

BACKGROUND



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PURPOSE

Through thoughtful design and careful programming, streets and open space can address complex functional challenges relating to transportation, ecological restoration, regular and occasional activities, and community life. Parks, plazas, streets, and other public open spaces should reflect the highest aspirations of a community and meet the needs of people of all ages and abilities.

The SOSIP establishes a framework for Downtown Berkeley's public realm, which is comprised of public parks, plazas, and street rights-of-way, which together comprise about 40% of the Downtown Area. The SOSIP offers a simple "playbook" that communicates a clear vision for vibrant parks, plazas, and streets that are shared by pedestrians, cyclists, and cars traveling at safe, appropriate speeds. The SOSIP also helps streamline the design and implementation process by vetting concepts before opportunities arise, coordinating agencies and stakeholders, and establishing a program for financing improvements and on-going maintenance.

SOSIP improvements will implement Berkeley's General Plan, Downtown Area Plan and Climate Action Plan. Many features in the SOSIP spring from the extensive community process that surrounded the development of the new Downtown Area Plan, which was adopted in 2012.

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.

It is important to note that the SOSIP focuses on public spaces and not open space on private land. Design considerations for private open space are included in Berkeley's Zoning Ordinance and the Downtown Development Design Guidelines.

SETTING

Downtown Berkeley already contains notable open spaces and streets, which address many community needs. Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park is Downtown's largest open space and was recently improved to emphasize its historic significance and introduce a tot lot and skateboarding area to serve Berkeley's youth. Berkeley High School's track is used for community recreation when it is not being used for

School activities. BART Plaza (also known as Constitution Square) will undergo improvements to make it a more attractive, useful, and supportive of transit. "The Crescent" on the UC Campus also serves Downtown with a large grassy slope that creates an attractive formal entry to the University. Downtown also contains special streets, such as the Addison Street "Poetry Walk," and the southern side of Center Street, east of Shattuck, where generous sidewalks are lined by active building fronts and sheltered by broad tree canopies.

Street and open space improvements are needed, however, to better address community goals. In spite of Downtown being largely built-out, major street and open space improvements can be achieved. Several types of enhancements can also be made in addition to major improvements, such as by planting more street trees and installing a consistent and appropriate palette of signs, furnishings and other street elements.

Streets and open spaces meet community needs in multiple ways. Transportation needs are the most obvious. Downtown is where two of Berkeley's principle thoroughfares converge: Shattuck and University Avenues. Transit service plays a vital role in Downtown; the Downtown Berkeley BART station serves more than 24,000 entries and exits per day, and there are over 6,000 bus boarding and alightings Downtown each day. Transit will remain an attractive option if convenient, reliable, and reasonably fast.

Public spaces are also critical for making Downtown a more inclusive social center, a more attractive cultural destination, a more successful commercial center, a more livable residential neighborhood, and a more ecologically-beneficial place. Demands placed on

streets and open spaces are discussed further in following chapters.

PROCESS

The SOSIP was developed with the guidance of a Subcommittee comprised of four City Commissions, each having a direct interest in streets and open space: the Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Commission; the Public Works Commission; the Transportation Commission; and the Planning Commission. The Plan also incorporates input received from Berkeley's Civic Arts Commission, the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and the Design Review Committee. In addition, a public workshop offered community members a chance to comment on design concepts and identify community preferences.

The SOSIP's Project Manager worked with other City staff to develop policy language and design concepts for consideration. Additionally, Economic Planning Systems developed funding recommendations for the SOSIP, which were based in part on ballpark cost estimates developed by Community Design & Architecture.

The SOSIP was also reviewed by multiple City Departments to assure consistency with City policies and initiatives.



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



Figure b.5. University Avenue facing east.