

CONSENT CALENDAR

April 15, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Councilmember Shoshana O'Keefe (Author) and Councilmember Mark Humbert (Co-Sponsor)
 Subject: Budget Referral for Thousand Oaks Park Playground Update

RECOMMENDATION

Refer \$80,000 to the June budget process (FY26 Mid-Biennial Update) for the completion of a new airplane themed play structure at Thousand Oaks Park, located at 1700-1780 Tacoma Avenue.

SUMMARY

On October 16, 2024, Berkeley resident Michael Seltzer - known to his friends and family as "Mikey" – passed away after a heroic battle with cancer. Mikey likely contracted cancer as a result of exposure to toxic chemicals while deployed, and was specifically recognized for his courage and sacrifice by Speaker Nancy Pelosi during the signing of the PACT Act.

A longtime resident of North Berkeley, Mikey graduated from Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School (then known as King Jr. High), Berkeley High, and UC Berkeley. Throughout his life, he stayed connected to his roots and community, raising his own family in Berkeley. His three children attended Thousand Oaks Elementary.

City of Berkeley (City) staff was recently approached by a former Berkeley resident and Michael's best friend, Peter Kaes, who expressed interest in working with the Parks, Recreation and Waterfront (PRW) Department on a donation in his honor. An accomplished and decorated pilot, Mikey's friends and family have proposed a fitting project in his honor – the creation of a new airplane themed play structure at Thousand Oaks Park.

BACKGROUND

Thousand Oaks Park is a community space that provides a safe and welcoming environment for students and families to enjoy outdoor activities. The park hosts a play structure for 5-12 year olds, sports fields, and picnic areas. The park area is owned by Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) and operated and maintained by the City per the 2020 Joint Use Agreement. This 25 year agreement provides year round public access to the Park. Originally developed by BUSD in 1950, the current play structure was redesigned in the late 1990s by a group of volunteers from the Thousand Oaks Parks Society (TOPS) and improved by using City Measure Y Funds.

This item would help fund approximately one-third of the creation of a new play structure modeled after an airplane that would be publicly accessible, serving students, families, and the greater Berkeley community.

Studies routinely show that play and playgrounds provide a wide range of benefits to children, and are an integral part of a child's development. According to the International Journal of Behavior Nutrition and Physical Activity, "play is considered fundamental for a child's development as play helps children develop social, academic, and personal competencies."¹ Parks like Thousand Oaks can support play-based learning, promote socialization, fuel creativity, and more. The addition of a less conventional play structure, such as an airplane, could lead to more imaginative play while also honoring a member of the Berkeley community.



Figure 1 by Groundworks Office (Pro bono)

¹ Schipperijn, J., Madsen, C.D., Toftager, M. *et al.* The role of playgrounds in promoting children's health – a scoping review. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 21, 72 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-024-01618-2>



Figure 2 by Groundworks Office (Pro bono)

REVIEW OF EXISTING PLANS, PROGRAMS, POLICIES, AND LAWS

The City of Berkeley's General Plan's Open Space and Recreational Element outlines policy priorities for the City as it relates to open spaces and recreation, and states: "give highest priority to maintaining and improving the City's existing network of open space and recreation facilities."²

CONSULTATION/OUTREACH OVERVIEW AND RESULTS

Councilmember Shoshana O'Keefe discussed the project with PRW Director, Scott Ferris, and Park, Recreation and Waterfront Commissioner, Brennan Cox. The PRW Director expressed interest in completing such a project given that a significant donation will be possible.

FISCAL IMPACTS

The complete project, including planning, design and construction, is estimated to cost approximately \$240,000. It is anticipated that the funding for this project will include this \$80,000 referral, a donation of a similar dollar amount and FY26 Parks Tax Minor Maintenance allocation of \$75,000.

CONTACT

Councilmember Shoshana O'Keefe, 510-981-7150

² City of Berkeley. Open Space and Recreation Element - Introduction. April 23, 2002. https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/08_Open%20Space%20and%20Recreation%20Element-FINAL.pdf

