

ACTION CALENDAR
June 16, 2026



To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Shoshana O'Keefe (Author) and Councilmember Brent Blackaby (Co-Sponsor)
Subject: Budget Referral for the Solano Avenue Stroll

RECOMMENDATION

1. Refer to the FY 2027-2028 Budget Process the cost of providing police, fire, and public works services to the Solano Stroll, totaling \$81,000 per year, for a two-year total of \$162,000, including:
 - a. \$55,000 per year for Police, including command/supervision, dispatch, community service officers, and parking enforcement officers to manage traffic control, safety, and missing children;
 - b. \$14,000 per year to cover the cost of Fire Department staffing and the use of fire engines and ambulances; and
 - c. \$12,000 per year for Waste Management Services.
2. Refer to the FY 2027-2028 Budget Process the cost of safety barricades, street closure supplies, and zero waste fees including:
 - a. \$50,000 per year for vehicle barricade rentals (\$100,000 total);
 - b. \$6,000 per year for street closure supplies and rentals (\$12,000 total); and
 - c. \$1,500 per year to cover zero waste fees (\$3,000 total).
3. Refer to the City Manager to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of purchasing barriers for City use compared to the ongoing costs of renting barriers, and report back with findings and recommendations.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On May 28, 2026 the Budget and Finance Committee took the following action: M/S/C (Ishii/Blackaby) to send the item to Council with a qualified positive recommendation with amendments to include a referral to staff to cost out purchasing barriers as opposed to renting them.

Vote: Ayes – Blackaby, Ishii; Noes – None; Abstain – None; Absent - Kesarwani

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Solano Avenue Stroll (the “Stroll” or the “Solano Stroll”) is an annual, multicultural event that draws visitors of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities from Berkeley and neighboring

communities. The event is an inclusive, no-barrier, family-friendly, outdoor celebration that is and always has been free to the public.

As the largest street fair in the East Bay, the Stroll draws upwards of 250,000 people and spans both Albany and Berkeley. Its scale and regional significance requires a high level of coordination and long-standing partnership between the two cities, which have provided consistent in-kind and financial support for decades.

The Solano Avenue Association, led by a board of local stakeholders, works diligently to produce the Stroll on a "shoestring" budget, despite the event's size and complexity. Following a two-year pause during the COVID-19 pandemic, the event returned with renewed community support and enthusiasm, drawing its largest crowd yet in 2023.

While the City previously provided in-kind services such as police, fire, and public works to support the event, including in 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025, the City is no longer able to provide these services at no cost. Given the City's ongoing structural deficit, estimated to be between \$27 and \$30 million, these expenses must be budgeted for.

The Solano Avenue Association has repeatedly expressed its gratitude to Berkeley and Albany for supporting the event's success, especially in the face of pandemic-related losses and the years following. The Association has determined that without the support of city services, the event may not be able to move forward.

The 50th Solano Avenue Stroll is scheduled to take place on September 13, 2026.

BACKGROUND

The Solano Avenue Association was formed in 1974 and achieved nonprofit status in 1983. The Association's signature annual event – the Solano Avenue Stroll – is an approximately one-mile long, 26-block closed-street festival, spanning Solano Avenue from the Alameda to San Pablo Avenue in both Berkeley and Albany. Attended by some 250,000 people each year, the Stroll is a free, family-friendly, smoke- and alcohol-free one-day event celebrating the vitality and diversity of the East Bay.

In 2000, the Solano Avenue Stroll became an official "Local Legacy," included in the United States Library of Congress with the help of Congresswoman Barbara Lee and was recognized as celebrating "America's rich diverse culture." Now approaching its semicentennial, the Stroll has been sponsored with both services and funds by the Cities of Berkeley and Albany longer than the Solano Avenue Association has records.

The Stroll draws both local residents and visitors from across the region. In 2013, a zip code survey was taken from 453 event goers and recorded 139 different zip codes from across the Bay Area. The event kicks off with a parade featuring dancers, bands, floats, and youth and families from many schools and organizations. Typically, the Stroll features over 500 vendors, including 50 entertainers representing a wide variety of cultures, food from 50 booths and local

restaurants representing cuisines from every continent, 150 government and non-profit agencies, 150 juried handcrafters, a 75-participant parade with local bands, performers, schools, and organizations, safe mechanical rides for children, and more. The Stroll gives people from near and far a rare opportunity to experience everything our unique community has to offer.

The event also provides significant community and economic benefits. Not only does the event introduce thousands of visitors to local businesses in Berkeley, it also allows for nonprofits, community organizations, city departments, faith institutions, schools, sports teams, elected officials and more to conduct meaningful outreach and connect directly with thousands of constituents and provide information about opportunities, programs, and services. All these groups rely on the exposure provided by the Stroll to connect with stakeholders, potential clients, volunteers, and donors – in-person.

The Stroll draws significant traffic to local restaurants, retail businesses, and arts and culture venues who participate in the event, and Solano Avenue merchants – both long-standing and newly arrived – benefit from the exposure to 250,000 potential customers. Some 92% of participating organizations and vendors return each year.

It takes about 600 staff-hours to produce the Solano Stroll, plus thousands of additional volunteer hours, and the event is one of only four in the United States and Canada that operates in two municipalities simultaneously.¹ The Stroll is unique in that it requires coordination among municipalities and with the Solano Avenue Association to ensure security, zero waste, toilet facilities, parade staging, setup and take-down of performance, commerce, and event spaces, electricity, barricades, and other services and elements. Despite the magnitude of the Stroll, Solano Avenue is virtually spotless and fully restored to normal operations within 24 hours of the close of the event.

While historically, city services were provided at no-cost, given budgetary and General Fund constraints, that is no longer possible. To ensure that the festival can continue, this item also refers \$55,000 per year to the budget process for Berkeley Police Department event support and \$14,000 for Fire Department staffing. Furthermore, this item refers to the budget process \$50,000 per year for vehicle barricade rentals (\$100,000 total), \$6,000 per year for street closure supplies and rentals (\$12,000 total), and \$1,500 per year to cover zero waste fees (\$3,000 total).

Though the Solano Stroll may be the first event to confront the reality of having to pay for both city services and street closure supplies, future special events will have to do the same. Therefore, this item asks City Staff to consider the costs and benefits of purchasing the barriers instead of continuing to rent them.

¹ A Brief History of the Solano Avenue Stroll,” Solano Avenue Association.
<https://www.solanoavenueassn.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/solanoavenuestrollhistory.pdf>

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Without City support, it's likely the Solano Avenue Association will be unable to take on the financial cost of the event and the Solano Stroll will cease to exist. In recent years, Berkeley has already seen the loss or near-loss of several beloved community events – including the Kite Festival, 4th of July at the Marina, and the Berkeley Flea Market. These closures and near misses underscore the fragility of free community events. Against this backdrop, the City cannot afford to lose another signature event like the Solano Stroll – one of the last remaining large-scale, free, and deeply rooted community celebrations.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The Solano Avenue Association works actively to minimize the environmental impact of the Stroll. In addition to regular AC Transit service, free event-day shuttles provide rides from 10AM to 7PM to and from the North Berkeley BART Station and up and down the length of Marin Avenue, making stops at intersections with stop lights on Marin. In the past, free valet bicycle parking, provided by the Albany High School Cougars mountain biking team and the Albany Strollers & Rollers, has been available.

Recycling and composting are part of the zero waste ethos of the event. In 2022, the Solano Avenue Association began requiring all vendors to provide only compostable bags and foodware, unless items are not available due to supply chain challenges, or for health and safety reasons (to avoid spilling of hot liquids, for example). Recycling and composting bins have and will continue to be provided along the entire route of the event.

FISCAL IMPACTS

As noted above, the Solano Avenue Stroll provides day-of and residual income to local businesses, and generates significant regional exposure and goodwill, contributing to the local tax base and economy.

The item refers to the budget process City services totaling \$162,000 (\$81,000 per year), and expenses related to zero waste and safety including barricades and street closure supplies totaling \$115,000 (\$57,500 per year).

CONTACT

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ATTACHMENTS

None.