

## **CIVIC CENTER VISION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **BACKGROUND**

Originally conceived at the turn of the 20th Century, Berkeley's Civic Center was master planned and molded by City Beautiful Movement principles, and anchored by the 1909 construction of Berkeley's second City Hall (now known as the Maudelle Shirek Building at 2134 Martin Luther King Jr Way). The Veterans Building (1931 Center Street) was built in 1928 and designed to honor Berkeley's war veterans and provide a meeting place for their organizations. Other neighboring buildings including portions of Berkeley High School were constructed in this same era, and by the 1940s, Berkeley's Civic Center emerged as a cohesive group of civic buildings surrounding a central park.

Today the Civic Center comprises portions of the area surrounding Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park including the Maudelle Shirek Building 'Old City Hall' (1909) and the Veterans Memorial Building (1928) which flank the Park on the west and north sides. The larger Berkeley Civic Center District (codified by the Civic Center Overlay Zone, 2014) itself was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. In addition, many of the buildings in the Civic Center District, including the Maudelle Shirek Building, the Veterans Memorial Building, and the Park itself, have been individually recognized as City Landmarks. Since the 1940s seismic building codes have evolved, requiring different thresholds of required maintenance and upkeep depending on use, and presently the historic buildings show signs of deferred maintenance and are seismically unsound. As part of the City's Measure T1 Bond Funding program, the Veterans Memorial Building and Old City Hall were slated for "Structural analysis and visioning of possible conceptual design alternatives, in concert with Civic Center Park, to help determine a direction for future capital improvements to restore and secure these facilities to maximize their community benefit."<sup>1</sup>

As such, this project has executed a comprehensive community outreach strategy, distilled a number of wide-ranging and exciting ideas into a vision statement; performed an assessment of the existing supporting infrastructures of all three elements (Old City Hall, Veterans Memorial Building and Civic Center Park); identified a menu of programs and functions for the two buildings, articulated complementary public realm improvements for the Park, and presented a suite of financial tools and revenue generation strategies to sustain the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of the facilities. The *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan* identifies and recommends design concepts and offers an appraisal framework for Berkeley's Civic Center. The plan lays a strong foundation and clear direction for the Civic Center's next act. The Vision for Berkeley's Civic Center is:

***Civic Center will be the heart of Berkeley's community. Civic Center will be the prime space for civic life, culture, and the arts. It will reflect the city's diverse identities, celebrating its history, and contributing to shaping its future. A place of shared resources and a platform for free expression accessible to all, Civic Center aims to manifest the city's values, advance social justice, and demonstrate the power of true public space.***

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<sup>1</sup> The \$376,430 contract for the *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan* development is funded entirely by Measure T1 bond proceeds (budget code 511-54-623-677-0000-000-444-612310) with \$80,000 of the funding dedicated towards a historical resources study of the Veterans Memorial Building, Maudelle Shirek Building (commonly referred to as "Old City Hall") and a cultural landscape study of Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park.

## FUNDING SOURCE

In 2016, Berkeley voters approved *Measure T1*, which authorized the City to sell \$100 million of general obligation bonds to repair, renovate, replace, or reconstruct the City's aging infrastructure and facilities, including important City facilities and buildings.

A structural analysis and visioning project including the Veterans Memorial Building, Old City Hall and Civic Center Park were included in Phase 1 project list to determine a direction for future capital improvements to restore these facilities to maximize their community benefit. On January 22, 2019 City Council approved this solicitation at its regular meeting and approved the engagement of a qualified project consultant team to assist in the completion of this project at its regular July 16, 2019 meeting.

In addition to the \$296,430 authorized for the project, an additional \$80,000 of T1 funding was granted to produce historic structures reports for both buildings and the park. The purpose of these reports is to verify the relevant historical information and historic context contributing to each resource's significance; understand their physical modifications and changes of use over time; document their character defining features and current physical conditions; generate cost estimates for their future rehabilitation; and pose treatment plans and future use recommendations. The historic structures reports also gather background data from various local archives, compare historic and renovation drawings with existing conditions, and are the result of significant documentary field work. They are included in full in the *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan* appendix along with the cost estimates and the community engagement transcripts.

## PROJECT TEAM

In July of 2019, the City of Berkeley selected a consultant team led by Gehl Studio and supported by Siegel & Strain Architects, Strategic Economics and others to provide professional consulting services to assist in completion of this project. Gehl is one of the world's leading urban design and architecture firms. They are headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark and opened a San Francisco office in 2014. They are known for their 'people-centered' design strategies; in recent years, they've led successful redesigns of many famous public spaces, including Times Square in New York City and San Francisco's Civic Center. The project team also included a roster of qualified sub-consultants in a number of relevant specializations including: architecture, historic preservation, economic analysis, and cost estimating.

## OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### ***Focus Groups, Interviews and Community Outreach***

The consultant team spent the fall of 2019 conducting a Public Space Public Life (PSPL) study of Civic Center, holding focus group interviews, hosting a site tour, facilitating a 'vision and values' workshop, and engaging with four city commissions and the project's technical advisory group composed of city staff in a wide variety of departments. In January of 2020, the team presented a draft vision statement for Civic Center to Berkeley's City Council for feedback.<sup>2</sup> The consultant team continued to work throughout the spring and summer of 2020 to host a variety of interactive design workshops and develop a project website for additional community input. They also delivered three interactive conceptual design options, an in-depth set of funding strategies, and a robust implementation plan.

***Workshops*** Throughout the course of the project, the project team conducted four public workshops in variety of settings designed to elicit creative and meaningful feedback from the Berkeley community.

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<sup>2</sup> Berkeley City Council Agenda Worksession, *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan*, [Item #1](#) January 14, 2020.

### ***Vision and Values Workshop***

On December 12, 2019, staff and the consultant team hosted a Vision and Values Workshop at the YMCA Teen Center (located at 2111 Martin Luther King Jr Way) adjacent to Civic Center Park. Approximately 40 community members attended the session, which was designed to generate thoughts about the underlying purposes and functions of our Civic Center, and to inform the project's Vision Statement. The consultant team organized the session into fast-paced group exercises, with opportunities for discussion in small groups and 'share-backs' with the whole group. Workshop attendees, City staff, and the consultant team noted that there was a strong spirit of collaboration among the attendees, and broad consensus around core values for the future of Civic Center.

### ***Youth Focused Workshop***

On February 4, 2020 the consultant team hosted two Youth-Focused Design Charrettes at Berkeley High School (located at 1980 Allston Way) adjacent to Civic Center Park. The charrettes explored design concepts for the Civic Center area with students from neighboring Berkeley High School (BHS) in partnership with BHS's Career Technical Education program. These charrettes were open to the general public, but were specifically designed to elicit targeted feedback from students who were identified in the Public Space Public Life (PSPL) study as bringing "the magic of youth" to Civic Center Park. The project team introduced the students to Public Life and its importance, and heard from the students on how they engage with the park. In groups, the students came up with design concepts and described features, spaces, and amenities they would like to see in the park including "Lights, Ledges & Liquidity" and a "Social Space Multi-generation Park."

### ***Pop-Up Workshop***

On March 7, 2020 the team hosted a tent at the Saturday Farmer's Market on Center Street to share the design concepts and project information. Displays were set up and shoppers stopped by for conversation about what they would like to see in Civic Center. The Pop Up at the Farmers Market also offered two tours of the buildings and park, and served to inform the conceptual design of the landscape and public realm options.

### ***Design Workshop and Remote Engagement***

Following the pop-up workshop of March 7, the plan was to hold a design workshop with pin up design boards in the Cypress Conference Room of 2180 Milvia Street on March 26, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) global pandemic and resulting shelter in place order issued on March 16, 2020 by the City of Berkeley's Public Health Officer, the engagement strategy was adapted to accommodate an entirely virtual approach. The project team (from home!) was quickly able to develop a series of videos to accompany the Civic Center design options and presented them on the interactive project website. The project team used video conferencing tools to record themselves describing the design process, vision statement, and the design options. In one week, the Civic Center project website generated over 350 comments, and more than 12,500 page views. The presentation included three conceptual design options with questions to gather input on each one, and finally images of possible landscape features along with questions designed to elicit constructive feedback.

### **DESIGN CONCEPTS A, B, AND C**

The engagement and visioning process that led to the creation of the conceptual design plans first identified the main programs and features that needed to be present in all versions of the design

concepts for Civic Center. The process also identified priority public realm improvements for Civic Center Park. Using those together, the team presented three varied design concepts titled “A”, “B” and “C”. A short description of each is below:

*Design Option A* shows Old City Hall is restored for use as a new City Hall with Council chambers, the Veterans Memorial Building is converted into a “Cultural Hive” and the existing restrooms and storage spaces on the west side of 2180 Milvia are replaced with larger additions for food and beverage services.

*Design Option B* shows Old City Hall renovated as a Performing Arts & Culture Center, the Veterans Memorial Building houses a meeting hall for Council and other public entities, select city offices and uses. Storage spaces on the west side of 2180 Milvia are converted into food and beverage kiosks.

*Design Option C* shows Old City Hall renovated as ‘The Berkeley Center,’ housing the historical society, a bookstore, and exhibit halls and/or renovated and rented to a small institution or a Think Tank. The Veterans Memorial Building is, as in Option A, transformed into a Cultural Hive. 2180 Milvia is expanded on the west side to house a new meeting chamber – for Council and other public entities.

## **PREFERRED DESIGN CONCEPT**

As the team developed and presented different iterations of the design concepts, it became important to establish a criteria for analyzing how options compare to each other on key measures. For example, all options successfully translated the vision statement into a spatial configuration. However, there were differences in the costing of each option and on the community and stakeholder support they each received. The recommended concept, which combines elements of both Design Option A and Design Option C is aligned with the Vision statement and with community and stakeholder input and is the most cost effective. The preferred design concept, includes the following key components:

*A new structure on the Park* — including a Council Meeting Hall, Park Café and Restrooms. This new building on the park will offer an opportunity for a contemporary architectural addition that complements the sensitive rehabilitation of important historic structures. It will also offer a home to new programs that will contribute to the activation of the park — a park café, restaurant and restrooms. Finally, it will enable the Council and other groups to meet (late into the evening) in a central location with modern amenities.

*A retrofitted Old City Hall – known as The Berkeley Center* is populated by the Berkeley Historical Society and other tenants. Additional tenants should extend or complement the historical and education mission of celebrating the history and stories of Berkeley. Spaces for indoor gatherings — such as receptions and talks, as well as exhibition spaces, will ensure the building is open to the public. Subject to programmatic needs and funding opportunities, the scenario of extending Old City Hall toward the west should be pursued for services and other uses.

*The Berkeley Cultural Hive at the Veterans Memorial Building.* The Cultural Hive will house community meeting spaces, places for performing arts and arts education (i.e. after school programs for school-aged children, performances etc.) and meeting spaces for the Veterans groups and the community. The Cultural Hive will serve as bridge between the Berkeley High School and the neighboring Arts District on Addison Street with a retrofitted auditorium, smaller performing arts studios, and teaching spaces. The idea of a rooftop addition for an outdoor event space, set back from the main façade, and a terrace, should be explored (the rooftop addition is not included in the cost estimates).

In addition, *a new landscape for Civic Center Park is proposed to celebrate the Park’s rich history and includes bold, ambitious and people-centered moves to make the park more accessible, comfortable and used.* The recommended design concept comprises six Public Realm Zones including: arts and

performance plazas, playscapes, leafy ledges, a turtle garden, and a “front porch” that opens onto the park.

### **FUTURE COSTS AND FUNDING STRATEGY**

Using the adopted vision plan as a guide, subsequent phases of this project should address the accompanying implementation strategy and associated action items.<sup>3</sup> Dedicated staff and allied consultants will be necessary to secure funding, advance planning, develop detailed architectural designs, align programming, manage construction, and make the vision for Civic Center a reality. Preliminary cost estimates to achieve the design concepts discussed in the final report range from \$56,144,000 to \$92,569,000 mostly depending on the desired uses and associated required seismic upgrades for the buildings.<sup>4</sup> The development of the preferred design concept which includes: park improvements, new council chambers, and the seismic retrofits for reuse of Old City Hall and the Veterans Memorial Building is estimated to be \$56,144,000.

Funding for subsequent near-term phases of this project may be considered in the public process in determining projects to be funded in Phase 2 of Measure T1, the remaining funding available in the City’s \$100 million general obligation bonds to repair, renovate, replace, or reconstruct the City’s aging infrastructure and facilities.

In addition, the Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan should also be used as a foundation to seek any other funding opportunities to bring this project to fruition. Inevitably, the preferred vision goes beyond this project’s scope and includes other nearby buildings that should be considered during subsequent phases of the Civic Center project. Future studies will further detail the preferred conceptual design option and help deepen the development of project phasing, and/or project groups (i.e. specifying what building projects goes with what public realm project), and will identify how each project can be effectively funded going forward.

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 8, Implementation, *Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan*, page 222-225.

<sup>4</sup> *Berkeley’s Civic Center Vision and Implementation Plan*, Chapter 6, Funding Strategy, Section 6.3 Cost Summary, page 193. The preferred design concept recommends a Basic Performance Objective for Existing Buildings (BPOE) seismic upgrade scheme for each building, which allows safe egress from the building and prevents the building from collapse during a seismic event, however, the building may incur damages that are exceedingly expensive to repair.