for Parks (BFPF)
- Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative (BCGC)
- The Berkeley Ecology Center
- City of Berkeley - Public Health Department, Public Works Department, and Parks and Recreation Departments
- Rails To Trails Conservancy
- Berkeley Youth Alternatives or BYA (*maintains Strawberry Creek Park in the north end of the Project area.*)
- Center for Eco-literacy
- The Berkeley Path Wanderers
- San Pablo Park Neighborhood Council (*resident association near the southern terminus of SF ROW*)
- Spiral Gardens (*non-profit nursery located at the southern terminus of the SF ROW*)
- Earth Island Institute Restoration Initiative
- The Berkeley Climate Action Coalition
- Friends of Westbrae Commons (*non profit coalition, maintains the "Ohlone Natural and Cultural History Corridor"*)
- Livable Berkeley (*organization that advocates for sustainable development in Berkeley*)
- University of California (including the Art Practices Department, Department of Environmental Planning and Landscape Architecture, Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management)
- Neighbors of the South Berkeley Santa Fe ROW



Based on the importance of this project and the community-based planning already undertaken for it, as attested by the background description provided in Exhibit 1, the City Council recently approved a measure sponsored by Council member Darryl Moore to obtain an estimate for the planning and implementation of the South Berkeley Santa Fe ROW. This will be made available to the PWC and staff in a manner timely for furnishing recommendations for the Parks Measure .

**Parks Mini-Grants Program.** Finally, we recommend that the Parks Measure include a new Parks Mini-Grant Program to foster partnerships for improvements to parks — such a program would encourage sweat equity and innovation while nurturing a shared sense of ownership and community among park users. These would be available to community and park friend groups and businesses to leverage other funding sources and inspire sweat equity and partnerships. It could be administered in the same manner that the last “parks mini-grant program” (1995-2000) was, by BPPF. The last one was very successful and realized improvements in city parks at one-third of the actual cost due to leveraging of other funds and sweat equity. In conjunction with this proposal, we also advocate that a Volunteer and Grants coordinator position be funded as part of the Parks Bond/Measure to institutionalize partnerships and help to build capacity within the community for community-based stewardships.

We urge the City to harness the remarkable community assets and partnership potentials that are present in these recommended new facilities, ones that are much needed and that should be the flagships of a proposed Parks Bond.

Yours truly,



John Steere, President Berkeley Partners for Parks



Beebo Turman, Coordinator, Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative



Ariana Katovich, Director, Earth Island Institute Restoration Initiative



Shawna McCarroll, Co-chair, Berkeley Climate Action Coalition Land Use Working Group

## Exhibit 1

### South Berkeley Santa Fe Right of Way Garden Greenway



*The Santa Fe ROW “mobile mural,” painted by the community in 2010, is a vision of the SFROW as a garden greenway, hanging on the fence enclosing it at Ward below Sacramento*

#### BACKGROUND

**History of the Santa Fe Right of Way in Berkeley:** The Santa Fe Railroad operated on this ROW from Point Richmond to Oakland from 1904 to the 1960s. In 1977, the citizens of Berkeley approved “Measure Y,” which provided about \$500,000 for the acquisition and development of the full 3.1-mile stretch of the Santa Fe Railroad Right-of-way (**SF ROW**) through Berkeley. Berkeley’s City Council approved the acquisition in 1978. Two parks were built on the ROW in the early 1980s: Cedar-Rose Park and Strawberry Creek Park, built just south of University Avenue (this was the first removal from a culvert or “day-lighting” restoration of an urban creek in the nation). Since then and continuing to the present, the remainder of the SF ROW in Berkeley, particularly north of University Avenue, has been developed largely as a greenway, comprising a multi-use path; intermittently adjoined by other features, such as basketball courts, and community gardens (e.g., the Peralta and Northside Gardens).

During the mid-1980’s several affordable housing projects, which were built on parcels adjacent to Channing and Dwight Way. In addition, immediately south of Ward Street, the City built a housing development, Sojourner Truth Way. Opposition to the continued loss of the SF ROW as a public asset led to the passage of the voter-approved Measure L that mandated retention of the remainder of the corridor as open space.

The Santa Fe ROW is formally recognized in the Open Space Element of the Berkeley General Plan (2000), which includes two policies related to the protection of the undeveloped portions of the SF ROW by indicating that no segments should not be sold off for housing, but be entirely retained as public “open space” in a multipurpose manner “including for greenways, parks, and community gardens.”

There have been three community-led and developed improvements to SF ROW in the past two decades. In the early 1990s, the City granted Berkeley Youth Alternatives the use of one block of the Santa Fe ROW—between Bancroft Street and Channing Way—for a youth-training and community garden. It remains a large and active garden today. In 2003, the City Council approved Spiral Gardens’ plan to build a plant nursery and urban farm at Sacramento and Oregon streets, at the very south end of the Santa Fe ROW. It is now a thriving native and edible plants nursery and educational center that also sells fresh produce from a street-stand. The third addition was the construction of a paved multi-use pathway running north of University Avenue for three blocks to Delaware Street and an informal, Berkeley Partners for Parks’ affiliates-led development of a trail on the corridor between Delaware and Lincoln Streets, connecting it to the Ohlone Greenway.



Some Berkeley community members have been interested in converting the Santa Fe ROW into a succession of green spaces since the early 1980s. During that time, a group formed to encourage the City to allocate funds. Community participation has been a key element in many of the existing greening, and park projects that have been established along the corridor, although public outreach and participation focusing on the So. Berkeley SF ROW began relatively recently.

2005 and 2006 a class of Landscape Architecture graduate students from the University of California, Berkeley conducted outreach to better understand the desires and concerns of community members related to the Berkeley Santa Fe corridor. Their work, which culminated in a publication that summarized their projects, "Citizen Participation in the Planning Process... Berkeley Parks and Open Space," contributed a wealth of knowledge and new ideas about how to transform the physical space of this corridor. In May 2006, the UC Berkeley students presented their projects to the community at a meeting in the old Santa Fe Depot (now the Montessori School). The community gathering brought renewed interest to the potential for re-developing the corridor. Community members began to talk together and brainstorm on how to get organized. Soon after the students' presentation, a stakeholder meeting was convened in May 2006, including Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Berkeley Partners for Parks, the Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative, Mayor Tom Bates and several other community organizations. The goal of the convening was to continue the planning process for the remaining available space along the Santa Fe ROW.

### **Community-based Planning Initiatives: 2009 to Present**

In November 2009, Berkeley Councilmember, Darryl Moore, whose district includes the southern portion of the SF ROW, helped to organize a community meeting to re-connect with Berkeley residents regarding the project of planning and developing the remaining open space. Among the potential open space features that were most-favored by the participants were a community garden or orchard, habitat restoration, a small, continuous pathway, a dog parks/run and tot-lot(s). Many expressed the desire that the space support multiple purposes.

In addition, the City authorized the preparation and publication of a "Vision Document" by the Rails to Trails Foundation, in cooperation with Berkeley Partners for Parks and the Berkeley Community Garden Collaborative, which resulted in ***The Berkeley Santa Fe Right-of-Way: AN OVERVIEW: HISTORY AND OPPORTUNITIES*** (2010).

Other community-based efforts and grants secured in the past several years include:

- **2009-2010 – Chancellors Grant for the "mobile mural"** (\$12,000). The mural was painted by neighbors of all ages and represents the expression of the community's vision for the Santa Fe ROW. That vision includes community gardens/linear urban farm and a greenway for bicyclists and pedestrians. The "Mobile Mural" project was funded by a UC Berkeley Chancellors Grant and is part of a larger community planning process spearheaded by the Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative (BCGC) and the Berkeley Partners for Parks (BPFP). Imagine the public land behind this fence, and



running for several blocks in each direction, like the scene portrayed in this mural...it is meant to inspire and mobilize the wider community toward creating a green and growing corridor across South Berkeley. It is called a mobile mural since the intention is to move the mural to cyclone fences at other street crossings of the Santa Fe ROW over the next few years.

- **2010-2011 National Park Service: Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program/Grant.** BPFP and BCGC secured a grant for 12 to 18 months of a planner from the National Parks Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Programs to lead the preparation of an opportunities and constraints analysis and schematic plan for the South Berkeley SF ROW. City of Berkeley Parks staff determined that it did not have staff time to support this effort and abandoned the partnership.

- **2012-2014 Chancellors grant for Bioremediation Garden:** This Project involves an active research garden on the SF ROW using Brake Ferns as a biological means to safely remediate soil toxins, in particular, Arsenic. It is being conducted by UC Berkeley's Environmental Science, Policy, and Management (ESPM ) Department in cooperation with Berkeley Partners for Parks, the Ecology Center and the Spiral Gardens. The Pallud Lab of UC Berkeley's ESPM Department is supervising the research plots on the SF ROW, being conducted via a two-year lease with the City of Berkeley. The Ecology Center, in collaboration with Spiral Gardens, has planned, and given the six public educational workshops on the theme of garden soil contamination and remediation

