



TIME CRITICAL AGENDA MATERIAL

Meeting Date: April 6, 2026

Item Description: Co-Sponsorship and Budget Referral for the Solano Avenue Stroll

The City of Berkeley will be unable to provide in-kind services, such as Police, Fire, and Public Works support, for the Solano Avenue Stroll. Without a budget referral securing city support, the event will not be able to move forward.

Given the high costs associated with producing the Stroll and its importance to the City and its residents, this item is being submitted as time critical agenda material to ensure the Budget and Finance Committee has adequate time to consider the request.

Time Critical Items. A Time Critical item is defined as a matter that is considered urgent by the sponsor and that has a deadline for action that is prior to the next meeting of the Council and for which a report prepared by the City Manager, Auditor, Mayor or Council Member is received by the City Clerk after established deadlines and is not included on the Agenda Committee's published agenda.

The author of the report shall bring any reports submitted as Time Critical to the meeting of the Agenda Committee. **Per BMC 2.06.060 (D), Time Critical items must be accompanied by complete reports and statements of financial implications.**

If the Agenda Committee finds the matter to meet the definition of Time Critical, the Agenda Committee may place the matter on the Agenda on either the Consent or Action Calendar.



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

RECOMMENDATION

1. Adopt a Resolution for the City of Berkeley to Co-Sponsor the Solano Avenue Association's September 2026 and September 2027 Solano Avenue Stroll events.
2. 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.
3. 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).
4. Refer \$10,000 per year to the FY 2027-2028 Budget Process (\$20,000 total) to support the September 2026 and 2027 Solano Stroll events.

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 of Berkeley previously provided in-kind services such as police, fire, and public works to support the event, 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 City of Albany provides similar in-kind services to support the event.

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 will not be able to move forward. Therefore, this item seeks to commit City sponsorship, account for city services needed, and a grant of \$10,000 per year to help support the North Berkeley BART shuttle service, marketing, and other out-of-pocket expenses for the September 2026 and 2027 events.

The 50th Solano Avenue Stroll will 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 then-Congressmember 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.

This item asks the City of Berkeley to register its official sponsorship of the September 2026 and 2027 Stroll events (taking place in FY 2027 and 2028), and refer \$10,000 in sponsorship for each of the two years (for a total of \$20,000) in the FY27-28 budget. 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).

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Without City support, 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

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

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 \$20,000 in sponsorship over two years (\$10,000 per year), city services totaling a cost of \$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

Councilmember Shoshana O'Keefe, sokeefe@berkeleyca.gov

ATTACHMENTS

None.

RESOLUTION #####-N.S.
CITY OF BERKELEY CO-SPONSORSHIP FOR THE 2026 AND 2027 SOLANO AVENUE
STROLL

WHEREAS, The annual Solano Avenue Stroll is a public event which brings together the expression, enjoyment, and diversity of our community in an inclusive, no-barrier, family-friendly, outdoor celebration that is and always has been free to the public; and

WHEREAS, the Solano Avenue Stroll is the largest street fair in the East Bay, drawing crowds of up to 250,000 people over the course of a single day and spanning two cities: Berkeley and Albany; and

WHEREAS, The scale and importance of this free public celebration is unique in Berkeley and the region, and requires a singular level of support and partnership from both the cities of Berkeley and Albany; and

WHEREAS, The Solano Avenue Stroll, now in its 50th year, has been sponsored with both services and funds by the cities of Berkeley and Albany for longer than the Solano Avenue Association has records, at least 20 years; and

WHEREAS, The Solano Stroll typically 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 nonprofit agencies, 150 handcrafters, a 75-participant parade with local bands, performers, schools, and organizations, safe mechanical rides for children, and more; and

WHEREAS, The Solano Stroll raises revenues and enhances the City's reputation locally and regionally, engendering significant goodwill; and

WHEREAS, The Solano Avenue Association, producer of the Stroll event, works actively to minimize the environmental impact of the Stroll, providing a free shuttle to and from the North Berkeley BART station, free valet bike parking, and will require vendors to offer only compostable bags and foodware; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of the diversity and reach of the event, the Solano Avenue Stroll has had the honor of being selected by then-Congresswoman Barbara Lee for inclusion at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. as a "National Local Legacy"; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the City of Berkeley shall be an official Co-Sponsor of the Solano Avenue Association's 2026 and 2027 Solano Avenue Stroll events, currently scheduled for Sunday, September 13, 2026 and Sunday, September 12, 2027, taking place on Solano Avenue in both Berkeley and Albany.