

October 18, 2023

Parks, Recreation & Cemetery Commission
City of Benicia
370 East L Street
Benicia, CA 94510



RE: Parks Trails and Open Space Master Plan – October 2023 Draft

The Board of Directors of the Benicia Tree Foundation is pleased to provide these comments on the Parks Trails and Open Space Master Plan – October 2023 Draft (Master Plan Update). These comments build upon the input the Board provided the City during the interview with Key Stakeholders and Focus Groups in April 2021, and in our comment letter of May 2, 2022 that was submitted following the release of the results of the project’s statistically valid household survey.

Add the following policy to Goal 3: Open Space:

Plant native trees in open space areas to shade trails and sidewalks, and support wildlife.

Planting native trees in open space was included in the 1997 Master Plan in Figure 4-2 Lake Herman Regional Park, which proposed “Establish native trees in drainage washes” in several areas. In 2015, the Benicia Tree Foundation took advantage of this idea and has planted over 100 native trees in the Lake Herman Open Space east of the trail that connects the Community Park with Lake Herman. The City owns over 1800 acres of open space, which presents many other opportunities to plant native trees that can shade trails and sidewalks, and support wildlife. This policy deserves to be included in the Master Plan Update.

Add the following objective to Goal 2: Trails and Paths:

Improve public access and public use of open space

The 1997 Master Plan identified an extensive network of paved and improved community trails in open space as part of Figure 4-1 City Parks, Trails and Open Space System. Many, but not all of these trails have been implemented. The statistically-valid survey of Benicia households identified strong support for additional paved and unpaved trails. Trails also provide important access to the open space to allow for additional tree planting. The City’s past successes with trail implementation in open space and the popular support for additional trails in open space warrants adding this objective to the Master Plan Update

Add policies to support the objective to improve public access and public use of open space.

Policies can be included for the planned trails proposed in the Master Plan Update, plus the following planned trails in open space included in the 1997 Master Plan but not yet completed.

- Southampton Park improved community trail and staging area; and
- Paved community trail connecting Southampton Road and Braitto Open Space trail.

Add a policy to control invasive plant species along trails and adjacent to parks.

The Benicia Tree Foundation has noticed a significant increase in the growth of invasive plant species in the Lake Herman Open Space where we are planting native trees. Volunteers are finding it more difficult to get through the yellow star thistle that has encroached the tree planting areas. A specific policy is needed to coordinate with the Fire Department to control invasive plant species in open space areas where increased public access is desired.

Add more trees in parks.

In addition to the trees recommended in the current draft concept plans for individual parks, the Benicia Tree Foundation supports the addition of trees in the following areas:

- Exhibit 4: Benicia Community Park. Phase 1: Add trees along the perimeter trail encompassing the ball fields and in the Disc golf course area;
- Exhibit 5: Waters End Park. Phase 3: Add trees in the shrub/groundcover area and low water use plants area where they border the internal path;
- Exhibit 17: Overlook Park. Phase 2: Include the addition of new trees in the area designated for replacement shrubs and groundcover along Olive Branch Court; and
- Exhibit 26: Francesca Terrace Park. Phase 2 proposes to remove shrubs and groundcover. This area parallels Valero pipelines. The Benicia Tree Foundation has planted some trees to replace the pine trees that are at the end of their lifespan. The shrubs and groundcover need to be replaced, not removed to help provide a visual barrier to the pipelines.

Add more trees along trails.

The following Trail Improvement Concept Plans should include tree plantings:

- Page 91: Braito Open Space trail, and the Class I trail (which is not shown) from Kearney St at Community Park to E. Channel Rd;
- Page 92: Proposed trail loop around Lake Herman; and
- Page 93: Proposed trail development from Palace Court to Cambridge Drive.

Further evaluate volunteerism as an implementation strategy for the Master Plan Update.

On page 94, the Master Plan Update appropriately mentions that the use of volunteers not only reduces an organizations costs in providing a service, it also builds advocacy into the system. The Master Plan Update identifies numerous projects to replace shrubs and groundcovers. Many more trees can be planted in the City's parks, trails and open space as part of this Master Plan Update. The bulk of this work can be done by volunteers and help indicate to taxpayers that the City is attempting to use its resources efficiently.

The Master Plan Update notes that *“organizing and managing volunteers and volunteer projects often requires a considerable amount of staff time, which may not be feasible”*. The Benicia Tree Foundation has been effective in organizing volunteers to plant over 1000 trees in Benicia, many of them in City parks and open spaces. We draw volunteers from our high schools, service organizations, boy/girl scouts, and employers. The Master Plan Update should determine the feasibility of using volunteers as part of implementation of the proposed park improvements and whether it would justify the staff time involved.

Regards,

Steven Goetz, Secretary
Board of Directors
Benicia Tree Foundation