



Downtown Streets & Open Space Improvement Plan Subcommittee

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MINUTES

Downtown Streets & Open Space Improvement Plan Subcommittee – Meeting #1 Monday, March 8, 2010, from 7 to 10 pm

North Berkeley Senior Center, 1901 Hearst Avenue, Berkeley, California

Subcommittee Member Attendance. All voting members were present: Keith Alward, Teresa Clarke, Patricia Dacey, Kate Harrison, Meghan Lang, Jim Novosel, Carole Schemmerling, Margo Schueler, and Ann Smulka. UC members present: Emily Marthinsen.

Staff Attendance. Matt Taecker (Planning Department & Secretary to Subcommittee), and Kara Vuicich (Transportation Division).

Public Attendance. Approximately 24 members of the public attended.

Welcome & Introductions. Taecker welcomed Subcommittee members and members of the public. Subcommittee members then provided brief introductions of themselves.

Presentation of Process, Alternative Design Concepts & "Open House" Comments. Taecker gave an overview of the SOSIP schedule, and then gave a Powerpoint presentation of alternative design concepts for subareas where major improvements could occur. Most of concepts had been presented in the SOSIP Open House on February 6, but some new concepts were also developed and presented in response to Open House comments.

Public Comments. Brad Froehle emphasized the importance of "place-making" in the Downtown through street and open space improvements. He also voiced concern over relying more heavily on Allston Way as a route for east-west bicycle traffic.

Michael Katz emphasized the importance of planting lots of trees and landscaping -- especially signature trees and ecological features. He said that improvements should not result in a loss of parking, because car access is important.

Jennifer May Pearsen said that any improvements need to stay within the law. She also said that Strawberry Creek should be resurfaced as at a creek, especially in light of flooding concerns and the possibility of culverts collapsing in the future.

Dave Cambell emphasized SOSIP as an opportunity to create "great streets" that accommodate all modes and are exceptionally attractive.

Richard Register noted the importance of creating a Strawberry Creek Plaza on Center Street.

Kirstin Miller said that the Hood design for Center Street Plaza has received extensive attention in design and public outreach, and that it deserved the Subcommittee's endorsement. She also noted that, at this time, the proposal is more of an approach than a specific scheme.

Steve Finacom said that open space needs to be programmed intelligently to meet local needs. Active uses should be emphasized, such as dog parks, tai chi settings, plazas, and basketball courts. He also proposed that the roof of the new Center Street Garage have gardens and public open space.

John Steere said that streets should be considered together as a system with multiple functions. He said that a greenway or linear park should continue down Shattuck to Adeline, and that it should be a “complete street” with bike lanes. He thought that the open space should be put on only one side of the street so that it could be more substantial and provide a more protected environment for pedestrians.

Bob Allen said that the Design Review Committee has a direct interest in the SOSIP and should be consulted. He said that trees are key, and should be in the context of the tree planting plan for Berkeley. He also noted that “gateway” locations throughout the city are important, such as at the freeway and on Adeline.

Goals & Key Issues. Each Subcommittee member had an opportunity to highlight a few issues of importance.

Dacey wished that the financial information was available before discussing designs. She expressed excitement about EcoCity’s Center Street Plaza proposal. She also said that consideration should be given to improvements that rely on the loss of on-street parking, but that it must be addressed through better managed parking and being able to find available off-street parking.

Novose said that downtown is not dead, and that there is a lot happening, such as the Y and movies. He also said that collaboration with the UC is important because it is a major developer Downtown along Oxford, Hearst, University Avenue, Addison, and Center Street.

Alward said that budgeting is key and that it will not be possible to afford all of the good ideas. He emphasized the need to “scale scaling expectations.” He also expressed interested in permeable paving and similar features.

Harrison said that entrances to Downtown are critical, and are presently unattractive. She also noted that some residents in the area don’t use Downtown, and the SOSIP should address this. She also supported EcoCity’s Center Street Plaza proposal. She noted that on-street parking would be more available if appropriately priced.

Schueler emphasized cost, maintenance, and multiple use of streets. She supported “low-impact development” (LID), and doesn’t want to lose LIDs with cost engineering. She noted that parking is of critical concern because cars have big impacts.

Marthinsen said that UC supports those things that will make downtown lively, with a special emphasis on walkability, i.e. pedestrian safety, comfort, and minimized conflicts with cars. She noted that streets are underutilized opportunity for being more sustainable, such as through permeable paving. She also said that it would be important to exercise discipline around design features that are known to be expensive, in light of limited funding.

Schemmerling liked ideas for enhancing bicycle facilities Downtown. She also noted that Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo have accomplished a lot through street trees, street furnishings, and well placed parking structures. She said that the Hood EcoCity’s Center Street Plaza proposal is doable.

Shmulka said that south Shattuck is big opportunity. She also noted that parking problem is a serious problem Downtown, both finding it and feeling safe walking to and from it. Lang emphasized the importance of directing people more clearly, and revealing connections and destinations Downtown. She said many more trees are needed and that Berkeley should be more green.

Clarke said that the SOSIP must focus on having a compelling vision and creating meaningful places. She said that EcoCity Builders Center Street Plaza proposal can be built upon. She also said that guidelines for sidewalks are especially needed.

Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. The Subcommittee unanimously elected Jim Novosel as Chairperson, after which it unanimously elected Kate Harrison as Vice Chairperson. Chairperson Novosel was bestowed with the honorary gable / meat tenderizer.

Input on Alternative Design Concepts for SOSIP Cost Estimating. The Subcommittee discussed design options for Downtown subareas with the potential for major improvements. Subareas discussed included: Hearst Street, Center Street Plaza & Greenway, Shattuck Square & east end of University Avenue, and Lower Shattuck (below Durant). For each subarea, the Subcommittee provided input on which alternative should be used to estimate "ballpark" costs. Cost estimates will inform a financing strategy that will be presented in May or June. The Subcommittee may reconsider and will refine design preferences later in the SOSIP process.

Hearst Avenue. The Subcommittee first endorsed keeping the northside curb in place (8 ayes & 1 nay). The Subcommittee then selected Option 1 (7 ayes & 2 abstentions). Option 1 places new open space along the southside and UC's future development, and recommends in-street bike lanes.

Center Street Plaza & Greenway. The Subcommittee selected "Option 1: Continuous Reference to Strawberry Creek" as the preferred option for cost estimating (8 ayes & 1 abstention). This option is consistent with EcoCity Builder's Center Street Plaza proposal.

Shattuck Square & east end of University Avenue. The Subcommittee selected "Option 2: 2-Way Traffic on West Side of Shattuck Square" (unanimous), which also includes a pedestrian plaza on the east side of Shattuck Square between Center and Addison, and a "slow street" with pedestrian amenities on the east side between Addison and University. Part of the motion was also to receive a cost estimate for creating a new the BART entrance on the east side of Shattuck Square.

Lower Shattuck. The Subcommittee was unanimous in selecting a hybrid of "Option 1" emphasizing active uses in a linear park, and "Option 3" with sidewalk widening and other improvements at the edge. The linear park would be from Durant to Haste, and the widened sidewalks would be from Haste to Dwight. As part of the motion, the Subcommittee asked that the costs of one-block of linear park and one block of outside be provided.