

**SOPHIE HAHN**

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CONSENT CALENDAR

JANUARY 16, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Councilmembers Sophie Hahn (Author) and Rigel Robinson (Co-Sponsor)
 Subject: Supporting the Installation of Permanent Chess/Games Tables on Telegraph Avenue and Proposing Resolution of Concerns at 2454 Telegraph Avenue

RECOMMENDATION

1. Refer to the FY2025 Budget Process \$50,000 to support the installation of fixed or purchase of portable public chess/game tables on Telegraph Avenue, including at or near the intersection of Telegraph and Haste Streets, and potentially elsewhere in Berkeley to support development of a citywide chess & games facility.
2. Refer to the City Manager to explore the potential development of a parklet at or near the Telegraph/Haste intersection, potentially near the South/West corner (beyond the yellow loading area on Haste Street) and other potential locations for a parklet that could accommodate chess/game tables and the volume of community participation this activity generates. Staff should consider who is the appropriate entity to finance such an improvement.
3. Refer to the City Manager the development of a city-wide chess and game facilities program to integrate permanent chess/game nodes into park, curtilage, and/or sidewalk areas throughout Berkeley in a manner that encourages broad participation in and enjoyment of games and supports the building of community around these activities. Consider appropriate locations for nodes, installation of City-owned facilities, rules and regulations for use, and maintenance.
4. Direct the City Manager to explore entering into negotiations with the property owner at 2454 Telegraph Avenue to achieve an agreement that would result in upgrades and improvements to the building exterior/facade, create a landscaped perimeter around the exposed entry area, improve maintenance, and/or similar terms, in exchange for a reduction/waiver of accumulated fees.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On December 11, 2023, the Health, Life Enrichment, Equity, & Community Committee adopted the following action: M/S/C (Hahn/Bartlett) to send Item 2 and Item 3 on the Committee's agenda to the City Council as revised with a positive recommendation. Proposed revisions include consideration of: financing of improvements; negotiations with property

owner(s); rules relating to the public right-of-way; and support of city-wide program(s). Vote: All Ayes.

This proposal was discussed at the December 12th meeting of the Health, Life Enrichment, Equity & Community policy committee. The Item was advanced with a Positive Recommendation alongside a separate, complementary item submitted by Councilmember Robinson: M/S/C (Hahn/Bartlett)

Vote: Ayes – Hahn, Bartlett, Humbert; Noes – None; Abstain – None

SUMMARY STATEMENT

In September, Telegraph Avenue’s chess tables were shut down for the second time in two years. Tables were removed after the property owner at 2454 Telegraph received a violation notice for “obstructing the public right of way and violating a use permit.” The result has been very negative for the diverse community of chess players and presents logistical and other challenges for the property owner whose relatively large entry plaza is contiguous with and open to sidewalks on both Telegraph and Haste streets.

Councilmembers have publicly voiced support for the City to resolve all related challenges in a manner that supports the continuation of chess on Telegraph Avenue – and potentially throughout the City of Berkeley – and improves conditions at the corner of Telegraph and Haste streets. This item proposes a path forward on all of these considerations.

BACKGROUND

Chess is one of the oldest games in the world and has become increasingly popular in recent years. It is a cross-generational and cross-cultural activity that doesn’t even require players to speak the same language – offering an exceptional bridge to friendships and camaraderie.

The chess club that has been operating informally at and around the corner of Telegraph and Haste, on both public and private property, has faced challenges in finding appropriate space and facilities to engage in this very positive activity, without infringing on private property or impeding sidewalk access.

The City should encourage and support activities that build community and bring liveliness to our public realm, all while supporting our sidewalk policies and removing undue pressure from private property owners. The City can balance these needs and relieve pressure on sidewalks and private property by installing a permanent cluster of chess tables at or near the Telegraph/Haste intersection, and in City-designated locations across Berkeley, signaling its support for this important play and community building activity.

New York City’s chess tables in Washington Square Park, for example, have been operational for decades, and have attracted chess enthusiasts from all over the city and world, including many legendary grandmasters. Washington Square Park, as well as Union Square and Bryant Park, are regular sites of exhibitions that turn out hundreds of players and spectators. Day-to-

day, these spaces are meeting places for diverse individuals and groups, and create vibrant and important community connections.

These proposed measures will allow the City to create, manage, and maintain facilities that encourage games and community building in a manner that supports both players and other users of the City's public parks and spaces. In addition, the City Council should seek resolution of imposition of fines on the property owner at 2454 Telegraph and improved management of the property, including the publicly-accessible entry plaza – for the benefit of all.

FISCAL IMPACTS

\$50,000 to cover the cost of purchasing and installing permanent or portable chess/game tables for Telegraph and possibly other locations. Potential loss of imposed fines and savings in staff and City Attorney resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

None.

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