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Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR  
April 11, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Wengraf (author) Councilmember Hahn, Councilmember Humbert, and Councilmember Taplin (co-sponsors)

Subject: Budget Referral: \$150,000 for Handrails, Lights and Signage for City Pedestrian Path Network

RECOMMENDATION

In support of the City's goals as stated in the "General Plan," "Local Hazard Mitigation Plan," "Pedestrian Plan," and "Community Wildfire Protection Plan", refer to the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Process an allocation of \$150,000 for the installation of lighting, handrails and signage on paths deemed most critical for safe evacuation throughout Berkeley.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

\$150,000

BACKGROUND

The City of Berkeley is home to a system of more than 130 pedestrian paths, most of which were originally built into our hillsides as short-cuts to access transportation and commerce. However, today they also serve as a critical element and key resource in our disaster evacuation strategy, providing routes for access and egress for people threatened by both wildfire and earthquake and for first responders and other emergency personnel.

It is critical to have a safe, well-maintained pathway system. Most of the paths have no lighting or handrails, making them a treacherous and dangerous option for pedestrians fleeing a threat, on foot. Installing lighting and handrails and signage identifying the path as an evacuation route would make them a safer option for use in the event they need to be used in an emergency.

The importance of the City's pedestrian pathway network is acknowledged in many City documents:

The 2019 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan states,

*“In the city’s many steep neighborhoods with winding roads, these paths take the shortest, most direct routes, mimicking city block grids that do not exist. In addition to producing a community recreation asset, these pathways can assist evacuation and firefighting efforts in the hills. In preparedness outreach, the City instructs community members to always be ready to evacuate without a car and to be aware of the locations of developed paths that may reduce evacuation distance. However, because developed pathway conditions vary widely from those with concrete steps and railings to those with wooden steps with no railings, these paths may not be good options for evacuees with mobility issues or low vision. As indicated on the map, there are many small paths in the Berkeley hills that can help with fire evacuation and firefighting efforts.”*

The Draft Community Wildfire Protection Plan states:

*“Ensure that all public pathways are maintained to provide safe and accessible pedestrian evacuation routes from the hill areas.”*

The General Plan, Policy T-28 B states:

*“Maintain and improve pedestrian pathways throughout the City that are dedicated for public use and provide alternatives to the streets in case of emergency evacuation.”*

The General Plan, Policy T-52D states:

*“Continue to make repairs and safety improvements on public paths and restore unimproved paths.”*

For more than twenty years, the Berkeley Path Wanderers Association, a group of dedicated volunteers, have donated their labor to help the City of Berkeley maintain the pathway network, clearing vegetation and constructing new useable routes and making essential upgrades to the existing path system. They have been an invaluable partner in the shared goal of restoration and improvements to our path network and have consistently and conscientiously worked collaboratively with our Public Works Department. The City can leverage their contribution by working together with the Berkeley Path Wanderers to improve the conditions of the paths.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Pedestrian Pathway improvements are in keeping with our goals for environmental sustainability.

#### CONTACT PERSON

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