

BACKGROUND



UNIVERSITY OF
MICHIGAN

184 BACKGROUND

185 PURPOSE

186 Thoughtful design and careful programming
187 can address complex functional challenges
188 associated with streets and open space, in-
189 cluding transportation needs, supporting com-
190 mercial exchange, and helping to restore the
191 natural systems to which Downtown is con-
192 nected. Parks, plazas, streets, and other public
193 open spaces should reflect the highest aspira-
194 tions of a community and meet the needs of
195 people of all ages.

196 The SOSIP establishes a framework for
197 Downtown Berkeley's public realm, which is
198 comprised of public parks, plazas, and street
199 rights-of-way. Together, these comprise about
200 40% of the Downtown Area. The SOSIP of-
201 fers a simple playbook to communicate a
202 clear vision for vibrant streets that are shared
203 by pedestrians, cyclists, and cars traveling at
204 slow speeds. The SOSIP will also streamline
205 the design and implementation process – by
206 vetting concepts before opportunities arise,
207 coordinating agencies and stakeholders, and
208 establishing a program for financing improve-
209 ments and ongoing maintenance.

210 SOSIP improvements will implement Berke-
211 ley's General Plan, Downtown Plan, and Cli-
212 mate Action Plan. Many features in the SOSIP
213 spring from the extensive community process
214 that surrounded the development of a new
215 Downtown Area Plan.

Facing Page: Transportation Hub & Community Life.
Downtown grew rapidly as a rail and streetcar center, as commercial and civic uses took advantage of this access.



Figure b.1. Shattuck in the 1940s.



Figure b.2. Downtown's Farmers Market.



Figure b.3. Transit & Complete Streets. Pedestrian- and bike-oriented improvements make car-free living more possible by making transit a more attractive option and will help Berkeley attain its climate action goals.

216 It is important to note that the SOSIP focuses
 217 on public spaces and not open space on pri-
 218 vate land. Design considerations for private
 219 open space may appear in amendments to
 220 Berkeley's Zoning Ordinance and the Down-
 221 town Design Guidelines.

222 SETTING

223 Downtown Berkeley contains a few notable
 224 open spaces and streets, which address many
 225 community needs. Civic Center Park is Down-
 226 town's largest open space and was recently
 227 improved to emphasize its historic signifi-
 228 cance and introduce a tot lot and skateboard-
 229 ing area to serve Berkeley's youth. Berkeley
 230 High School's track is used for community rec-
 231 reation when it is not being used for School

232 activities. BART Plaza (also known as Consti-
 233 tution Square) will undergo improvements to
 234 make it more attractive, useful, and supportive
 235 of transit. "The Crescent" on the UC Campus
 236 also serves Downtown with a large grassy
 237 slope that creates an attractive formal entry to
 238 the University. Downtown also contains spe-
 239 cial streets, such as the Addison Street "Po-
 240 etry Walk," and the southern edge of Center
 241 Street where generous sidewalks are lined by
 242 active building fronts and sheltered by broad
 243 tree canopies.

244 Additional street and open space improve-
 245 ments are needed, however, to better address
 246 community goals. In spite of Downtown being
 247 largely built-out, major street and open space
 248 improvements can be achieved. Other types
 249 of enhancements can be made in addition to
 250 major improvements, such as by planting more
 251 street trees and installing a consistent and ap-
 252 propriate palette of signs, furnishings, and oth-
 253 er street elements.

254 Streets and open spaces meet community
 255 needs in multiple ways. Transportation needs
 256 are the most obvious. Downtown is where two
 257 of Berkeley's principal thoroughfares converge:
 258 Shattuck and University Avenues. And with
 259 over 5,000 boardings each day, bus service
 260 plays a vital role in Downtown and will remain
 261 an attractive option if convenient, reliable, and
 262 reasonably fast.

263 Public spaces are also critical for making
 264 Downtown a more inclusive social center, a
 265 more attractive cultural destination, a more
 266 successful commercial center, a more livable
 267 residential neighborhood, and a more ecolog-
 268 ically-beneficial place. Demands placed on
 269 streets and open spaces are discussed further
 270 in following chapters.

271 PROCESS

272 The SOSIP was developed with the guid-
273 ance of a Subcommittee drawn from four City
274 Commissions, each having a direct interest in
275 streets and open space: the Parks, Recreation
276 & Waterfront Commission; the Public Works
277 Commission; the Transportation Commission;
278 and the Planning Commission. The Plan also
279 incorporates input received from Berkeley's
280 Civic Arts Commission, the Landmarks Pres-
281 ervation Commission, and the Design Review
282 Committee. In addition, a public workshop of-
283 fered community members with an opportunity
284 to identify community preferences and set the
285 direction of design concepts.

286 The project's planner and designer, Matt
287 Taecker, worked with other City staff to de-
288 velop policy language and design concepts for
289 consideration. Additionally, Economic Planning
290 Systems developed funding recommendations
291 for the SOSIP, which were based in part on
292 ballpark cost estimates performed by Commu-
293 nity Design & Architecture.

294 The SOSIP was also reviewed by multiple City
295 Departments to assure consistency with City
296 policies and initiatives. The Plan is expected to
297 be adopted by Berkeley's City Council in 2011.



Figure b.4. The east end of Addison is still in need of improvement.



Figure b.5. University Avenue facing east.