



Sophie Hahn
Councilmember District 5

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA MATERIAL for Supplemental Packet 1

Meeting Date: November 9, 2021

Item Number: 16 - Budget Referral: Solano-Peralta Park
Restoration and Improvements

Submitted by: Councilmember Sophie Hahn

Amendments are submitted to the Budget Referral to restore and improve the Solano-Peralta Park, reflecting further consultation with the Director of Parks, Recreation and Waterfront and more accurately capturing actual conditions and anticipated costs.

To: Honorable Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Sophie Hahn
Subject: Budget Referral: Solano-Peralta Park Restoration and Improvements

RECOMMENDATION

Refer \$80,000 to the November 2021 AAO process to complete improvements to the Solano-Peralta Park located at 1559 Solano Avenue, bordered by Peralta and Capistrano Avenues.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Access to convenient outdoor space for dining and socializing is increasingly in demand due to COVID-19. If updated and revitalized, the Solano-Peralta Park has the potential to bring life to a retail environment that continues to struggle from the economic crisis. Unfortunately, park infrastructure is severely outdated, with benches worn and in some places crumbling, planters filled with dead plants, trees overgrown and/or dying, wooden dividers between concrete slabs splintering, and the park generally in need of maintenance and updates.

The Parks Department is scheduled to “clean up” the park this year, but no funds exist for improvements. Funds allocated will help to replant, refurbish, and update the park to meet current needs. A small investment can have a significant impact on this heavily used urban pocket-park. New permanent seating and cafe tables/chairs can be purchased to provide much needed outdoor community seating. Local merchants have offered to “adopt the spot” and take care of securing tables and chairs nightly and putting them out for the public each morning. Permanent benches need to be repainted or replaced. ADA accessible seating for eating should be added.

BACKGROUND

The Solano-Peralta Park is a small urban park consisting of a poured concrete plaza with a few scattered planters and benches and a relatively large fenced sandbox area for children. There is very little landscaping, other than several mature trees, some of which have been cut back significantly to accommodate overhead wires. A ring of dirt around the perimeter of the sandbox is the only non-hardscape area, and has almost no plantings other than the trees.

The park was funded by monies from Measure Y, the bond passed in 1974 for park development. The original design was adopted by the Parks and Recreation

Commission in November 1981, and the park was completed in 1983. Since that time, the park has not been updated. Situated on a busy corner with many nearby restaurants and shops, the small “pocket park” has the potential to operate as a lively urban plaza, but is extremely worn and tired. An adjacent restaurant has taken on regular sweeping and cleaning of the area, but the general poor condition results in a dilapidated and underutilized space in the center of a major North Berkeley commercial area.

The Parks Department has already scheduled maintenance and small improvements, focusing on the sandlot, which is no longer considered appropriate for children’s play in public parks and attracts animal litter, broken glass, and other undesirable elements. There are funds already available for a few items of play equipment and replacement of sand with a code compliant soft material. In addition, the Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Department (“Parks Department”) will review the health of the trees, at least one of which appears to be dying.

After discussion with the Parks Department Director, it is clear that a relatively small amount of additional funding, to replace the crumbling benches and a picnic table and plant the play area perimeter and plaza containers with drought tolerant plantings, would allow the whole park to be transformed, turning a neglected, underutilized space into a more vibrant, attractive and useable amenity for the commercial district and neighborhood. By joining these small additional improvements to the currently-planned and funded updates and repairs, a more complete and impactful project can be achieved with less disruption to park users and lower cost than undertaking two separate projects.

A landscape designer who lives close to the park has agreed to support the Parks Department on a volunteer basis by creating a simple design and specifying plantings and park furniture for approval by the Parks Department, so no additional design costs are entailed. Once funds are in hand and a plan is tentatively approved, my office will be available to partner with the Parks Department to hold a community meeting to receive input.

While the Parks Department will continue to undertake regular maintenance pursuant to its schedule, there are four entities that may be able to assist and support with more regular maintenance of this small urban park, once improved. The Solano Avenue BID and the Solano Avenue Association both may have funding that could be used to help maintain the park area, and could be approached to explore possibilities. In addition, one or more nearby restaurants and businesses may be willing to take on more regular maintenance, as is already the case with one establishment that is keeping the area clean. Finally, the park was created through the advocacy and support of a

neighborhood group which is no longer active, but could be reactivated, or a new group could be formed.

Given the many potential opportunities to support ongoing maintenance of plantings and cleanliness of new park furniture, the additional small investments to be funded through this allocation can make a big difference without additional maintenance requirements for the City of Berkeley.

These photos illustrate existing conditions:





The following improvements are already funded:

Replacement of sand in the tot-lot with a soft, natural fiber material more easily maintained. Addition of children's play equipment for active and imaginative play.

Additional Costs to be funded:

Update public benches and tables, replace cracked concrete benches and broken slats. Cost for new benches is estimated by the Parks Department at approximately \$5,000 per bench. Replacing 6 existing benches would cost approximately \$30,000. Replacing

the picnic table and adding additional cafe- or picnic-style seating will cost approximately \$15,000.

The plaza and tot lot are both in need of dedicated trash cans to maximize cleanliness, enjoyment and utility of the park. Standard dual recycle and trash cans are estimated by staff at \$5,000 per set, with three sets optimally required for a total of \$15,000

Much of the current grounds are bare dirt, especially the four sides around the tot lot and park exterior. Planting of manzanita or other low- to mid-height drought resistant ground cover, not taller than the tot lot fence, will create much-needed separation from the streets that encircle the play area on three sides (with no sidewalk to buffer), enhanced greenery, and a sense of place. Approximate cost of new plantings is \$20,000.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Budget request for \$80,000.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

No negative impacts. Benches, which match benches in Improvements will add greenery and contribute to increased walkability for the shopping district and neighborhood, encouraging residents to get out of their cars.

CONTACT PERSON

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