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DATE: January 23, 2025

TO: Public Art Committee

FROM: Melissa Abercrombie, Public Art Specialist  
Andrew Trippel, Planning Manager

SUBJECT: Recommendation to the City of Petaluma Public Art Committee to Receive a Staff Presentation and Conduct a Study Session to Provide Nonbinding Comments and Further Direction on the Public Art Component of a Conceptual Design Proposal for the Petaluma River Park Located on the McNear Peninsula and 500 Hopper Street, APNs 007-181-002, 136-010-023, 007-171-023, and 136-010-024, City Record No. PLPJ-2025-0003

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Public Art Committee conduct a study session to receive staff and applicant presentations about a conceptual design proposal for Petaluma River Park, provide comments and feedback on the public art component of the overall Proposal, and respond to discussion topics prepared by City staff to provide further direction to Petaluma River Park Foundation (Foundation). This recommendation responds to the City's Public Art Ordinance in that it furthers the integration of public art into private development project planning at the earliest stage possible to help make the City of Petaluma more livable and visually stimulating and to create a deeper interaction with the places people visit, work, and live.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Project Context**

The [Petaluma River Park Project](#) (the project) is a project of the [Petaluma River Park Foundation](#). The project site is comprised of approximately 35 acres, including a 24-acre peninsula property (APN 007-181-002 and 136-010-023) on the south side of the McNear Channel and east of the City-owned Steamer Landing Park, and an approximately 10.8-acre portion of property fronting a portion of Hopper Street (APN 007-171-023 and 136-010-024) on the north side of the McNear Channel and east of Shamrock Materials, Inc.

The project is in the heart of Petaluma, northeast of Downtown. Surrounding natural features include the Petaluma River and McNear Channel. Uses in immediate proximity to the project site include industrial, warehousing, multi-family, commercial, and office uses, and the Downtown Petaluma Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) station is located within ¼-mile of the site.

The project site is within walking or biking distance of commercial retail goods and services, restaurants, entertainment uses, a museum, and public gathering areas. The Petaluma Regional Library and Fairgrounds are just over ½-mile northeast of the project site.

The Petaluma River Park is open to the public and accessible from Copeland Street. Park users are supported by limited site improvements approved by the City of Petaluma. These improvements include formalizing trails onsite (approved under Building Permit BLGR-2022-0001) and installing Huru, a steel art sculpture by Mark di Suvero that is on a long-term loan to the Petaluma River Park Foundation from a local family (approved for installation under Building Permit BLDC-2023-0025).

## **Project Description Summary**

The Petaluma River Park’s conceptual design envisions an inclusive, nature-forward, and culturally rich public space. It describes the general characteristics of future development, including playgrounds, picnic areas, sports courts, a beach, and landscape installations consisting of trees and other native, climate-resilient species. The conceptual design explores how the park will to the community through site design and community programming, and it considers the restoration, enhancement, and climate change adaptation components to fulfill the project’s “light on the land” philosophy.

The Concept Plan is driven by three overarching design goals, which address what the project plans to do and why it plans to do it:

1. **Connect for Success.** The park’s new trails and bridge will provide key connections to the city of Petaluma, the region, bus and train networks, the Bay Area Ridge Trail, and other major trail systems. Together, these park features will improve active transportation routes and access to the Petaluma River for locals and people across the North Bay.
2. **Nurture Nature.** Community voices were clear: Petaluma River Park should be a park that protects and restores nature. This is a rare opportunity to create a natural refuge in the heart of an urban setting.
3. **Uplift Community.** The goal is to create a welcoming, shared place for everyone to gather, enjoy time together, and celebrate the richness of our community and varied cultures.

The subsections below provide an overview of these components of the Conceptual Design Proposal.

### *Connect for Success*

The proposed conceptual design includes the following:

- A bridge over the McNear Channel to connect the site’s two properties.
- Multi-use and walking trails that will connect the site to regional systems including the Bay Area Ridge Trail, SMART Pathway, and Petaluma River Trail.
- Aquatic launching and landing sites to connect the site to the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail.
- Recreational and other amenities, including a community center, sport and multi-use courts, flex fields, playgrounds, outdoor amphitheater, pavilion, community garden, food truck area, and restroom facilities.

- Surface parking along the Park's Hopper Street entrance.
- Wayfinding and educational signage throughout the Park and adjacent areas.
- Visual art installations throughout the site.

### *Community Programming*

The Petaluma River Park will provide a variety of community benefits through a mixture of formally and informally programmed areas. At a high level, community programming components are anticipated to include:

- School district and community-based organization environmental education programs and hands-on community stewardship opportunities facilitated by the Project's location and focus on restoration, enhancement, and climate change adaptation improvements.
- Cultural and historic educational programs and information.
- Individual and group gathering and recreational opportunities facilitated by site features such as picnic areas, community center, sport and multi-use courts, flex fields, and playgrounds.
- Performances and programs, facilitated by site features such as the proposed community center, pavilion, amphitheater, and flex fields.

### *Restoration, Enhancement, and Climate Change Adaptation*

The Concept Plan reflects the community's desire to maintain and enhance the natural features of the Project site, devoting approximately 80% of the Park's acreage to restoration and enhancement of native plant and wildlife habitat and climate change adaptation. Restoration, enhancement, and climate adaptation features include the following:

- Restoration of two acres of tidal marsh.
- Preservation of two additional acres of tidal marsh that will allow habitat migration with increasing sea level rise.
- Restoration, enhancement, and preservation of an approximately 1.4-acre vernal pool.
- Restoration, enhancement, and preservation of the Park's shoreline through the implementation of biotechnical bank stabilization.
- Tree and native plantings within restoration areas and areas programmed for public access (e.g. along multi-use and walking trails, within the proposed parking area, etc.).

### **Review Process**

Based on information provided in the conceptual design proposal, required Planning entitlements will include a General Plan Amendment and Rezoning, for which the review authorities are Planning Commission (recommendation) and City Council (decision), and Site Plan and Architectural Review, for which the review authority is Planning Commission (decision). Because the project is in its conceptual design phase, applications for required Planning entitlements have not been formally submitted to the City of Petaluma for review and processing. Rather, the project will receive feedback, direction, and comments from the City of Petaluma's Committees, Commissions, and Boards (CCBs) through a series of study sessions.

The City's CCBs play a vital role in ensuring that projects achieve City goals and that projects presented for formal review authority approvals and permits are well-informed and reflect a range of perspectives. Study sessions also provide a forum for public members to comment, garnering meaningful community feedback related to topic-specific areas. For this project, community input received through City-sponsored public meetings will augment a significant and robust community engagement process project leaders have implemented over the past 1+ years. This early-stage review will allow the Petaluma River Park Foundation to submit a formal application that reflects the goals and priorities of the City of Petaluma and its residents. The project is scheduled to be reviewed at various Study Sessions by the following CCBs:

- January 23, 2025: **Public Art Committee (PPAC)**
- February 4, 2025: **Historic and Cultural Preservation Committee (HCPC)**
- February 5, 2025: **Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee (PBAC)**
- February 13, 2025: **Senior Advisory Committee (SAC)**
- February 19, 2025: **Tree Advisory Committee (TAC)**
- February 19, 2025: **Recreation, Music, and Parks Committee (RMPC)**
- February/March 2025: **Planning Commission (PC)**
- TBD: **City Council (CC)**

Following these study sessions, the project will refine the conceptual design to incorporate collective feedback and key recommendations shared by the CCBs and the community. It anticipates submitting formal applications for review and processing in 2025. The required Planning entitlements [General Plan Amendment, Rezoning, and Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR)] are subject to discretionary review; therefore, the project will be subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)<sup>1</sup>. CEQA review will commence after entitlement applications are submitted.

## **Regulatory Context**

City policies and regulations to which the proposed project will be subject are contained in a variety of regulatory and policy documents, including but not limited to the following:

- **2025 General Plan and Central Petaluma Specific Plan (CPSP)**
- **River Access and Enhancement Plan and Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan**
- **2013 SmartCode**
- **Petaluma Municipal Code (PMC) and Implementing Zoning Ordinance (IZO)**, as applicable

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<sup>1</sup> The term "CEQA clearance" refers generally to the environmental review process required by CEQA, which can take many forms (e.g. categorical and statutory exemptions, mitigated negative declaration, environmental impact report, etc).

For this staff report, a discussion of regulations is limited to those relating to the Project's public art component.

### *SmartCode, PMC, and IZO*

Art and culture are integral to the park and reflect throughout the project's design. Integration of art and culture is directly reflected in the Foundation's stated mission: to meet the vital need for shared space that connects people, art, and nature. Success for the Petaluma River Park is a vibrant, welcoming place that fosters a love of nature, sparks creativity, and unifies our community for generations to come.<sup>2</sup> Compliance with City municipal and zoning regulations ensures that public health, safety, and welfare are prioritized in all design components and support development that is compatible with surrounding areas.

### *Petaluma General Plan*

The City of Petaluma General Plan 2025 contains adopted goals and policies that respond to and address the City's unique challenges and opportunities and are guided by a variety of Guiding Principles. The Petaluma River Park Project contributes to many of the General Plan's Guiding Principles and is consistent with several adopted policies contained in the Recreation, Music, Parks, & the Arts Chapter of the General Plan. General Plan policies particularly relevant to the Project include the following:

- **Policy 6-P-26** Encourage, develop and support arts programs throughout the community that provide for the continued success of musical, theatrical, artistic, and cultural traditions and events in Petaluma.
- **Policy 6-P-30** Place public art in areas that are interactive and accessible to the public and at the city's gateways.
- **Policy 6-P-31** Support the development of centrally located facilities to house visual and performing arts activities such as exhibitions, studio/classrooms, performance and theater/lecture space. Include outdoor locations that encourage cultural events such as outdoor performance and amphitheater space.
- **Policy 6-P-32** Work cooperatively with local school districts and community groups to encourage the development of art and cultural programs for all ages.
- **Policy 6-P-34** Offer and encourage opportunities for partnerships among public, non-profit and private organizations that sponsor art activities and programs. Explore grant possibilities from State and Federal agencies.

### *Central Petaluma Specific Plan*

The CPSP envisions a reinvigorated central district that accommodates a greater diversity and intensity of activities, supports the diversity of transportation opportunities afforded by the river, rail lines, and vehicular movement corridors, and furthers the goal of improving public access and enjoyment of the Petaluma River. Major Planning Concepts are used to guide the goals and policies of the CPSP. Policies, particularly relevant to the Project include the following:

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<sup>2</sup> Petaluma River Park, About, Frequently Asked Questions, <https://www.petalumariverpark.org/about>, accessed January 2025.

- **Public Space & River Access, Goal 9: Promote Art in Public Spaces.** The Specific Plan creates the potential for the development of numerous public spaces that could include public art of all types. A commitment to public art within the Specific Plan area would greatly contribute to and enrich the redevelopment of this area.

## **Community Engagement**

The Petaluma River Park Foundation has independently conducted community engagement with a variety of populations and groups, including, but not limited to local Indigenous peoples, Latino/Latinx, Black, Asian, and other BIPOC communities, people with disabilities, unsheltered individuals, elders, youth, and LGBTQIA2+ communities. The Foundation's community engagement efforts provided a diverse range of opportunities for members of the public to share their visions for the Park, including workshops where Community Park Designers and technical experts worked alongside the Foundation's design team to provide feedback on topics such as restoration, recreation, health, arts and culture, urban planning, education, and community engagement. The overall community engagement strategy employed by the Foundation seeks to create a space that fosters equity, accessibility, and shared stewardship, informing the Conceptual Proposal, which is now being presented to the City's various CCBs for additional review and feedback. Community engagement will continue to play a key role in the overall planning process for the Petaluma River Park.

## **Project Timeline**

The Petaluma River Park Foundation's timeline for the project includes three distinct phases. **Phase 1 (Dream It)** began in September 2023 and included community engagement activities to envision the future of the Petaluma River Park, assessment of site conditions to identify opportunities and constraints, development of a draft planning concept, and concluded in December 2024 with identification of a preferred concept.

The Project is currently in the beginning stages of **Phase 2 (Build It)**, which is anticipated to occur between January 2025 and December 2027. The first part of this Phase includes formal design, which requires review and approval by the City of Petaluma. Once approved, the Foundation will estimate project construction costs, select a general contractor, apply for and obtain City approval of any necessary building, grading, or similar construction permits, and commence construction.

**Phase 3 (Love It)** is anticipated between January and June 2028. It is anticipated to mark the completion of Project construction and will include special events, ribbon cutting, programs, volunteer opportunities, and the ongoing operation of the Park in the future.

## **DISCUSSION**

As previously discussed, this Study Session offers an opportunity to integrate public art planning into the overall development project planning during the conceptual design stage so that the City's public art goals of helping to make the City of Petaluma more livable, visually stimulating and create a deeper interaction with the places people visit, work, and live, which is consistent with the stated purpose of IZO Section 18.010.

The role of the Petaluma Public Art Committee at this Study Session is to provide feedback and direction to the project applicant related to the Conceptual Plan for providing public art within the

overall Petaluma River Park. The PPAC's discussion should be guided by the project's ability to meet the intent of the adopted General Plan and CPSP policies related to public art. The following are intended to facilitate PPAC discussion:

1. Discuss what types of public art would complement the site's character and enhance the quality of life of residents and visitors.
2. Discuss elements of scale, material, form, and content that the Committee would like to be considered to ensure the Project's public art component relates to nearby buildings, architecture, landscaping, and other elements that complement the site and its surroundings.
3. Discuss elements of history, modernity, community engagement, and environmental interpretation that the Committee would like to be considered in the Project's public art component.
4. Discuss specific programs for the Foundation to consider that would support the continuation of Petaluma's performing arts traditions.
5. Discuss the placement of public art throughout the site as it relates to interactivity and accessibility.

## **CASE STUDIES**

No case studies are associated with this project staff report. The project's conceptual design is informed by parks nationwide that are similar in spirit and scope including:

- [India Basin Waterfront Parks](#), San Francisco, CA
- [Brooklyn Bridge Park](#), New York, NY
- [Memphis River Parks](#), Memphis, TN
- [The Davis Center at the Harlem Meer](#), Central Park, New York, NY
- [Story Mill Park](#), Bozeman, MT
- [Pogo Park](#), Richmond, CA

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

As discussed in the Review Process section of this Staff Report, the Petaluma River Park Project is subject to several discretionary government entitlements or permits and is therefore required to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act regulations. During Planning review of the project's formal Planning entitlement applications, environmental review will be conducted and a CEQA determination will be prepared. Coordination between City staff and the Petaluma River Park Foundation is ongoing and includes identifying and preparing technical studies and analyses to support the project's required environmental review.

## **CITYWIDE GOALS & PRIORITIES**

The Petaluma River Park project advances key Citywide goals and priorities, including:

- **Our Environmental Legacy:** Preserve and protect Petaluma's environment for future generations and become a municipal leader in sustainability by protecting our river and

open space; reducing and drawing down greenhouse gas emissions; and encouraging sustainable development.

- **Spaces & Places That Inspire:** Create inviting natural and built places and spaces for contemplation, play, arts, and connection while celebrating our history and encouraging community pride.
- **An Economy That Prospers:** Encourage a thriving business environment that results in a strong, diverse, resilient economy and supports community prosperity.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Conceptual Project Description, prepared by the Petaluma River Park Foundation, dated January 16, 2025

Attachment 2: Project Site Map and Conceptual Site Plan, prepared by the Petaluma River Park Foundation, dated January 16, 2025