The meeting was called to order at 7:11 p.m.

1. ROLL CALL

Planning Commissioners present: Boverhuis (7:31 p.m.), Bronstein, Capitelli, McCamant, Morris (7:19 p.m.), Pappas, Poschman, and Wengraf. Nick Pappas will sit in for Commissioner Wrenn at this meeting and at the meeting of June 28, 2000. Zelda Bronstein will chair the meeting.

Planning Commissioner absent: Howerton.

Landmarks Preservation Commissioners present: Emmington, Korte, Morse, O’Malley and Olson.


Staff present: Chakos, Cowan, Haney-Owens, Kahn, Mottern, Powell, Thomas, and Wendover.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Polly Armstrong of the City Council stated her appreciation of the Planning Commission holding workshops in the various neighborhoods of the City.

Norine Smith suggested that the Planning Commission explore the option of a pedestrian-only promenade like the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica.

Commissioner Poschman stated that the cities of Sacramento and Chicago tried pedestrian promenades and found that they didn't work.

Commissioner Bronstein suggested discussing the issue at another meeting.

3. ORDER OF AGENDA

There were no changes to the order of agenda.

4. GENERAL PLAN URBAN DESIGN, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AND COMMUNITY SAFETY WORKSHOP

Commissioner Bronstein opened the workshop, thanking members of the public for their active participation in the General Plan process.

Michael Katz asked what the last date for public comment on the draft General Plan will be.
Andrew Thomas stated that public comment would be accepted at any point in the process.
Janet Stromberg stated her support for putting the General Plan comments on the web.

URBAN DESIGN

Commissioner O'Malley stated that she does not like the division between historic preservation and urban design. She stated that in a built-out city like Berkeley, everything is a historic resource. She stated her disapproval for the Design Review Committee/Landmarks Preservation Commission division because modernists review new buildings and anti-modernists review old buildings.

Commissioner Emmington stated that the value of historical resources depend on their neighborhood context.

John McBride urged the Commissions to see the value in seemingly unplanned neighborhoods like West Berkeley.

Michael Katz stated that one of Berkeley's assets is its heritage as a streetcar suburb.

Commissioner Morse stated his support for a category of neighborhood with standards that are easier to meet than the strict standards for defining a neighborhood as a historic district, which requires a 50% approval of landowners.

Janet Carleton stated her appreciation for Berkeley's natural setting between the bay and the hills. She also stated that most parts of San Francisco are only four stories tall.

Wendy Market stated her concern for the new developments at the Claremont Hotel. She stated that they will impact Berkeley traffic.
Vivian Kahn stated that the project probably requires a discretionary permit from the City of Oakland, which means that Oakland will require an environmental review for the project and that Berkeley residents will have an opportunity to voice their opinions to Oakland lawmakers during that process.

Commissioner Emmington stated that people need to do research on the Claremont Hotel in order to prove that it has historic value that will be diminished by the new development.

Clifford Fred stated that two of Berkeley's assets are its relative lack of high-rises and that its old neighborhoods are still intact.
Helen Barber stated that the heaviest impacts of the Claremont Hotel development will be on the streets.
Commissioner Morris stated that the City should look for ways to communicate with other entities like the City of Oakland. She stated that the Claremont Hotel is just one example of a project that is controlled by another entity but directly affects Berkeley residents.

Commissioner Wengraf suggested that the Landmarks Preservation commission place the Claremont Hotel development on their agenda.

Norine Smith stated that one of Berkeley’s assets is its pedestrian friendliness in trees, sunlit sidewalks, and architecture.

Carrie Sprague stated that residential neighborhoods are threatened by expanded parking requirements that cause property owners to cover play areas for children and green space.

Russell Kilday-Hicks of the San Pablo Neighborhood Association stated that his neighborhood fought for an R-1 zoning district to stop cheap, boxy apartments. He stated that his neighborhood is currently fighting a four-story building under development.

John English stated his concern for preserving the quality of yards and open space. He stated his opposition for planting trees in the median of University Avenue because the trees block the view to the bay.

Steve Finacom stated that tall fences that abut sidewalks are a problem and that hedges are better.

John McBride stated that the continuity of landscaping in inner blocks is pleasant.

Commissioner Capitelli asked how to resolve the problem of cars parked on front lots.

Norine Smith stated that litter from unleashed dogs and traffic noise are two things that can be kept out of a yard by a high hedge or fence.

John McBride stated that the City cannot afford to maintain all of its parks.

Commissioner O’Malley stated that the Gaia Building will be unattractive and that we must learn how to prevent buildings like it in the future.

John English stated that design guidelines are too vague and that they should reflect differences among areas because many buildings in the City are out of context.

Commissioner Wengraf stated that sometimes there is a tension between beautiful buildings and affordable housing.

Commissioner Pappas stated that affordable housing can be nice and that there are good examples.

Commissioner Morris stated that design guidelines should be used to encourage and inform.
Steve Finacom stated that citizens must have confidence that decision-makers pay attention to
Guidelines.

Suzanne Adams stated her concern for the tendency to think about a neighborhood as a
fortress. She stated that it is inappropriate to define contextuality by what already exists in a
neighborhood.

An unidentified speaker stated that sameness should not inspire. She stated that freedom is
important.

Commissioner Emmington stated that we need to help neighborhoods define themselves and that
guidelines really do help.

Clifford Fred stated that better public notification would help the design review process.

Primo Facchini stated that something is wrong with the political nature of decisions in the City.
He stated that the City Council should not overturn the decision of the Design Review
Committee.

Commissioner Wengraf stated that some ugly buildings are allowed because they are residential
and do not require a Design Review.

Norine Smith stated that some subsidized buildings have good design.

Commissioner Morris stated that Frank Lloyd Wright was condemned when he first built and
that the City should not be overly afraid of new architectural styles. She stated that some simple,
modernist buildings are well landscaped.

John McBride stated that he does not support mandating styles.

Commissioner O’Malley stated that there is a difference between expressive architecture and
cheap and boring architecture.

Carrie Olson stated that in her recent experience as a member of the Design Review Committee
(DRC), she has found that DRC decisions seem to have little affect since the conditions they
impose are so difficult to track. She stated her perception that the DRC has little control.

Commissioner Korte of the Landmarks Preservation Committee stated that windows deserve
more attention because they affect the character of buildings but no building permit is required to
replace the windows in a historic building.

Michael Katz stated that new urbanist developers are using post-modern architectural styles now.
He stated his desire for Berkeley to preserve its true historical architecture.
Janet Stromberg stated that suburbs look better that they used to and the challenge of inner-ring suburbs like Berkeley is how to attract good new developments.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

John English stated that the City should not weaken its Landmarks Preservation Ordinance. He stated his support for giving the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) the power to prohibit demolitions instead of just suspending them. He stated his support of declaring the following areas historical districts: Downtown, Bowditch/Benvenue, and Telegraph Avenue. He stated that a zoning ordinance that allowed tall building would create an incentive for demolishing historic structures.

Steve Finacom stated that the public does not understand the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance. He stated his support for creating a classification of historic district that is easier to obtain than the current historic district status. He suggested giving tax incentives to owners of historic buildings.

Commissioner Bronstein stated that there is a widespread public impression that all old buildings qualify as landmarks and that local preservationists should make the criteria for landmarking a building clear to the general public.

Clifford Fred stated that the City should require Environmental Impact Reports before allowing demolition of historic structures. He stated his preference for zoning regulations that limit the height of residential buildings to four stories, instead of the currently allowed six stories.

Michael Katz stated that a strong historic preservation program could lead to economic development and ecologically sound buildings.

Commissioner O'Malley stated her support for allowing the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) the power to forbid demolition. She stated that a developer could always appeal the LPC decision.

John English stated that he would like to rename the Landmarks Preservation Commission the "Historic Resources Commission."

John McBride stated that sensitive, economically viable infill housing could work.

Commissioner Morse stated that Allston Way is a vulnerable area and that he considers it a candidate for historic district. He also stated that the Landmarks Preservation Commission has no clout in neighborhood discussions.

Steven Finacom stated that the Landmarks Preservation process is not antithetical to development, only to unpalatable, cheap, or modern buildings.
Commissioner Olson stated her support for historic districts. She stated that the Underhill Area falls in a district where 17 out of 18 buildings are historically significant.

Trent Wilson stated his support for a city-sponsored inventory of historic buildings.

Janet Stromberg suggested developing sets of standards for each district of the city.

Norine Smith stated that Berkeley will lose its unique character if it does not protect its historic landmarks.

Commissioner Emmington stated that staff tends to side with developers and that staff should be aware of the importance of historic resources.

Commissioner Wengraf stated that preservationists need to publicize their cause to enlist the support of more citizens.

Commissioner O'Malley stated that the Landmarks Preservation Commission is understaffed.

Steve Finacom stated that the term "landmark" implies a high standard and that perhaps the City should consider a change in terminology.

Commissioner Morse stated that microfiche of the documents relating to historic buildings should be made available to the public.

Vivian Kahn replied that all of the City’s building records are available to the public, but information for older buildings is often incomplete.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Russell Kilday-Hicks stated that the City would be hard-hit by a major earthquake. He stated the need for creating a disaster plan and for seismic retrofitting of existing buildings.

Arietta Chakos of the City Manager's Office stated that the City is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and that Berkeley has been named a "Project Impact" site by FEMA in order to work on reducing risks.

Commissioner Wengraf stated that the cost of insuring a building against earthquakes is often less than the costs of relocating tenants during retrofitting, so landlords delay needed retrofits.

Commissioner Morris stated that many buildings on lower Sproul Plaza are seismically unsafe and suffer from deferred maintenance.

Commissioner Capitelli asked what the focus of FEMA’s Project Impact program was.
Arrietta Chakos stated that Project Impact focuses on all types of natural hazards and that other communities have used it for hazards besides earthquakes.

Russell Kilday-Hicks stated that the School District has not fully implemented their emergency plan.

Steve Finacom stated that schools and parks will become refugee camps in the event of a major disaster, so the City should investigate what services can be provided in these public spaces. He also stated a need for the City to plan for what to do with land that may be leveled in case of natural disaster.

Commissioner Poschman stated that after the 1991 Oakland Hills fire, the Zoning Adjustments Board was bypassed during the rebuilding process, resulting in large increases in the size of residences.

Commissioner Morris stated that the City could educate its citizens through neighborhood associations.

Janet Stromberg stated that at her neighborhood’s disaster training, the group was told that they could not use schools in the case of a natural disaster.

Clifford Fred stated that a greater density makes Berkeley more vulnerable to disasters. He stated his concern with the fact that there is only one emergency room left in the area.

Commissioner Wengraf stated that City staff should designate sites that could be used by the public as meeting places in case of an emergency. She stated her concern that Fire Station #7 in the Northeast Hills has not been seismically retrofitted. She stated that the station is outdated and small. She stated that neighborhoods that complete City-sponsored fire safety training should be able to get City fire hoses for use in an emergency.

Norine Smith stated that, in addition to public safety issues like fire and earthquakes, the General Plan ought to address personal safety issues like muggings.

John McBride stated that residents should be able to support themselves for about 96 hours in any major disaster.

Commissioner Olson stated that the City should require landlords to retrofit seismically unsound buildings.

Steve Finacom stated that in the case of a natural disaster, many people who are in Berkeley will not be able to get out of the City. He also stated that in previous disasters, police and fire crews discouraged citizens from entering hazard areas to help. He stated that he would not support a policy like this in the future.

Russell Kilday-Hicks stated that the Emergency Plan Subcommittee meets on the 4th Wednesday of every month at the Emergency Operations Center at 9th and Cedar.
Clifford Fred stated that global warming could lead to rapid climate change, which could lead to landslides in Berkeley, so citizens should prepare for that risk as well.

Commissioner Wengraf stated the need for a coordinated plan between the School District, the City, and the University.

5. CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT
There was no Chairperson’s Report.

6. COUNCIL ACTIONS
There was no report on Council Actions.

7. FUTURE AGENDAS
There was no discussion of future agendas.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MAY 17 AND MAY 24, 2000 MEETINGS
Approval of the minutes was tabled until the Planning Commission meeting of June 28, 2000.

9. COMMITTEE REPORTS
There were no Committee Reports.

10. ADJOURNMENT
The meeting was adjourned at 10:27.