



Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission

CONSENT CALENDAR  
December 12, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
 From: Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission  
 Submitted by: Claudia Kawczynska, Chairperson  
 Subject: Council Referral – Request for City Community Survey for placing a Modest Increase in the Parks Tax on the November 2024 Ballot

### RECOMMENDATION

The Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission recommends that the City Council include in upcoming community survey for possible 2024 ballot measures, a measure to increase the Parks Tax by 4ct/ft<sup>2</sup> or ~20%, and appropriate funding for the survey.

### CITY MANAGER

City Manager concurs with the recommendation contained in this report.

The City Manager also requests that Council consider re-allocating the \$100,000 identified in the FY2024 Budget for the “Vision 2050 Complete Streets Parcel Tax Community Engagement and Program Plan” to a “community survey” for this and any other potential ballot measures.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The City’s Parks system is facing three major challenges:

- I. **Unfunded Major Maintenance and Capital Liabilities**  
 With all Measure T1 bond funds spent or allocated, the \$1M of the Parks Tax reserved for annual major maintenance/capital funding is insufficient to address the \$60 million in unfunded park capital needs. While there are federal and state grant opportunities, providing leverage of city taxpayer dollars from 1/1 to 5/1, the PRW Department does not have the matching funds required for many grants.
- II. **Declining Urban Forest**  
 Due to increased storm damage, old age, and lack of funding there are 10,000 empty tree spaces in City parks and the public right-of-way. In Berkeley, tree planting relies mainly on grant funding and volunteerism, resulting in little progress in filling empty tree spaces. While the existing urban forest coverage is adequate in the hill area, where it ranges from 20% - 50%,

it is inadequate in the flatlands, where it is 10% or less. A healthy urban forest can help address the impacts of Climate Change, by cooling urban spaces and mitigating the Heat Island Effect. The existing urban forest consists primarily of non-native trees, which do not support insect populations and the bird species that feed on them. By prioritizing native species and also using funds to increase the number of native-plant habitat gardens, the urban forest and park spaces can also help address Biodiversity Declines.

### III. Unequal Funding Across Parks

The City has 53 parks with a total of 250 acres. The 150 acres east of I-80 are maintained by the Parks Tax. West of I-80, the 100 acres of waterfront parks (Cesar Chavez, Shorebird and Horseshoe) are maintained by the much smaller Marina Fund, which has no reserves and has a structural deficit, causing the infrastructure in these parks to deteriorate.

At the City Council's March 20, 2023 Worksession, Staff suggested that while the current Parks Tax revenue cannot adequately fund maintenance costs, a voter-approved tax measure to increase the Parks Tax could unburden the Marina Fund and help close its structural deficit.

Consolidating ALL City Parks funding into the Parks Tax would ensure adequate funding for the three Waterfront Parks that comprise 40% of the City's total park acreage.

### IV. Solution

Addressing these problems will require additional funding, which could be provided by a modest increase in the Parks Tax that is comparable to the 17% increase approved by the voters in 2014. The estimated \$3.5M in annual revenue for this proposed new increase in November 2024 would be used to:

1. Double major maintenance/capital project funding
2. Increase grant matching funds to leverage city taxpayer dollars
3. Create a dedicated Urban Forest Unit to build a healthy urban forest of native trees.
4. Adequately fund the major/minor maintenance of the three waterfront parks.

### CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

At a regular meeting on November 8, 2023, the Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission approved a motion to communicate a recommendation to Council to include an increase in the Parks Tax by 4cts/SF or ~20% in a community survey for possible November 2024 ballot measures. The estimated \$3.5M annually, would be split equally between: major maintenance/capital projects, Urban Forest restoration, and consolidation of three Waterfront Parks into City Park system.

M/S/C (Avellar/Kawczynska/U). Ayes: Abshez; Avellar; Cox; Diehm; Kawczynska; Lee; Ranuzzi; Wozniak; Noes: None; Absent: Hurtado; Leave of Absence: None.

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS**

A modest increase in the Parks Tax can help the City maintain a healthy urban forest and City parks to better address the impacts of Climate Change, by cooling urban spaces and mitigating the Heat Island Effect.

**RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

See body of the report.

**ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED**

None

**CONTACT PERSON**

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Claudia Kawczynska, Chairperson, Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission

