

To: Oakland 2045 General Plan Update Project Management Team

From: Hiking by Transit

RE: Comments on the Oakland General Plan



Dear General Plan Update Project Team,

Thank you for the vision shown in the “Oakland for All: Options for How We Stabilize and Grow” report, and for the thoughtful listening and engagement of Oakland’s communities in putting it together.

Parks at the Heart of the General Plan

Parks feature prominently in the plan, despite the primarily development-focused phase of the General Plan update. This is because parks are integral to who we are as a city, as a region, and as a people, as shown in the Community Priorities section of the report:

Equitable Parks Access. Priorities include improved park safety, quality and maintenance. Community members want 10-minute walking access to parks and open space, and safe and connected routes to get there. The Environmental Justice Element also directs prioritization of new parks in underserved communities, with a focus on ensuring no displacement occurs.

Parks are at the core of *all* of the report’s plan options: the City of Neighborhoods plan (Option A) calls for mid-sized parks as focal points of neighborhoods; the Connected Corridors and Greenways plan (Option B) calls for parks and plazas marking major corridor intersections (“focus on mini parks, linear parks, and bikeways along corridors”); and the Midtown plan (Option C), perhaps most ambitiously, calls for Sausal Creek to be reinvented as a “greenway, with park space, trail connections, and public art”:

This Option also supports a new greenway running from the hills to the Estuary along Sausal Creek. Parts of Sausal Creek are “daylit” (i.e., run above ground), while other portions flow underneath Oakland’s streets. Policies would seek to activate and enhance access to the daylit portions of the creek, while creating connectivity and awareness along the undergrounded portions. Possible strategies for maintaining ecological awareness of the creek’s undergrounded reaches include site-specific art and informational signage that identifies where the creek is running underground. This greenway would bring foot traffic into the new Midtown, and provide an opportunity for trail-focused economic development in Central East Oakland.

Finally Time to Realize a Longstanding Vision

General Plans have called for the creation of trails from the shore to the parks of the hills for generations, with the 1996 OSCAR plan calling for trails in eight or more locations. Other cities around the East Bay already have such trails, funded and maintained in partnership with the East Bay Regional Park District.

All trail corridors are important: the community's desire for 10-minute walking distance to parks plays hand-in-hand with creek corridor trails, and so all should be incorporated into the plan. However, Option C's focus on a single trail corridor means city departments know which of those corridors to prioritize.

Uniquely, however, the East Bay Regional Parks District is working on an update to its District Plan. The City of Oakland is older than the Park District, and as such is surrounded by Regional Parks, with no District projects in neighborhoods. Cities developed in the suburban era of the Park District, like Walnut Creek, Danville, and Clayton, have Park District trails running through commercial and residential areas as part of the Regional Trails network. The District has development funds and is interested in park equity, making them a powerful ally and partner in developing greenspace in Oakland's most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

As such, Hiking by Transit urges the following to be included in the Preferred Plan:

- 1) **Sausal Creek Greenway:** a priority project connecting the estuary parks to the Dimond, Dimond Canyon, and up into Joaquin Miller Park
- 2) **Interim estuary-to-hills trail plans:** short-term projects connecting existing park trails via interim roadway routing to provide residents with the knowledge and ability to find and follow existing partial corridors
- 3) **Partnership with the East Bay Regional Parks District:** the Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development must work with the Park District to bring corridors like Sausal Creek into the Park District's new District Plan. This can bring funding and management resources that the city would otherwise not have access to.

Building Oakland, Together

Oakland's existing parks have the potential to be world-class: Joaquin Miller Park and Lake Merritt are two of the best urban parks in the nation. Though Oakland has to be very particular about park budgeting, regional partners with larger funding streams and shared visions are waiting to help. Our General Plan defines our vision, and our vision needs to be shared stewardship with them.

Sincerely,

Evan Tschuy
Founder, Hiking by Transit