



# LIVABLE BERKELEY NEWSLETTER

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## The Brower Center/Oxford Plaza— Will it Establish a New Standard?



*A rendering of the proposed Brower Center/Oxford Plaza project.*

The proposed Brower Center/Oxford Plaza project at Oxford and Kittredge Streets could establish a new standard for development in Downtown Berkeley. Despite a number of positive attributes, however, Livable Berkeley believes the Brower Center proposal reflects some outmoded concepts for the heart of our city. Berkeley can do better. Because the City of Berkeley is the owner of this major site, this is a unique opportunity for the City to set the standard for future development in the downtown core. The site is an opportunity for both the City and the Brower Center to proclaim the importance of urban density to the vitality and sustainability of Downtown Berkeley.

In a recent review of the project, Livable Berkeley members were impressed by the proposal to incorporate an office building for nonprofit organizations at the north end of the site (the Brower Center), affordable housing at the south end (Oxford Plaza), and a public plaza and public parking. This demonstrates an evolving consciousness of the role of infill, social diversity, and urban

location in the environmental movement. We were also pleased with the family orientation of Oxford Plaza, which will contribute to the Downtown's residential diversity.

The environmentally sensitive aspects of the design of the Brower Center can be a model for green infill development. The architectural treatment in the initial elevations—particularly the incorporation of photovoltaics—is compelling and attractive.

Despite these positive features, the project as currently proposed is too timid in scale and density. The site can support intensive, multi-use development for the following reasons: it is at the boundary of downtown and the university; it is on a major street with limited pedestrian attractions; it is across the street from the large, impenetrable mass of the track stadium, and therefore no views to or from the campus will be blocked; there are no nearby clusters of historic buildings establishing a desirable low-density context; and there are new, taller

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***Transportation Commission to focus on downtown parking at its April 21 meeting. See article, page 3.***

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## LB Weighs in on West Berkeley Bowl

In recent months Livable Berkeley's Project Review Committee held several meetings to review and discuss the controversial Berkeley Bowl project in West Berkeley. Following are key points from Livable Berkeley's letter about the project submitted to the Planning Commission in February:

- ◆ Livable Berkeley strongly supports the proposal for a full-service grocery store in this location. West Berkeley is poorly served by grocery stores, and most residents now drive long distances to shop.
- ◆ However, despite our support for the proposed use and rezoning, we do not support the current design of the project. We have recommended that the Planning Commission request the ZAB and Design Review Board to work with the applicant to address problems of urban design, the shortcomings of proposed auto and bicycle circulation, and the long-term workability of the proposed parking.

Other Livable Berkeley recommendations include:

- ◆ A more cohesive physical organization that would establish this area as a destination and reinforce a "sense of place."
- ◆ Careful organization of pedestrian, bike, and auto modes to avoid conflicts and contribute to a more pedestrian-friendly environment.
- ◆ Placement of a pedestrian/bike "portico" on Ninth St. and relocating the parking lot exit to Heinz St. would reduce auto/bike conflicts on the Ninth St. Bike Boulevard and respect its regional importance as a pleasant transportation alternative.
- ◆ Design of any new parking facility in order to allow for potential joint use by surrounding businesses during times of low use.

# Planning Commission Considers Landmarks Preservation Ordinance

*by Alan Tobey*

Berkeley may soon conclude a five-year struggle to revise its 30-year-old Landmarks Preservation Ordinance (LPO). The outcome could make the LPO more functional and also increase protection for historic resources by expanding the purview of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to include properties not yet subject to a permit application.

In 2000, the City Council charged the LPC with changing the LPO to comply with the state Permit Streamlining Act, which sets limits on the amount of time allowed for the consideration of a building permit application. The LPC approved a revision last July that is now being vetted by the Planning Commission (PC) because of needed coordination among the LPC, PC, and the Zoning Adjustments Board. A markup version of the proposed ordinance is currently being reviewed, and after a public hearing the PC will recommend actions to the Council.

The LPC's proposal has gotten a mixed reception at the PC. Both LPC and PC commissioners agree on the value of scheduling landmarks review earlier in the permit approval process, to help avoid current problems with last-minute landmarking petitions and to help prevent worthy landmarks "falling through the cracks" through inattention. However, planning commissioners have had problems with three proposed increases in scope of the LPC's authority: for the first time requiring mandatory landmarks commission review of every building over 50 years old that's subject to a permit application, both commercial and residential; enabling the LPC to establish the level of required CEQA environmental review for projects involving a designated historical resource; and gaining decision authority on proposed demolitions of historic resources. Most commissioners have said that requiring every ordinary application for a simple remodel to be fully reviewed requires too much extra effort and city expense for not enough extra protection, so the current markup version has dropped this idea. And that version has also made the LPC's role in CEQA-level determination and in demolitions advisory to the ZAB.

The PC also returned to the proposed ordinance a provision approved by the LPC's drafting subcommittee but not the full LPC: to allow the "neutral determination" of the potential landmark status of any building outside of a development application process and without requiring a full project application. Livable Berkeley be-

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# Transportation Commission to Discuss Downtown Parking

*Livable Berkeley is concerned about the Downtown. Many proposals for the Downtown are currently being considered. In addition, the City was recently awarded a Transportation for Livable Communities grant to improve the BART Plaza area. Given all these important projects, Livable Berkeley is beginning to develop positions on downtown issues. The following article by Rob Wrenn, chair of the Transportation Commission, provides an overview of one important downtown issue on next month's meeting agenda.*

For a decade or so, downtown parking has been one of the most contentious issues in Berkeley. The debate over parking, and whether there is enough of it downtown, has not always been informed by facts and careful analysis. To shed some light on the issue and encourage productive discussion, the Transportation Commission is planning to make downtown parking the main item at its Thursday, April 21, 7 p.m. meeting at the North Berkeley Senior Center. The major issues include:

**Supply:** Is there enough parking in downtown to meet the needs of shoppers, movie- and theater-goers, visitors to the main library, to the YMCA, and to other downtown destinations? How much parking is enough? Since the Hink's Garage was demolished, have the vacant spaces in other garages disappeared? What are the facts of current parking utilization?

**Transportation Demand Management:** What is the City doing to reduce demand for parking? What more could it be doing? Research and surveys suggest that there is a relationship between the convenience and cost of parking and commuter transit use.

**Parking Management:** A recent study by UC Berkeley planning professor Elizabeth Deakin found that "overtime parking," parking in on-street spaces for more than the allotted time, is the major cause for the shortage of on-street parking spaces. Meter feeding by downtown employees and problems with broken meters are at the root of the problem. Enforcement against illegal overtime parking could free up on-street spaces and alleviate the supply problem. Better ways of directing drivers to available spaces in garages is another way of managing parking.

**Location of New Parking:** The General Plan points to the seismically deficient and centrally located Center Street garage as the preferred location for any additional parking. But the Berkeley Unified School District is also reportedly asking for City support for a parking garage at the BUSD tennis courts site, located further from the core of downtown.

**Funding for New Parking:** If new parking is built, how will it be funded? Using a portion of the Vista College mitigation funds has been suggested. The Transportation Commission has recommended that about half the Vista funds be used for parking, with the other half going to improve alternative modes in downtown. Downtown property owners could also be assessed, as has been done in Walnut Creek and other cities.

## Design for Safe Streets

*The comparison of street designs shown below is from a flyer on the effects of street design on safety produced by the Center for Livable Communities. The Center is a national initiative of the Local Government Commission (LGC), a nonprofit membership organization of elected officials, city and county staff, and other interested individuals throughout California and other states. LGC helps local governments identify and implement solutions to today's problems. For more information contact the Center at: 1414 K St., Suite 600, Sacramento, CA 95814-3966 or go to [www.lgc.org](http://www.lgc.org).*



The good: A marked pedestrian crossing with bulbout.



The bad: Too many lanes, no protection for people.



The ugly: No trees, no sidewalks, one helpless pedestrian.

## Brower Center/Oxford Plaza (cont'd. from page 1)

structures in immediate proximity to the site.

Livable Berkeley recommends that two or more floors of market-rate condominium housing be added to the Brower Center building and that more space be added for additional nonprofits and/or commercial uses. More height on this northern portion of the site will also enhance solar exposure for the Brower Center with minimal impacts to the Oxford Plaza housing structure to the south.

Livable Berkeley also recommends that at least one additional level of underground parking be added to maximize the amount of parking at this key location. Parking in the downtown should generally occur in only a small number of places where ac-

cess will have minimal impacts on pedestrian and retail activities. These locations, like the Oxford site, should have the maximum amount of parking that can feasibly be developed.

It may be possible to secure funding from UC Berkeley for the development of additional parking that serves the university at peak hours and reverts to public use in the evenings. It is in the interests of the City to have any new university parking (over 2,000 spaces are planned) located where the potential for shared use with the community is greatest, where users are most likely to contribute to the Downtown's vitality, near BART where the tradeoffs between use of transit and driving are most apparent, and where property acquisition is not required.

## Landmarks Preservation Ordinance (cont'd. from page 2)

believes this would significantly increase landmarks protection by helping direct the attention of would-be developers to non-historic properties.

The PC has also considered two recommendations by the State Historic Preservation Office. Both are endorsed by Livable

Berkeley: to apply the criterion of "integrity" (the ability of a resource to tangibly express its value) to the evaluation of all aspects of a proposed landmark, which has been approved by the PC; and to eliminate or modify the "largely redundant" Structure of Merit category, which is still included in the PC's working draft.

**Livable Berkeley has been awarded official 501(c)3 nonprofit status by the IRS. All contributions are tax-deductible.**



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