



LIVABLE BERKELEY

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1:
FALL 2003

Mayor's Task Force Tackles Berkeley's Permitting and Development Review Process

By David Early and Ali Kashani

When Tom Bates was running for Mayor last fall, he pledged to fix Berkeley's broken development permit process. Berkeley's system of entitling new development projects has become extremely cumbersome, time-consuming, and divisive. Developers often complain that they are stymied by confusing and complex policies and procedures, while the public asserts that they do not receive adequate notice about pending development projects.

So, when Mayor Bates was elected, one of his first acts was to appoint a 14-member Task Force on Permitting and Development. The Mayor asked the Task Force to investigate options for improving and rationalizing the permitting process while continuing to guarantee appropriate public input. Livable Berkeley Board members David Early and Ali Kashani serve on the Task Force, working to ensure that Livable Berkeley's smart growth agenda is reflected in Task Force recommendations.

The Task Force will be making recommendations regarding the City's Landmarks Preservation and Design Review Commissions. While both of these commissions play valuable roles in safeguarding Berkeley's cultural heritage and design quality, they are sometimes used by foes of responsible development to create roadblocks in the development process. The Task Force is considering ways to streamline the City's multi-layered project review process while preserving historic resources and ensuring design quality.

The Task Force is also working to simplify the development process in general. For example, Berkeley's existing zoning regulations require that a property owner go through an expensive public hearing process to get a permit to build a single-family house in a single-family neighborhood. Task Force members are considering recommendations to allow construction of single-family homes and additions of any size within single-family neighborhoods, provided that the new construction meets simple objective criteria relative to setbacks, massing, and shading of adjacent properties.

Although the City already goes to great lengths to let the public know about proposed projects, the Task Force is looking at further improvements to public notification such as larger on-site disclosure signs, wider mail notification zones around proposed project sites, requirements that developers hold public meetings with neighbors, and an automated email notification system that could let interested users know about pending projects that meet specific criteria set by the individual user.

Task Force recommendations will be made by early November.

Livable Berkeley members are encouraged to come to Task Force meetings to support progressive reform of Berkeley's development process.

For more information, visit the City's website at <http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/Mayor/PermitTaskForce/PermitTaskForce.htm>.

Livable Berkeley is a broad-based organization that advocates smart growth and sustainable development in Berkeley, California. The mission of Livable Berkeley is to harness the forces of change to improve our city and quality of life, preserve the environment, and offer increased housing, employment, and transportation opportunities for current and future generations.

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To find out more
about Livable Berkeley
Board members, visit our
website at
www.livableberkeley.org.

**Livable Berkeley will be
holding quarterly
Potluck Mixers.
Please visit our website
to find out more.**

Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the first issue of Livable Berkeley's quarterly newsletter!

Livable Berkeley is pleased to provide this resource to its members and the Berkeley community to let people know about the issues surrounding smart growth and sustainable development in Berkeley.

Livable Berkeley is a nonprofit organization that grew out of the overwhelmingly successful campaign to defeat Measure P in the November 2002 election. After Measure P lost to an 80 percent "no" vote, organizers of the "No on P" campaign realized that the time was ripe for a new organization in Berkeley that would support smart growth and ensure that Berkeley lives up to its image as a place that "thinks globally and acts locally" when it comes to housing and environmental sustainability. Livable Berkeley seeks to preserve the environment and to promote increased housing, employment, and transportation opportunities in Berkeley for current and future generations.

Over the past year, Livable Berkeley has been in an organizational phase, which has led to a number of important achievements:

- ◆ We have adopted by-laws and elected our first Board of Directors.
- ◆ We have held several community-wide meetings to let people know about the organization.
- ◆ We have opened our official membership roles, recruited our first 50 members, and begun an extensive membership drive.

- ◆ We have launched a new website, livableberkeley.org, and published the first issue of a quarterly newsletter.
- ◆ We have developed a project review criteria matrix for reviewing development projects, and we are preparing our first project review for the Library Gardens project in downtown Berkeley.
- ◆ We have made recommendations to the Mayor and other City Council members regarding key commission appointments.
- ◆ Several Livable Berkeley members have been appointed to the Mayor's Task Force on Permitting and Development (see *Mayor's Task Force* on page 1).

Livable Berkeley members believe that Berkeley is a great place to live and that it can become even better through expanded housing and job opportunities, more vibrant public spaces, and improved transit.

If you are already a Livable Berkeley member, look through this newsletter to learn more about the issues that Livable Berkeley is working on and consider how you would like to join us further in our work. There are many opportunities to volunteer to help make Berkeley even better.

If you are not yet a member, I hope you'll join us. Please take a moment to send in the membership form in this newsletter, or visit our website online at www.livableberkeley.org.

*David Early
Chair, Board of Directors*

Building on Transit: A Primer on Transit-Oriented Development

By Allen Freeman

Reduced traffic, increased housing options, and vibrant pedestrian-oriented commercial areas—these are but a few of the benefits of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). So what is TOD and what can it bring to Berkeley?

Transit-oriented development calls for the development of moderate- to high-density mixed-use housing and commercial projects within walking distance of a major transit stop (for example, BART or Trans-Bay bus stops). Good TOD encourages transit ridership and provides a healthy mix of residential, employment, and shopping opportunities primarily designed for pedestrians.

One particularly attractive aspect of TOD is the reduction in automobile dependency and ownership. Residents of transit-oriented development can conveniently depend on public transit, so they tend to keep the car at home or get rid of it completely. Breaking auto-dependency provides several benefits, including substantial personal savings, significant reductions in traffic congestion, less air pollution, and the ability for new developments to devote less space to vehicle storage.

An analysis completed for Portland, Oregon found that TOD could reduce single-occupant vehicle use by 22.5 percent, increase trips made by transit, walking, and biking by 27 percent, reduce highway congestion by 18 percent, and provide 21 percent greater access to jobs.

Good examples of transit-oriented development in the Bay Area include the Fruitvale Transit Village at Fruitvale BART in Oakland, the Crossings in Mountain View, the Gaia Building near Downtown Berkeley BART, and the Acton Courtyard on University Avenue, three blocks from North Berkeley BART.

So what are the impediments to transit-oriented development in Berkeley?

- ◆ **BART's Autocentric Mentality.** BART stations are perfect candidates for TOD. Yet, BART's policies render TOD impossible by forcing developers to replace existing parking one-for-one.
- ◆ **Board and Commission Review Processes.** The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) cited Berkeley's development review process as a significant governmental constraint to the production of housing in Berkeley, including TOD projects. As a condition of certification of Berkeley's Housing Element (part of the City's General Plan), HCD directed Berkeley to evaluate the process and come up with solutions to overcome these constraints (see *Mayor's Task Force* on page 1).

Despite these challenges, transit-oriented development presents an exciting opportunity for Berkeley—a community blessed with ample public transit. By focusing new housing development along transit corridors, we can revitalize our major streets and reduce pressure on residential neighborhoods to meet housing demand through intensification of existing residential parcels. By providing new housing close to transit, we encourage alternatives to the automobile that save money and reduce traffic and pollution.

For more information on transit-oriented development, please use the resources below:

California Transit-Oriented Development Database:
<http://transitorienteddevelopment.dot.ca.gov/>

1000 Friends of Oregon, Making the Connections: A Summary of the LUTRAQ Project. (1997)
www.friends.org

In the next issue:
**AC Transit's New
Bus Rapid Transit
System**

Michael Pyatok: Perspective of an Affordable Housing Architect

By Sally Woodbridge

City of Berkeley Receives Award for Infill Housing Implementation:

The City of Berkeley has been recognized for its progressive housing policies with a *Distinguished Leadership Award* from the California Chapter of the American Planning Association. The award acknowledged Berkeley's efforts to encourage "creative, affordable, and compatible housing development, bringing new life and vitality to downtown Berkeley."

Michael Pyatok's career goal to help families in need of safe, affordable housing came from his personal experience growing up in a single-parent, low-income household in Brooklyn. His building had 600 sq. ft. apartments at a density of 100 units per acre. Despite this constrained physical environment, Pyatok found that many things about his neighborhood worked well for the residents' needs, including its affordability, convenient public transit, and proximity to shopping, public schools, and parks.

After finishing his architectural studies at Harvard in 1967, Pyatok spent many years working and teaching, connecting his design studio courses to the needs of low-income communities. In 1985, he started an architectural practice in Oakland.

Pyatok explained some of the design, construction, and funding hurdles facing affordable housing:

"[T]he design process can be driven by funders' cycles and not by the realities on the ground. . . . We are often pushed to get planning approvals to give the client a better chance to get funding, which can lead to missing neighborhood input or to using insufficiently studied conceptual designs that will have to be refined later."

Construction costs are rising, in part due to the prohibitive cost of liability insurance for multi-family ownership housing. "Until there is new legislation to discourage condo associations and their attorneys from litigating to exaggerate defects in order to increase their reserves and lower their monthly

payments, the soft costs of designing housing will continue to rise."

In addition, federal support for affordable housing is decreasing. Says Pyatok, "The current administration and its supporters in Congress have reduced the Section 8 housing subsidy program for very low-income families by \$1 billion. This action will terminate housing subsidies for 100,000 families."

Despite all of this, Pyatok believes that people who specialize in multi-family housing are crusaders in the cause of community building. Those involved cannot help but be drawn into the many important issues facing our society, from environmental quality to transit, and to the profound question of what makes community.



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