

December 8, 2022

Danielle Crider, Senior Planner
Community Development Department
City of Benicia
250 East L Street
Benicia, CA 94510



Re: Comments on the Draft Safety Element

Dear Ms. Crider:

I am submitting this letter on behalf of the Benicia Tree Foundation Board of Directors to provide comments on the draft Safety Element. The Benicia Tree Foundation is an all-volunteer non-profit organization dedicated to the mission of strengthening community by supporting and promoting tree planting, maintenance and education. Our interest centers on how the Safety Element addresses the resilience of Benicia to natural disasters, drought and extreme heat events.

Emergency Preparation and Response

Additional programs are needed to support Policy 4.8.4: ENCOURAGE NEW AND EXISTING DEVELOPMENT TO INCORPORATE SUSTAINABLE AND ENERGY-EFFICIENT FEATURES INTO THEIR FACILITIES, LANDSCAPES, AND STRUCTURES. Such programs can increase tree planting in the city to reduce urban heat-island effect, protect residents from extreme heat events and absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere. Consider adding the following program:

- Evaluate and revise the Benicia Municipal Code requirements for landscaping and tree planting to ensure new development and city improvements adequately shade sidewalks, parking and other paved areas to reduce urban air temperatures.

Flood and Inundation Hazards

Additional programs and needed to support GOAL 4.9: MINIMIZE AND ACCOMMODATE RUNOFF FROM EXISTING AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT. Consider a program that evaluates the ability to incorporate stormwater detention basins in city parks, open space and other city property.

The Safety Element supports accelerating the implementation of the Storm Drain Master Plan. Storm drains typically are intended to collect storm runoff and empty it into the

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Carquinez Strait. The Safety Element and the City's website does not contain information on the Storm Drain Master Plan. Does the Storm Drain Master Plan consider green infrastructure strategies to manage storm runoff? The city's tree canopy can be an effective tool to slow storm runoff and retain precipitation in the soil.

Drought

The City should consider recycling water from the water treatment plant to help stretch Benicia's water supply. The Benicia Tree Foundation has been encouraging Caltrans to complete and maintain landscaping on the freeways consistent with General Plan Policy 3.9.2. Caltrans has been reluctant and gives landscaping priority to areas that can supply recycled water for irrigation.

Extreme Heat

The section describing Extreme Heat mentions how trees and other vegetation can help to lower surface and air temperatures. It might be worthwhile to calculate the tree canopy for the city to provide a baseline for maintaining, if not expanding this tree canopy. The draft Vegetative Fuels Management Plan prepared by the Fire Department uses data from USGS LandFire layer of Existing Vegetation Type to show tree cover in open space areas (Figure 3-2 of that plan). Can the City use this data to estimate tree cover for the entire city and develop a policy in the Safety Element that supports expanding the existing tree canopy to reduce hazards from Extreme Heat events and mitigate increases in greenhouse gas emissions?

Programs should be added to the safety element to increase Benicia's tree canopy.

- Increase tree planting on city parks, playgrounds, trails, streets and other city property to reduce urban air temperatures and provide shade when people are outdoors.
- Evaluate funding mechanism such as Landscape & Lighting Districts to maintain trees in public spaces.
- Continue to participate in the Tree City USA program.
- Encourage residents and property owners to plant street trees.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Safety Element.

Sincerely,

Alison Fleck

Alison Fleck, President
Benicia Tree Foundation Board of Directors