



Office of the City Manager

CONSENT CALENDAR
June 17, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Submitted by: Scott Ferris, Director, Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront

Subject: Companion Report: César Chávez Park Nature and Recreation-Based Conceptual Plan

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager recommends that Council take no action on the Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront (PRW) Commission recommendation that City Council approve the Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Commission process and direct Councilmembers Kesarwani and Taplin to appoint members of the César Chávez Park ReVision Team.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

While the PRW Commission proposal would involve the use of unpaid volunteers to serve on the proposed Cesar Chavez Park ReVision Team, the proposal asks the City to engage a facilitator to document ideas and input at the workshops. Staff estimates that this work, and the costs needed to assemble the necessary technical analyses and graphics for the final basis of design document for the Concept Plan will likely be more than the \$200,000 estimated in the Commission report.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

On April 9, 2025, the PRW Commission took the following action: Request that City Council approve Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Commission process and direct Councilmembers Kesarwani and Taplin to appoint members of the César Chávez Park ReVision Team (M/S/C: Cardile/Rybczynski/U): Abshez; Cardile; Cox; Diehm; Hurtado; Rybczynski; Noes: none; Abstain: Kawczynska.

Summary and analysis of the PRW Commission proposed process

Per the attached PRW Commission council report, the goal of the César Chávez Park ReVision process is for the Commission to prepare, for the City Council's review and consideration, a community-driven nature and recreation-based conceptual vision ("basis of design") for César Chávez Park. The Plan has the following elements:

1. The PRW Commission proposal requests that Council direct Councilmembers Kesarwani and Taplin appoint members of the César Chávez Park ReVision Team that would be comprised of Berkeley volunteers with experience in contemporary park-making issues such as equitable access, ADA expertise, engaging youth,

human health, climate change, urban biodiversity, sustainable design, operations and maintenance to assist the César Chávez Park ReVision process.

2. The PRW Commission would then conduct four community input workshops over a 2-3 month period at each of the four City community centers. Prior to each community workshop, the ReVision Team would develop a draft “basis of design” based on public feedback received from each prior workshop and present it to the PRW Commission for additional public feedback and further direction from the Commission. The PRW Commission would then forward the final basis of design to the City Council for review and final action. The ultimate goal is to incorporate the César Chávez Park basis of design into the larger Waterfront Specific Plan document.

Staff commends the PRW Commission for their extensive work and dedication to advocating for improvements to César Chávez Park that benefit the residents of Berkeley as well as the greater Bay Area region. Their concept for a process to create a ReVision Concept Plan for César Chávez Park is extremely well thought out and is anticipated to create a new Concept Plan that is truly reflective of all voices in Berkeley. Due to the City’s dire budget situation, the City will have to make difficult choices for how to best spend limited City funds. The PRW Commission proposal for a new ReVision Concept Plan (basis of design) is discussed below as it relates to these dire budget difficulties.

1. **Funding:** At present, there is approximately \$200,000 remaining in the budget for the Waterfront Specific Plan (WSP) that is currently programmed to complete the César Chávez Park ReVision Concept Plan. There is no funding identified to conduct the CEQA process for the Waterfront Specific Plan, which would include the final César Chávez Park Concept Plan. At present, the Marina Fund is anticipated to have a negative fund balance in FY26 and there are significant unfunded immediate repairs needed at the Berkeley Waterfront, such as the hazardous condition at the East Dock Pier.
2. **César Chávez Landfill Complications:** Pursuant to regulatory permits issued for the maintenance and operation of César Chávez Park, any work that penetrates the surface of the park will require special approvals from the Regional Water Quality Control Board and the Bay Area Air Quality District. As a result, the City is working on developing Health and Safety protocols for any repairs or improvements that involve digging into the surface soil at César Chávez Park. Given the cost and complexity of these protocols, staff recommend that no improvements to César Chávez Park be planned or implemented at this time until further processes and studies can be completed over the next 2-3 years. Additional details about César Chávez Park can be found at the following project website:
<https://berkeleyca.gov/your-government/our-work/capital-projects/cesar-chavez-park-closed-landfill-state-water-board>
3. **Cost.** The PRW Commission recommendation would involve considerable City staff time and funding to attend community workshops, meetings of the voluntary

ReVision Team, and to work with consultants to produce technical analyses and graphics needed to complete a robust basis of design document. Staff estimate this process will cost as much or even more staff and consultant time than the current process.

4. **Duration of the process.** The proposed three-month community process in the proposal is likely to take a least a year since the process involves the vetting and appointing of members by Councilmembers, City staff potentially hiring a new consultant, coordinating with the PRW Commission, revising the Concept Plan several times after each of the four community meetings, as well as the logistical issues to coordinate the scheduling of the workshops and other meetings of the ReVision Team.
5. **Completeness.** César Chávez Park advocates and related constituents are numerous. Staff recommends doing separate focus group meetings with all of these groups before the start of a public process in order to ensure that all interests are represented. This could involve up to 10 additional meetings.

Given these factors, staff is reallocating remaining funding for the Waterfront Specific Plan to essential repairs (i.e., East Dock) needed at the Waterfront and recommend that both the César Chávez Park ReVision Concept Plan and the remaining CEQA process for the Waterfront Specific Plan project be deferred until full funding has been identified. Staff appreciate the PRW Commission’s suggestions on public process and recommend that some of the elements of their recommendation be included in a future public process once it has been funded and the complications and path forward in dealing with the César Chávez Landfill are addressed.

BACKGROUND

At the City Council’s November 18, 2024 Special Meeting to provide feedback and direction on how to proceed with the Waterfront Specific Plan process, the City Council took the following action (22 speakers): M/S/C (Taplin/Kesarwani) to provide direction to staff to 1) complete the parking study; 2) prepare a nature and recreation-based conceptual plan for César Chávez Park; 3) proceed with the EIR with the highest development scenario; and 4) return to Council with the revised Specific Plan and certification of the EIR. Vote: Ayes - Kesarwani, Taplin, Bartlett, Tregub, Hahn, Wengraf, Lunaparra, Humbert; Noes – None; Abstain – None; Absent – Arreguin.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no identifiable environmental effects, climate impacts, or sustainability opportunities associated with the subject of this report.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Funding has not been identified to complete this project.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

None.

CONTACT PERSON

Scott Ferris, Director, Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department, 981-6700