



# LIVABLE BERKELEY NEWSLETTER

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## The Future of University Avenue—Differing Views

by Rebecca Lave

Almost no one in Berkeley would question that University Avenue is among the city’s most important streets. It may be the single most important street of all. There the consensus about University Avenue ends.

University Avenue is literally the gateway to Berkeley. Yet today the future of this crucial artery is much in dispute, and, despite some recent improvements and retail activity, the street lacks a sense of urban place and vitality.



Spurred by recent development projects, some residents of the University Avenue Planning Area called on the City Council in February to amend the zoning along University Avenue to implement the recommendations of the 1996 University Avenue Strategic Plan (UASP). After a series of public hearings dominated by people opposed to four- and five-story buildings on the avenue, the Planning Commission considered substantial downzoning of University. In April and early May, a proposal was on the table that would have allowed only two stories along most of the avenue and three stories at designated nodes, significantly reducing the number of potential housing units.

Livable Berkeley opposed this proposal because it conflicts with our mission. As an organization, we support housing and mixed-use development on major corridors to enable people to live close to where they work, to expand the pool of transit riders, thus encouraging improvements in service,

and to bring in more pedestrian traffic to support local businesses.

Livable Berkeley’s position has been consistently that revitalization of University Avenue, including density at major designated nodes, is needed to make the avenue into a gateway of which Berkeley can be proud. University is a wide street on which taller buildings, appropriately placed, could help to create a sense of place. Some of its best-

loved buildings, such as the historic structures in the vicinity of Shattuck Avenue, are five stories tall. On a street like University, such heights are appropriate.

A number of Livable Berkeley members have attended public hearings before the Planning Commission to advocate for this view. Also, Livable Berkeley chair David Early has written two letters to the Planning Commission outlining our position and a commentary piece for the Daily Planet.

At press time the Planning Commission was still considering the matter. Eventually the commission’s recommendations will go to the City Council. Livable Berkeley will continue to be involved in monitoring the progress of the recommended zoning and alerting our members as the plans and decisions unfold.

*See page 3 for more ideas about the future of University Avenue in our interview with architect Dan Solomon.*



**“Greed to Green”  
Our Next Event—Thursday,  
June 24, 6:30-8:30 p.m.,  
Berkeley Central Library**

David Gottfried, a nationally known Berkeley-based advocate of green building techniques, will tell the story of his transformation as a developer-builder. For more information see page 2.

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# Working Together for a Better City

by David Early, Chair, Livable Berkeley Board of Directors

## JUNE 24 LIVABLE BERKELEY EVENT—“GREED TO GREEN”

Thursday, June 24, from 6:30–8:30 p.m. Livable Berkeley will host an event featuring renowned Berkeley-based green-building pioneer and author David Gottfried. The event will be held in the Berkeley Central Library Community Room (third floor), and refreshments will be served.

Formerly a commercial real estate developer, David Gottfried has dedicated the past decade to creating organizations and supporting real estate projects that lessen our global reliance on limited natural resources and wasteful practices. He is the President of WorldBuild Technologies Inc. Since the firm's founding in 1994, WorldBuild has served as a consultant for leading and award-winning sustainable building projects throughout the U.S. Gottfried is also the founder of the U.S. Green Building Council, with approximately 4,000 organizational members from all sectors of the building industry, and the World Green Building Council, which has affiliates in eight countries.

Gottfried will share his personal journey and insight as he progressed from a real estate developer in the 1980s to founder of the U.S. and World Green Building Councils and a leading sustainable development consultant. He will also reflect upon some of the stories from his recent book, *Greed to Green: The Transformation of an Industry and a Life*.

Building a community-based organization focused on the concept of a livable city is a challenge. Cities today face numerous pressures—economic, social, and environmental—that make the realization of idealistic hopes and dreams difficult at best.

Fortunately, Livable Berkeley has attracted a core of committed volunteers who share a fascination with what might be termed the “livable cities” movement. Our members and engaged activists understand the complex interrelationship of housing, transportation, land use, urban amenities, open space, and economic development, among the many factors that contribute to a city's livability.

Fortunately, too, we're working together in a city that encourages creativity and visionary thinking. We have a sense of the possible here in Berkeley, and, at the same time, we want to get things right and do our best. Livable Berkeley has attracted planners, environmentalists, housing advocates, supporters of bicycling and mass transit—all working together to advance a common mission.

As more and more of us from Livable Berkeley represent the organization at public meetings, write letters to the editor, and study complex issues, we're becoming part of Berkeley's heady mix—and also part of its greatness.

## LB Committee Reviews New Center St. Condos

by Mike Friedrich and Allen Freeman

Livable Berkeley has “Strongly Endorsed” the proposed development at 2055 Center St. This is a high-quality project with a superior standard of design that will be a positive addition to the downtown. Particularly noteworthy is the project's mixed-use nature, including housing and a large working space for the Berkeley Repertory Theater.

In recent years most of the new housing downtown has catered to the burgeoning student population, a vital but transient group. By contrast, 2055 Center St. will be a residential condominium. This will attract resident-owners with a significant long-term commitment to the quality of life in Downtown Berkeley, contributing greatly to increased economic activity, safety, and the cultural vitality of the downtown.

In reviewing the project, Livable Berkeley representatives expressed concern to the developer about the market feasibility of the proposed number of small one-bedroom condo units. We urged the developer to include larger units to attract older residents.

Parking, as always, is a concern. The Livable Berkeley reviewers supported the proposed amount of parking as a way of maximizing underground parking in the downtown, which we believe is in the long-term interests of the city. That said, Livable Berkeley recognizes the potential difficulty of financing the proposed subterranean parking. Accordingly, we would support a reduction in the amount of on-site parking should it be necessary to make the project economically feasible. To reduce the need for car ownership, we recommended inclusion of a City Carshare pod for building residents. The developer has indicated such a pod is already planned.

The project will have a flexible allocation of resident and short-term parking. Therefore, the building offers an opportunity to learn more about the needed mix of parking in downtown residential projects. We recommended that City staff work with the developer/manager to study how parking is actually used in the building in order to inform future changes to city parking policy.

# Dan Solomon—A New Urbanist Looks at University Avenue

by Sally Woodbridge

Dan Solomon is an architect and urban designer who taught at UC Berkeley's Department of Architecture for 35 years. Solomon's recent book *Global City Blues* has received high praise from prominent architects and planners around the country.

Solomon grew up in San Francisco, where he has designed buildings and served as a consultant on the city's planning policies. His firm, Solomon E.T.C., designed the mixed-use Fine Arts Building at Shattuck Avenue and Haste St. Prompted by recent discussions in Berkeley about University Avenue, this interview focuses on the urban character and potential of University Avenue as Berkeley's major gateway.

According to Solomon, University Avenue was developed without any overall consideration of how this major four-lane corridor might contribute to the city's urban character. As a result, University Avenue lacks identity and definition. Solomon believes that the length of University Avenue — two miles from the bay to Oxford Street — has not helped it to function as an identifiable gateway to the city.

When asked about urban design strategies to make the avenue memorable, Solomon observed, as he states in his new book, that "street walls, surfaces of buildings of sufficient continuity and consistency," are the basic time-tested means of defining the space of streets. Solomon challenges anyone to name a satisfactory urban place in the world that lacks street walls. With respect to University Avenue, he thinks that five-story buildings would help to achieve spatial definition. In addition, Solomon believes that graphic design, landscaping, and street furniture enrich the experience of streets and bring intersections to life.

Although non-residential ground floor use has become axiomatic for buildings on streets like University Avenue, Solomon points out that retail use is not always successful. He recommends a more flexible program that would permit developers to choose commu-



nity organizations, artisan work spaces, or retail for ground floors. As for parking, Solomon thinks the footprints of most buildings are too small to meet parking needs on one floor. He advocates car-lifts that allow double-decker parking.

Architects may lament, but cannot avoid, the need to build economically. Solomon believes this does not have to translate to unattractive buildings. In designing housing, for example, domestic details such as balcony railings, planter boxes, and small windows for kitchens and baths can be given decorative treatments that will enhance the play of light and shadow on their predictably thin, flat stucco walls. As Solomon states in his book, "The ever-changing limitations of craft and materials make the reproduction of historic architecture a doomed proposition. As with most cosmetic surgery, the artifice is transparent, unconvincing, and sad."

Architect Dan Solomon's firm, Solomon E.T.C., designed the Fine Arts Building, above, a mixed-use project with 100 housing units under construction at the corner of Shattuck Ave. and Haste St. in Berkeley.

# Support Needed for AC Transit and “BRT”

by Ben Grant

## Act Now to Reverse Cuts

A broad coalition of community groups and elected officials is rallying to demand that the Governor reverse the cuts he has proposed to AC Transit, BART, and the Marin County Transit District. These agencies provide essential service to five Bay Area counties.

To register your opinion with the Governor's office call (916) 445-2841.

Press #5 for “Hot Issues.”

Press #5 again for AC Transit.

Press #2 to OPPOSE the Governor's proposed cut.

A major premise of Livable Berkeley has been our commitment to transit-oriented development. Now an essential element of public transportation in the East Bay, AC Transit, is gravely threatened by the Governor's proposed budget. If passed, the budget would require a significant sacrifice from transit operators throughout the Bay Area. Specifically, the Governor's May 2004 version of the FY 04-05 state budget includes taking \$20 million away from AC Transit. If the budget is adopted, it will force AC Transit to make severe service cuts. An additional \$20 million cut in AC's operating budget would be the equivalent of cutting all weekend service.

Livable Berkeley has alerted members to the crisis through e-mail bulletins, and many members have contacted the Governor's office to protest the cuts. The situation changes from day to day, and the best way to stay informed is to log on to AC Transit's web site: [www.actransit.org](http://www.actransit.org).

In addition to monitoring the overall budget situation, Livable Berkeley members have been involved in discussions about AC's proposal for a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. The proposed BRT system will extend from International Boulevard in downtown Oakland to the University of California via Tele-

graph Avenue and around the UC campus to Downtown. AC is currently studying alternative routes. The proposed plan would create a system similar to light-rail service. Buses would have an exclusive right-of-way, stations that allow for easy boarding, and fast, frequent service.

The Livable Berkeley committee studying the proposal believes BRT in Berkeley could provide significant benefits to the community. It would increase transit use and reduce automobile dependence. It would provide an opportunity for significant streetscape improvements and pedestrian amenities. And it would help promote infill development in the Telegraph Avenue corridor and Downtown while enhancing the livability of these districts.

We believe BRT is the next generation of transit service for key corridors. We also recognize that BRT presents serious concerns and challenges that should be thoroughly addressed. Livable Berkeley intends to be a part of that process.

High-quality design will be a key to making the BRT system work, and the City needs to play a role commensurate with the importance of the proposed changes. This project will affect the quality of our public realm on the Southside and in the Downtown for decades to come.



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