

F. URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL QUALITY

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The following section describes the visual and sensory relationships between people and the built environment, and describes potential impacts of the *Draft General Plan* on these resources. The built environment includes not only buildings and streets, but also natural features, such as trees, gardens and parks as they are incorporated into the urban context. The discussion in this chapter includes general elements of urban design and streetscapes, such as view corridors, gateways, signs, and public art, as well as Berkeley's urban form and urban design policies. This baseline setting information has been focused to directly relate to potential urban design and visual impacts of the *Draft General Plan* based on the criteria of significance outlined in Section 2a, below.

1. Setting

a. Urban Design Elements. Elements that contribute to the success or failure of urban design include architectural design, site and landscaping design, design and placement of signs, street and sidewalk design, the relationship between and among buildings, and building color and material choices. The following urban design elements shape the visual landscape of the City of Berkeley.

(1) View Corridors, Scenic Landmarks and Streetscapes. Views from Berkeley towards the San Francisco Bay, the skyline of San Francisco, the Bay Bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the East Bay Hills have long been identified as being among Berkeley's greatest assets. Public views of the San Francisco Bay are available from University Avenue and other major east/west streets and sidewalks, the Lawrence Hall of Science, City Hall, the Berkeley Pier, the Rose Garden, and numerous other parks and open space areas.

Views of buildings and monuments and other visual landmarks can serve a practical function of orientation. For example, views of the Campanile from various streets in the downtown area and from Telegraph Avenue help orient pedestrians.

Streets, sidewalks, building facades, and street trees and furniture are all elements that comprise the urban streetscape. Addition, deletion, and modification of any of these

elements will affect the visual quality of the City. Views of the Campanile and streetscape elements can be seen in Figures IV.F-1a and IV.F-1b.



(2) Gateways. Gateways are key points of arrival into a city, and can convey civic pride and identity. Gateway corridors are often emphasized with landscaping, lighting, signs, art, banners or gate markers. The location and design of new buildings can also contribute to the sense of entry and gateway experience. Prominent Berkeley gateways include San Pablo Avenue, which becomes tree-lined at the Berkeley borders with Albany and Oakland, as well as the University Avenue entrance from I-80, which offers a panoramic view of Berkeley and the hills and helps orient arriving visitors to Berkeley. Several other examples of Berkeley gateways include the stone pillars for the Elmwood, Northbrae and Thousand Oaks neighborhoods, the Rose Walk steps, and the large redwoods at the intersection of Shattuck Avenue and Adeline Street as one enters the south Shattuck Avenue corridor leading to the Downtown.

(3) Signs. Signs are a necessary element of all business districts, and because of their intentional visibility, they can significantly affect the appearance and image of a city. Since 1987, all new signs in Berkeley have been regulated by both the Design Review Ordinance and the Sign Ordinance. The Sign Ordinance outlines how signs should be attached from a safety perspective, and also regulates the type, number, and size of signs. The Sign Ordinance also prohibits the construction of new billboards, but does not require the removal of existing ones. The Design Review Ordinance coordinates the size and location of signs with the architecture of the building and the character of the area, and specifies materials.



Figure IV.F-1 Views of Berkeley

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(4) Public Art. Notable examples of public art in Berkeley include: the bas reliefs at Berkeley High School, the Marina sculpture, the fountains at Marin Circle and Civic Center Park, the Peace Wall in Civic Center Park, the murals at Willard Jr. High, and the Orchard Lane pedestrian path balustrades.

b. Berkeley's Urban Form. Historic structures are a critical component of the City's physical character. The built environment in Berkeley was largely shaped by early development patterns during the first part of this century. The Garden City Movement, influenced by Frederick Law Olmstead, is in evidence in Berkeley's landscaped roadways, self-contained residential subdivisions, and the natural beauty and formal appeal of the University of California campus. Later, the Beaux Arts Movements, influenced by the architecture of John Galen Howard and others on the U.C. campus, resulted in a more formal design aesthetic that is evident in the City's Civic Center area and other downtown buildings. The Arts and Crafts Movement, including architects such as Bernard Maybeck, Julia Morgan, and the Green Brothers, resulted in Berkeley's many brown shingle buildings. A Green Brothers building is shown in Figure IV.F-2b. Later, Modernism and the International Style influenced the design of several Berkeley buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, including buildings on the U.C. campus and several multi-family residential buildings. Modern building styles from the 1980s and 1990s also influence the City's urban fabric, as historic and recently built structures are often placed side by side. An example of this mosaic is shown in Figure IV.F-2a.

(1) Commercial Areas. Downtown Berkeley is the City's primary commercial and entertainment center, with office buildings, retail shops, government facilities, restaurants, theaters, and general services. Many of downtown Berkeley's commercial buildings were built in the 1920s and the area as a whole retains a strong feeling of that period. A historic structure in the Downtown is shown in Figure IV.F-2c.

Berkeley has several major commercial corridors, including Shattuck Avenue, University Avenue, and San Pablo Avenue. These corridors are generally characterized by small storefronts, turn-of-the-century buildings, a generally continuous row of low-rise buildings at the front property line, parking at the side or rear, a consistent street tree canopy, landscaped street medians, and the presence of mass transit.

Berkeley has several neighborhood shopping areas, such as the North Shattuck corridor along Shattuck Avenue and Walnut Street; the Elmwood area along College Avenue; Solano Avenue; the Adeline/Alcatraz area in South Berkeley; Fourth Street; and Gilman Street. These areas are characterized by retail buildings that begin at the

Figure IV.F-2 Views of Berkeley

8x11

back of the sidewalk, a lack of off-street parking, historic buildings, continuous public sidewalks, access to public transit, pedestrian-scale signs (rather than tall pole signs), large display windows for browsing, and a diversity of shops and services. The design and layout of these districts place equal emphasis on pedestrian and auto circulation. Views of a Berkeley neighborhood and avenue commercial corridor are shown in Figure IV.F-3.



(2) Residential Neighborhoods. Berkeley's residential neighborhoods have a distinctive feel and quality, characterized by highly variable housing of different styles and eras. Housing types include historic or period revival as well as modern and post-modern architectural styles, abundant landscaping, and varied materials, including both wood and stucco exteriors.

(3) Campus. Although the buildings of the central campus of the University of California and adjacent hillsides leading up to Lawrence Berkeley Lab, are a visual asset for the City, many of the buildings located off of the central campus are out-of-scale and of a different character than the neighborhoods in which they are located. As a state agency, the University is exempt from local zoning regulations. With the adoption of the *Long Range Development Plan (LRDP)* in 1991, an effort is being made to establish an on-going dialogue between the City and the University on development issues, including the design of off-campus projects and historic preservation. The University has also adopted a policy of presenting future off-campus building designs to the City's Design Review Committee for review and comment.

The City and the University are also currently working on a *Southside Area Plan* for the area south of the U.C. Campus. When complete, the *Southside Area Plan* will address issues that could affect urban form in the southside area, including land use, housing, parking, urban design and historic presentation and public safety.

c. Urban Design Plans and Policies. The residents and policymakers of Berkeley have made preservation of historic resources a priority in the City. This section outlines the policies, programs and organizations that have been created by residents and City staff to promote historic preservation and successful urban form in the City.

Figure IV.F-3 Views of Berkeley

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(1) Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance. The Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance (NPO) is a citizen-approved measure, effective since April 1973, intended to preserve and enhance neighborhood character through the regulation of residential construction and demolition, including protection of affordable housing and regulation of higher-density development. Virtually all of the requirements of the NPO have been incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance.

(2) Area Plans. The majority of the City's current area plans (listed in Section A, Land Use, in this chapter of the EIR) contain policies and recommendations which stress urban design and historic preservation. All the area plan policies would be readopted as part of the General Plan Update, although certain policies from the *Downtown Plan* would be required to undergo revision to ensure consistency with the *Draft General Plan*.

(3) Design Review. In 1986, the City Council adopted the *Design Review Ordinance* and established the Design Review Committee to advise the Zoning Adjustments Board on design-related issues for new projects located in non-residential zoning districts.¹ The *Design Review Ordinance* requires design approval, prior to construction, of new commercial and industrial buildings, storefronts, signs and awnings. It contains general guidelines for architectural design, the locations of new buildings, parking, landscaping, signs, and awnings, but does not dictate a particular architectural style. Approximately 100 projects are submitted each year for Design Review.²

(4) Landmarks Preservation. The Landmarks Preservation Commission, also created by City ordinance, has been delegated authority by the City Council to designate historic buildings, sites, and districts as City landmarks. Currently, approximately 298 buildings or districts in Berkeley are designated as local landmarks, local structures of merit, or historic districts, and are shown in Figure IV.G-2 in Section G, Cultural Resources. A complete listing of City landmarks appears as Appendix D. Of these, 48 are on the list of National Register of Historic Places, and one, the Piedmont Avenue

¹ Residential development can be required to undergo design review as a condition of approval for any discretionary permit granted by the Zoning Adjustments Board.

² Thomas, Andrew, City of Berkeley Planning Department, July 2000. *Personal communication with LSA Associates, Inc.*

public right-of-way, designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, is on the list of State Historic Landmarks.³

The Landmarks Preservation Commission reviews architectural changes to designated landmark buildings and structures of merit to ensure that these resources are not altered insensitively or lost. The Landmarks Preservation Commission also advises the Design Review Committee as to the appropriateness of design changes to or demolitions of all non-residential buildings over 40 years old. The Landmarks Preservation Commission provides advice as to the impact a proposed project may have on an adjacent or nearby landmark building. The State Historic Resources Inventory and the California Register of Historic Resources are actively considered by the Landmarks Preservation Commission when considering the designation of City landmarks and when evaluating changes to historic buildings.

d. Draft General Plan Policies. The *Draft General Plan* contains policies related to urban design and visual quality in four of the nine *General Plan* elements, including Land Use; Open Space; Economic Development and Employment; and Preservation and Design. All 18 policies of the Preservation and Design Element are relevant to urban design and visual quality issues. These policies can be easily referenced in one consolidated location in Appendix B. Each relevant policy from the other three *Draft General Plan* elements is restated here to assist the reader. In addition to the policies of the Preservation and Design Element, additional *Draft General Plan* policies related to urban design and visual quality include:

- § *Policy LU-1*. Maintain the character of Berkeley as a special, diverse, unique place to live and work.
- § *Policy LU-2*. Protect Berkeley character by identifying, restoring, and preserving historic buildings.
- § *Policy LU-3*. Require sensitively designed, thoughtfully planned infill development compatible with existing city character, neighboring land uses, and architectural scale and design.
- § *Policy LU-4*. Use design review and permit approval processes to enhance the character of Berkeley with regard to visual, esthetic, environmental, economic and social factors.
- § *Policy LU-6*. Ensure that all residential areas are safe and attractive places to live.
- § *Policy LU-7*. Preserve and protect the quality of life in Berkeley's residential areas through careful land use decisions.

³ Berkeley, City of, 2000. *Workshop Information Sheet*. 2000.

- A. Require that new development is consistent with zoning density standards and compatible with the existing scale, historic character and surrounding uses.
- \$ *Policy LU-18.* Implement the Downtown Plan and take actions to achieve the three goals of the Plan:
 - 1. Express and enhance Berkeley's unique social and cultural character in the downtown;
 - 2. Create an appealing and safe downtown environment, with a comfortable pedestrian orientation; and
 - 3. Diversify, revitalize and promote the downtown economy.
- \$ *Policy LU-24.* Require the highest quality architectural design for all downtown projects.
 - A. Ensure that all downtown area projects conform to the Downtown Plan, the Downtown Design Guidelines and the Urban Design and Historic Preservation Element.
 - B. Maintain the existing scale of downtown. New construction should fit into the context of the existing built environment and complement downtown's historic character.
 - C. Encourage infill development that is compatible with existing uses and improves the pedestrian environment and the streetscape. Permit taller buildings only if they are in scale with other structures in the downtown.
- \$ *Policy LU-27.* Maintain the Civic Center as a cohesively designed, well-maintained and secure place for community activities, cultural and educational uses, and essential civic functions and facilities. Promote the Civic Center as a historic resource listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- \$ *Policy LU-28.* Maintain and improve Neighborhood Commercial Areas including Elmwood, Solano, and North Shattuck as, pedestrian-friendly, visually attractive areas of human scale and ensure that Neighborhood Commercial areas fully serve neighborhood needs.
- \$ *Policy LU-29.* Maintain and improve Avenue Commercial areas including University, San Pablo, and South Berkeley as pedestrian-friendly, visually attractive areas of human scale and ensure that Avenue areas fully serve neighborhood needs as well as a broader spectrum of needs.
 - C. Ensure safe, well-lighted wide walkways that are appropriately shaded for compatibility with upper story residential units and adequate traffic signals for pedestrian street-crossings in commercial areas.

- § *Policy LU-37.* Reduce the housing impacts of the University on the citywide supply of housing.
 - A. Support sensitively designed additional housing for students and faculty within walking distance of campus.
- § *Policy S-11.* Encourage and support the long-term protection of historic or architecturally significant structures to preserve neighborhood and community character.
 - A. Create incentives for owners of historic or architecturally significant structures to undertake mitigation to levels that will minimize the likelihood of demolition and maximize the ability to repair or avoid damage in the event of a natural disaster.
 - B. Consistent with public safety and acceptable risk determinations, seek all feasible means to avoid demolition of historic or architecturally significant structures following a disaster by pursuing repair, rehabilitation, and preservation of structures, facades or other features.
- § *Policy OS-7.* Within the context of open space resource allocations for new or expanded facilities, give high priority to providing additional facilities in areas of the city and for populations that are currently underserved.
- § *Policy OS-8.* Improve transit, bicycle, disabled, and pedestrian access to and between open space and recreation facilities, including regional facilities such as the University of California open space, East Bay Regional Park lands, East Bay Shoreline State Park, and recreational facilities in other cities.
- § *Policy ED-4.* Provide programs and services to assist neighborhood commercial districts.
 - A. Implement capital improvements and expand façade grants to restore original and historic facades.
- § *Policy ED-6.* Improve customer access to Berkeley businesses.
 - A. Support streetscape and facade design that makes it easier to identify businesses and more pleasant to shop them.
- § *Policy ED-8.* Implement capital and transit improvements to support the local economy.
 - C. When considering public improvements in commercial districts, ensure that preservation of historic elements to maintain district individuality is considered.

2. Impacts and Mitigation Measures

a. Criteria of Significance. The proposed *Draft General Plan* would have a significant impact on urban design and visual quality if it would:

- \$ Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- \$ Create substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views;
- \$ Substantially degrade the existing visual character of the City or specific neighborhoods;
- \$ Substantially damage a scenic resource, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings and historic buildings;
- \$ Result in a significant increase in the number of hours that a park, open space or schoolyard is in shade; or
- \$ Create development that would be substantially inconsistent with the character, scale, massing, bulk and form of the surrounding neighborhood as defined by the existing zoning standards.

b. Impacts and Mitigation Measures. This section outlines potential impacts to urban design and visual quality that would occur with Plan implementation and suggests mitigation to address these impacts. Less-than-significant urban design and visual quality impacts are discussed first, followed by significant impacts.

(1) Less-than-Significant Urban Design and Visual Quality Impacts. As set forth in earlier sections of this EIR, less-than-significant impacts are discussed below.

Implementation of *Policies PD-1* through *PD-39* (see Appendix B), *LU-1*, *LU-2*, *LU-3*, *LU-4*, *LU-6*, *LU-7*, *LU-18*, *LU-24*, *LU-27*, *LU-28*, *LU-29*, *LU-37*, *S-11*, *OS-7*, *OS-8*, *ED-4*, *ED-6*, and *ED-8* relate to urban design and visual quality but would not be expected to result in significant adverse physical environmental impacts. The proposed policies of the *Draft General Plan* would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or substantially damage a scenic resource.

(2) Significant Urban Design and Visual Quality Impacts. One potentially significant urban design and visual quality impact would occur with implementation of the *Draft General Plan*.

Impact VIS-1: Policy OS-3H calls for the addition of lights where appropriate to existing sports fields, which could create significant glare in residential neighborhoods. (PS)

The addition of nighttime sports field lighting could create potentially significant visual impacts by creating substantial light and glare in residential neighborhoods. *Policy EM-*

45 requires that outdoor lighting be chosen to avoid glare and have fully shielded fixtures to limit light rays emitted above the horizontal plane. This type of lighting may be difficult to implement for sports field lighting. Therefore, the following mitigation measure is identified.

Mitigation Measure VIS-1: Any potential sports field lighting project shall be subject to site-specific project environmental review, with a particular emphasis on potential intrusive light and glare impacts. (LTS)

