

Date: March 13, 2023

Memorandum To: Mayor and City Council of Petaluma

From: Releaf Petaluma, submitted by Wendy Jacobs, Chair



Re: Priority Setting. **ReLeaf Petaluma Calls for “Rebuild Green” as Top Priority for 2023-2024**

The City has adopted a **Climate Action Framework**. ReLeaf Petaluma is grateful for our opportunities to work with the city and with schools on planting 748 big trees on public lands in the past year to help our climate goals and quality of life. ReLeaf knows there are innumerable public servants among the city’s employees, at all levels, who are devoted to the concept of climate action yet constrained by a multitude of other priorities and in some places, chronic understaffing. ReLeaf recommends a priority of overwhelming significance for 2023 **for prompt, effective action on climate, environmental justice, public health, and biodiversity.**

ReLeaf urges the city to adopt this priority this now because: 1. fast changing climate will continue to stress our population and economy in unpredictable ways and 2. once-in-a-generation federal infrastructure funding is coming and it will be negligence to fail to transform our city’s climate readiness with these funds. There is no time to wait for the completion of the General Plan or for next year’s Priorities setting. We advise the City needs to boldly bump this onto the list, reprioritize other activities, and invest the extra energy and attention now, or else the opportunity to implement major, necessary changes will pass us by. ReLeaf suggests allowing for two assumptions: meaningful participation and assistance from the city’s non-governmental organizations and plentiful but time sensitive funding opportunities thanks to climate and infrastructure funds that must be spent fairly rapidly. ReLeaf hopes that together, Public Works and Climate Action will rise to the leadership called for by this extraordinary occasion.

RELEAF RECOMMENDED PRIORITY: REBUILD GREEN: Planning and applying for funding for updating the City’s Aging Gray Infrastructure using federal infrastructure funds. While the federal funds may be spent over a ten year period, the concepts and applications must be completed this year for the bulk of the available money, apparently sometime this fall. Establish a public-private task force reporting to the Director of Public Works, with a dotted line to the Climate Action Manager, to develop strategic and concept plans, and grant applications to achieve major climate action goals in the form of expensive but highly beneficial green infrastructure retrofits. Recommended components:

1. Fix Petaluma’s Central Heat/Pollution Island:

a.)Begin planning for redoing **E. Washington Blvd and Lakeville Highway** to disrupt the serious heat island effect of those corridors with green infrastructure streetscaping (that cools, mitigates stormwater run-off, and welcomes pedestrians and bicyclists instead of just cars). These should be shade tree-lined corridors with welcoming, protected bike lanes and safe, buffered pedestrian sidewalks. Incentives should be developed and funded with the grant money for private parking lots to encourage pedestrian safety and buffering, bioswales and shade trees. In 2023: Apply for federal infrastructure money to do this work.

b.)Prioritize planning and implementation for the 5th Street Greenway to help disrupt the serious heat island effect of central Petaluma with **residential green infrastructure streetscaping**, in order to serve as a model and template for any residential street in the heat island whose

residents mostly favor a similar implementation. In 2023: Apply for federal infrastructure money for the community outreach and education, and greening of a dozen or more streets in the heat island.

c.) Plan for and apply for funding for purple pipe extension for irrigation to all City Schools, Parks, and other Public Lands such as Right-of-Ways in the **101 Corridor**, and for planting of plentiful **shade trees with removal of excess concrete** for cooling, cleansing, stormwater mitigation and carbon sequestration. *(Carryover from 2022.)*

d.) Plan for and apply for funding for **restoration of shade tree planting along Highway 101** to address the removal of nearly 1,000 redwood trees. ReLeaf Petaluma is already working on this concept which should be included for funding.

2. **Reduce unnecessary GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emissions in our Parks and Public Lands:**

Collaborate with the Director of Recreation and Parks to create a plan, beginning with a 2023 pilot program, for **no-mow zones in parks**, such as along creek sides, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the industrial scale mowing currently underway in our parks, and to encourage biodiversity along our creeks. (See Westridge Park as an example.) The plan would provide education for the public about the reasons, such as interpretive signage, and transition the maintenance roles from mowing to buffer maintenance. Infrastructure funds could provide for a consultant, temporary staffing, and new equipment for a rapid but thoughtful transition.

3. Create a concept and apply for funding for a **scenic, environmental river corridor amenity** with naturalized buffer zones and maximum protections for the river. This also protects property, economy, and public health as part of our green stormwater infrastructure. We need to extend and protect buffer zones from the North River Corridor area through the entire city to its southern boundaries. *(Carryover from 2022, amended 2023.)*

CARRY OVER FROM LAST YEAR: Please be sure to renew this effort to completion. This could be made a part of the **Rebuild Green** priority or could remain separate but should be wrapped up on schedule.

1. Complete the drafting and supervise the adoption and implementation of a **new Tree Ordinance**, *necessary to protect and conserve valuable existing public and private trees in Petaluma. (Selected for 2022, but not yet completed.)*

As part of this action item, establish an **urban forestry department** consisting of an arborist/urban forester and two assistants, in order to

- *properly implement the new Tree Ordinance,*
 - *preserve existing public trees and address an extensive backlog of maintenance needs,*
 - *implement the urban forest management program which has approved grant funding* awaiting an assessment and blueprint study but no start date,*
 - *guide the expansion of Petaluma's urban forest and preserve the trees planted to date.*
- (Carryover from 2022, amended 2023.)*