

Letter: Make St. Helena a walker's delight

Michelle Deasy

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The logo for the St. Helena Star is centered on a dark red rectangular background. The text "ST. HELENA STAR" is written in a white, serif, all-caps font. "ST." is on the top line, "HELENA" is on the middle line, and "STAR" is on the bottom line. The letters have a slight glow or drop shadow effect.

There is nothing I enjoy more than a walk in St. Helena. It is beautiful, peaceful and friendly. I get a little exercise and fresh air, check out what's blooming, see the faces of other residents, gaze up at the valley walls, and have some precious time to think and reflect. Having previously lived in big cities and suburbs, I recognize what a treat it is that one can get just about anywhere in town on foot in a very reasonable amount of time. The ability to walk in St. Helena is a real strength of the town — and it could be better.

I currently have the pleasure of serving as chair of the city's Parks and Recreation Committee. For the past few years, I have served on the Walking Routes, Trails, and Publicly Accessible Open Space Subcommittee, which has been in existence since 2019. As a group, we have a vision of our town which is a center for walking and passive recreation. This will provide many benefits: low-cost health benefits for

walkers, an enjoyable and safe option for transportation (reducing our time driving around town and reducing air pollution), and making the city even more enticing to visitors.

The subcommittee published a **comprehensive report** to the City Council recommending the city take formal action to preserve and open walking paths, publish maps of walking routes from downtown, and provide access to existing open space using existing trails in some of the city's most marvelous areas (including areas adjacent to Bell Canyon, Lower Reservoir, and the newly created Redwood Forest). The plan has been approved by the Parks and Recreation Committee by a 5-0 vote (2x), a progress report was given to City Council and received with great enthusiasm, and it has gone through a formal CEQA analysis. Next up is the Planning Commission and then it will come before the City Council for the adoption of the report's recommendations. I would like to invite *all* residents to join us in supporting the efforts to make St. Helena a walker's delight.

I would like to publicly thank all of the members of the subcommittee current and past, including David Knudsen (who has led the effort from the start), new county Supervisor Anne Cottrell, Pam Smithers, Richard Seiferheld, fellow Parks and Recreation Commissioner Rebekah Weeman, Gail Davies and Bob Frescura. City staff has also spent many hours helping make sure we deliver a great plan. Dave Jahns (St. Helena parks and recreation director) Maya DeRosa (St. Helena community development director), and Chris Hartley (St. Helena police chief) deserve special recognition, as well as Andre Pichly (former recreation director), Erica Ahmann Smithies (former public works director) and Mark Prestwich (former city manager), plus the St. Helena Historical Society (which has helped identify the city's historical landmarks along the mapped walks) and Amy Carabba-Salazar with the chamber who saw immediately how helpful this could be in marketing St. Helena. Finally, a big thank you to all of the walkers in town who have contributed their thoughts and ideas.

Hope to see you out on the streets, paths and trails soon!

Michelle Deasy

St. Helena

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Commentary: Update on St. Helena trails and open space plan

