

The Berkeley Santa Fe Right-of-Way

AN OVERVIEW: HISTORY AND OPPORTUNITIES

for

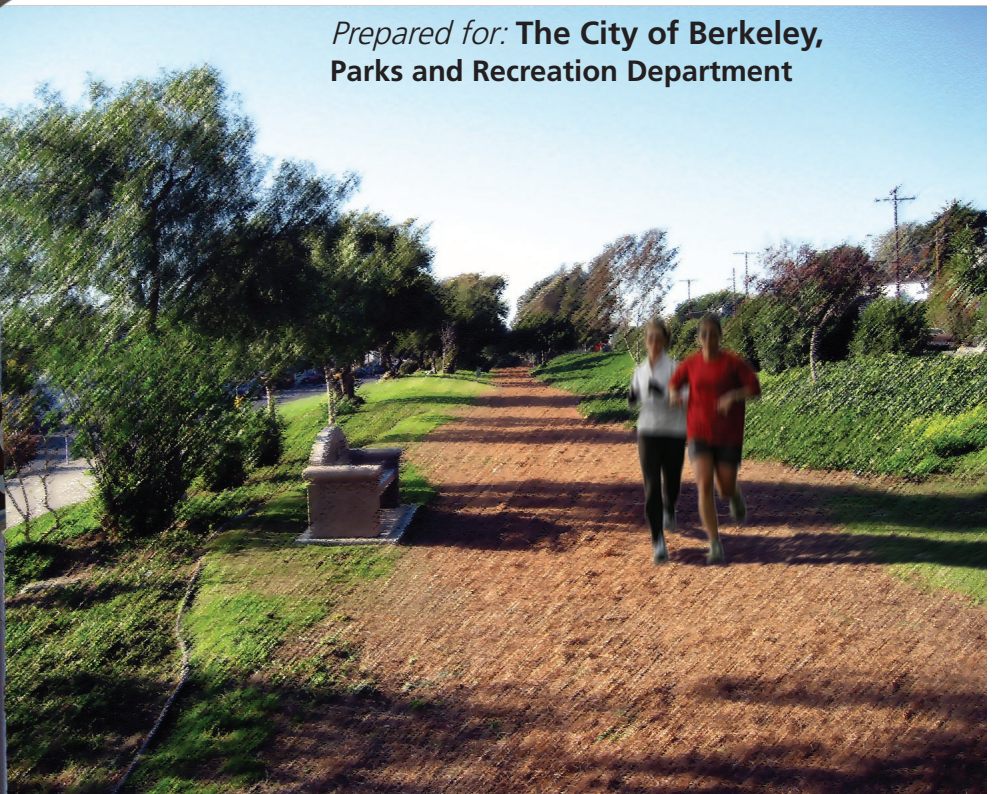
- ▶ a linear park and commons
- ▶ an urban greenway
- ▶ a community resource



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In Cooperation with: **Berkeley Partners for Parks and Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative**

Prepared for: **The City of Berkeley, Parks and Recreation Department**



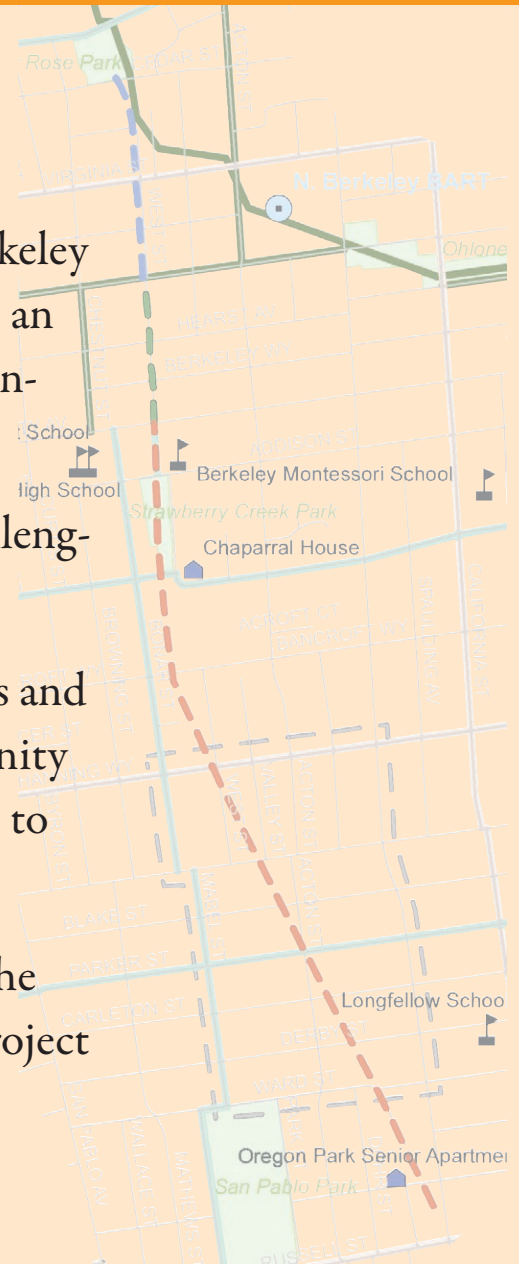
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The South Berkeley Santa Fe Right-of-Way

The purpose of this document is to:

- Provide a broad overview of the Berkeley Santa Fe right-of-way (ROW), with an emphasis on the space between Channing Way and Oregon Street
- Describe the opportunities and challenges and benefits of this public asset
- Provide a package Berkeley residents and decision-makers can use for community outreach and to describe the project to potential funding agencies.
- Provide information to help guide the planning and development of the project



History of the Berkeley Santa Fe Right-of-Way



In 1904, the Santa Fe Railroad established the “Oakland Local,” which ran from Point Richmond to Oakland, and ran diagonally through Berkeley. The Oakland Local served passengers and freight until the 1950s, when the automobile doomed rail passenger service. While passenger service officially ended in the late 1950s, freight trains continued to run on the line while the City of Berkeley began to look at alternative ways to purchase and/or use the corridor.

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 (Santa Fe ROW) through Berkeley (Figure 1). Berkeley’s City Council approved the acquisition in 1978, and a year later they approved the development of the Santa Fe ROW for a combination of “park land, housing, and to sell to neighboring residents.” The Santa Fe Railroad agreed to remove its tracks, railroad ties, crossing and signaling equipment. The City then completed two significant improvements to this land in the early 1980s: one was Cedar-Rose Park, built at the northern end of Berkeley’s Santa Fe ROW; the second was 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).

After the City constructed those two parks, the rest of the corridor remained undeveloped except for 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 which mandated retention of the remainder of the corridor as open space. In addition, the City’s 2000 General Plan forbade additional parcel sales of the right-of-way. The corridor was thus designated exclusively for parks, pathways, tot lots, community gardens and other resident-supported open space projects.

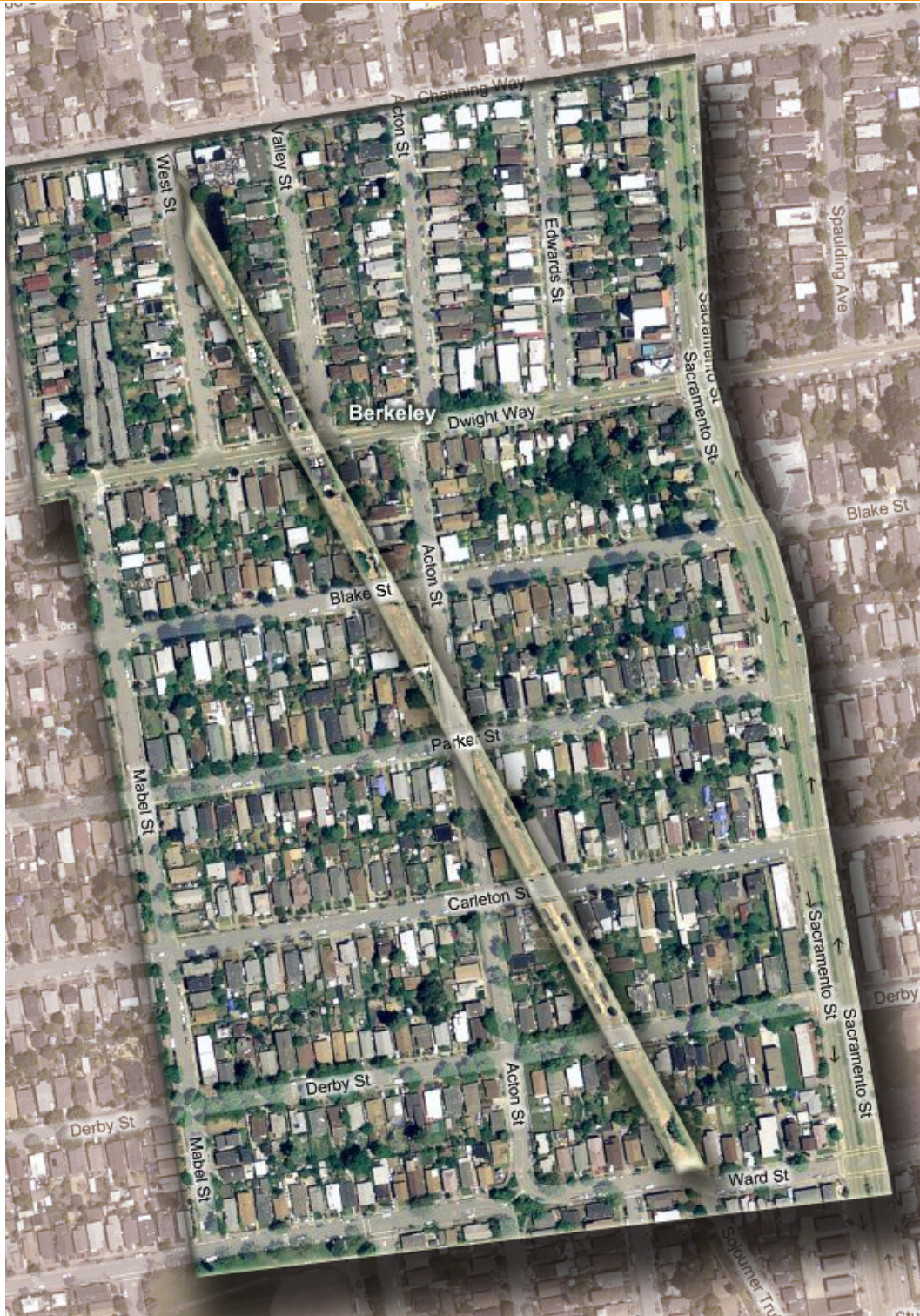


The Santa Fe ROW — taken from Blake Street, looking south.

Figure 1 Berkeley Santa Fe Right-of-Way



Figure 2 Berkeley Santa Fe Project Area



Realizing the Promise of Parkland

There have been three community-led and developed improvements to the Santa Fe Right of Way (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. The City is interested in connecting this extension to the Ohlone Greenway at some point in the future.

What remains of the undeveloped corridor—a six-block section from Channing Way to Ward Street (Figure 2) -- presents

another unique opportunity to create much-needed open space in the community of South Berkeley and link to the existing Santa Fe ROW greenway, which extends as the “Ohlone Greenway” all the way to Richmond. As suggested in Figure 1, this linear commons, when completed, will be accessible and welcoming to a variety of people and to community resources, such as:

- Schools
- Daycare and youth centers
- Parks and community gardens
- Existing and proposed bicycle pathways
- Transit nodes such as the North Berkeley BART and AC Transit stops
- South Berkeley Public Library
- Senior housing

One thing has become universally clear from community discussions of the South Berkeley SF ROW: **the greenway’s potential is enormous.** As a gathering spot, a recreational pocket, a natural escape and a green and growing space, the Santa Fe ROW can define a significant new community landscape and commons for South Berkeley..



Spiral Gardens — a gardening success story on the Santa Fe ROW.

Berkeley Community Orchard

While neighborhood residents and community groups have identified a variety of potential uses for the SFROW, the concept of creating a community orchard has been developed the most. The vision for the orchard can be traced back to 1998, and a passionate group of residents is still advocating for it.

Several soil tests have been conducted and a draft site plan has been created for the proposed orchard site, which sits between Carleton and Derby streets on the ROW. Trace amounts of arsenic were identified on the parcel in a toxicity study, but higher arsenic levels occur naturally in the area. Nevertheless, the city of Berkeley is not comfortable allowing public use of the space without further testing, and the area has been gated off.

Though challenges exist for the project, it should not be overlooked that a great deal of work and creative energy have been dedicated to the concept, and that it remains popular with neighborhood residents.

Community Outreach & Participation



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, the Vision document's project area, began relatively recently.

In 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. These students conducted interviews with the leaders of several neighborhood organizations, and 200 surveys were distributed to South Berkeley residents. This outreach found general consensus among residents that green, quiet, park-like activities such as community gardens, native plant displays, lawn space and bike/pedestrian pathways were preferable to louder, more active uses such as basketball or bocce courts.

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.

In the spring of 2008, two walks were organized and conducted along the Santa Fe ROW by Berkeley Partners for Parks and the Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative. The groups visited community gardens, artwork along the Ohlone Greenway, nearby parks, school gardens and neighborhood stores. They also shared their ideas on how these amenities related to the Santa Fe corridor, and what they would like to see in the future.

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. More than 40 people convened at the San Pablo Park Community Center to discuss the future uses of the Santa Fe Corridor. 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, and that while nearby San Pablo Park is devoted mainly to active sports, this space should complement the park by focusing on more passive uses.

Unique as the Santa Fe ROW linear park would be, it follows in the long tradition of rail-trails as community amenities. While the personalities of these pathways may be diverse, they still share a common history and a common set of community and natural benefits.

The Story of Rail-Trails



In 1916, the world's most extensive rail transportation network stretched across the United States, with cities and small towns connected by ribbons of street. In that year, the railroad system peaked with more than 270,000 miles of track winding across every state.

Yet due to changes in development and transportation patterns, economics and politics, railroads have since stopped utilizing more than 150,000 miles of track.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) formed in 1986 to preserve this integral part of our nation's heritage. By converting unused rail into multi-use trails, the corridors continue to play a vital role in communities across the United States.

Today, the thriving rail-trail movement has created thousands of public trails for running, walking, bicycling, playing, community gardening and other purposes. There are approximately 15,000 miles of rail-trail across the United States, and more than 350 miles in California alone. Converted rail-trails have many benefits:

- Rail-trails have gentle grades and minimal road intersections, making them perfect for seniors, families and people with disabilities.
- Rail-trails act as linear greenways through urban areas, providing much-needed open space and

new recreational opportunities.

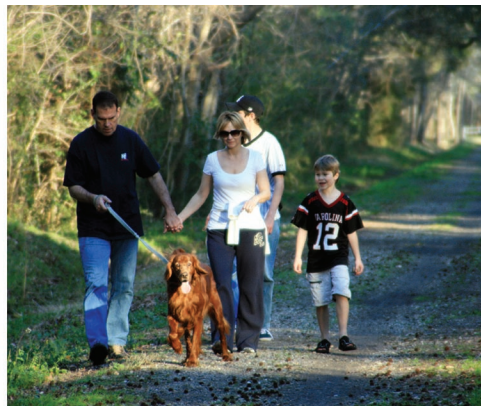
- Rail-trails promote sustainable land use and help revive historic business districts.
- Rail-trails are independent community amenities that enhance existing recreational resources by linking neighborhoods and schools to parks, waterfronts, recreational centers and other facilities.

Benefits

Health

Trails create transportation and recreation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe accessible places to bike, walk, jog, skate or play. In doing so, they make it easier for people to engage in physical activity. The physical environmental has a substantial impact on the activity level of communities. A recent survey found that 43 percent of people with safe places to walk within 10 minutes of their home meet recommended activity levels, while just 27 percent of those without safe places to walk are sufficiently active (Active Living Network, 2007).

If more Americans embrace walking and biking as everyday options, we can create a healthier nation.





Community

Community and family are at the heart of the American trail experience. One of the most significant benefits of trails is the sense of community and the connections they build. Well-designed trails transform “community” from an abstraction into a real, physical space.

Trails connect people with places, enabling them to walk or cycle to run errands or commute to work. Trails provide natural, scenic areas that motivate people to spend more time outdoors and remain physically active. Trails connect neighborhoods and schools so children can cycle or walk to their friends’ homes or to school, especially in communities that lack sidewalks. Like gyms and health clubs, community pathways also serve as a place where people can see and interact with other people exercising. Researchers have found that a lack of this type of social support is often a barrier to participation in exercise.

Transportation

Active transportation choices—like walking or biking to work instead of using a car—allow people to meet their neighbors and stroll along neighborhood streets. The short walking and biking trips that become daily routines can replace many of the longer, auto trips that clog neighborhoods around the country. When offered a real choice through the provision of walking and biking infrastructure, people will often choose to walk and bike.

With short trips under three miles representing near-

ly half of all trips taken (FHWA 2006), walking and biking are poised to bring healthy, clean transportation to communities around the country.

Environment/Climate

Recent studies have shown that making communities more bike- and pedestrian-friendly can significantly reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions by driving down vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Walking and biking are mainstream components of a strong climate-change management strategy today. With increased investment, the potential for this clean and healthy transportation mode to help decrease carbon emissions can be significant.

Economic Benefits

Trails can be powerful tools for economic development. The New York Times recently noted a National Association of Homebuilders study that found that trails are the number one amenity potential homeowners cite when choosing a new community. Trails are increasingly being used to help urban communities revitalize long-underutilized corridors. Trails are building strong, vital communities with increased property values for area residents and improved economic opportunities for local businesses.

By consciously linking trails and businesses, and by providing new desirable housing choices along trails, communities around the country are building vital, economically stable neighborhoods that are truly sustainable.

Opportunities & Challenges



Several **timely opportunities** now exist that encourage the development of the Santa Fe ROW into linear open space and that require action before they are lost. Several significant constraints must also be addressed.

Opportunities

- Unused, vacant space designated exclusively for open space
- Support and commitment from local organizations including Berkeley Community Gardening Collaborative (BCGC), Berkeley Partners for Parks (BPPF), Livable Berkeley, the San Pablo Park Neighborhood Association, among others
- Support and commitment from local organizations
- The corridor can create a commons for a diverse neighborhood that lacks sufficient open space for recreation and community gardening
- Public - non-profit partnership for stewardship and/or maintenance of ROW features including vegetation, paths, and community gardens,
- Support from key elected officials, including Mayor Tom Bates and Councilman Darryl Moore

Challenges

- Lack of complete corridor continuity
- Some soil toxicity
- City budgetary constraints for park development and maintenance
- Space is limited, and all ideas will not likely be implemented



Courtesy of Brian Whyte

Funding Opportunities



The City recognizes the value of the SF ROW as a resource to provide for an improved quality of life for the community. However, a chief concern of elected officials and City staff is the cost of implementation and ongoing maintenance for the project. Fortunately, numerous regional, state and federal funding sources are available to plan and construct parks.

While rail-trail projects are often funded through transportation funding sources, this project is as much a linear park as a transportation corridor. Listed below are potential funding sources that focus on park development. Other potential funding resources are provided in Appendix A, “Berkeley Santa Fe ROW Funding Matrix,” (a separately bound document).

Park Development and Community Revitalization Act of 2008

Introduced as CA Assembly Bill 31, this grant program establishes a local funding stream that targets the acquisition and development of parkland in critically under-served communities. Proposition 84 will provide four hundred million dollars to fund the program.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

California’s Department of Parks and Recreation distributes grants to local communities to acquire parkland and build park and recreation facilities to meet state-wide park and recreation goals. The types of projects most often funded by these grants are acquisition or development of neighborhood, community and regional parks.

Cal/Environmental Justice Grants

The California Environmental Protection Agency has established the EJ Small Grants Program to assist eligible community-based, grassroots, nonprofit entities, and federally recognized tribal governments to address environmental justice issues. Recent grants have been in the \$20,000 range.

Foundations and Universities

While funding for park construction will most likely come from government funding sources, foundations and UC Berkeley may be interested in contributing financially to the planning process.

Suggested Next Steps



Given the City's existing priorities, it's unlikely that this project will be considered for the next several years. When it is ripe to go forward, the following presents suggested steps to advance the project.

By working together effectively, community groups and local agencies can successfully convert the Santa Fe ROW into a vibrant open space for the Berkeley community. Three crucial components of successful projects include

- A clear and realistic plan of action that details the benefits of the project and addresses constraints and other challenges, including funding
- Strong, widespread community support for the project
- Local, regional, state and federal agency support

Suggested steps:

Identify funding to continue the planning process for the project. Enough money should be identified to ensure the project can continue without significant delays. The funding can come from a combination of sources.

Continue the community outreach and engagement process. This document should be used as a tool to educate residents on the project, and to solicit further ideas and opinions concerning what the space should ultimately be converted into. Outreach should consist of both larger community meetings and targeted communication (inter-

views, surveys, etc.) with residents and stakeholders.

Create a Santa Fe ROW working group that can move the project forward and coordinate future outreach and events. The group should include residents, city staff, elected officials and staff from community organizations to ensure that efforts are coordinated and that the project remains a priority.

Adopt a City Council resolution strongly supporting the project. This step will indicate clear political support for the project, which is essential for funding applications. And it will help to integrate the project in other city, county and regional plans.

Gain higher priority from city agencies and commissions. In order for the project to be realized, it needs to be higher on the priority list of both the Recreation and Parks Department and Commission.

Complete a Master or Site Plan for the Santa Fe ROW. This is a longer-term goal, but it will need to happen to create the new park space. The process should include the completion of all relevant environmental compliance, (CEQA, etc.), soil and engineering assessments.

Consider developing a phased implementation strategy. While it is most efficient to both plan and gain approvals for the entire project as one site, the space can be divided into segments for implementation. Breaking the ROW into smaller phases, or segments, can accelerate fundraising and construction efforts.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy wishes to thank:

- The Berkeley Gardening Collaborative, particularly Beebo Turman, and Berkeley Partners for Parks, particularly John Steere, who have exemplified remarkable persistence and dedication to this project;
- The City of Berkeley, particularly Councilmember Darryl Moore, for his strong commitment and support for the project and Mayor Tom Bates and his staff, who helped initiate this document
- The residents of Berkeley, who have contributed invaluable ideas, time and energy to the process.

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