



NORTHERN NEWS



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California Chapter
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Making Great Communities Happen

Democracy in action: Berkeley's *Downtown Area Plan*

By Matthew Taecker, AICP

In the end, support was overwhelming as eight of nine Council members adopted a new Downtown Area Plan ... but what a long, strange trip it has been.

The 2012 "DAP" was forged from the crucible of Berkeley's special style of community decision-making — fueled by passionate, intellectually rich debate in over 100 public meetings, six workshops, a hands-on draft from an advisory committee, and a controversial reformulation by Berkeley's planning commission. In the end, everyone seemed to participate in what can only be described as democracy in action.

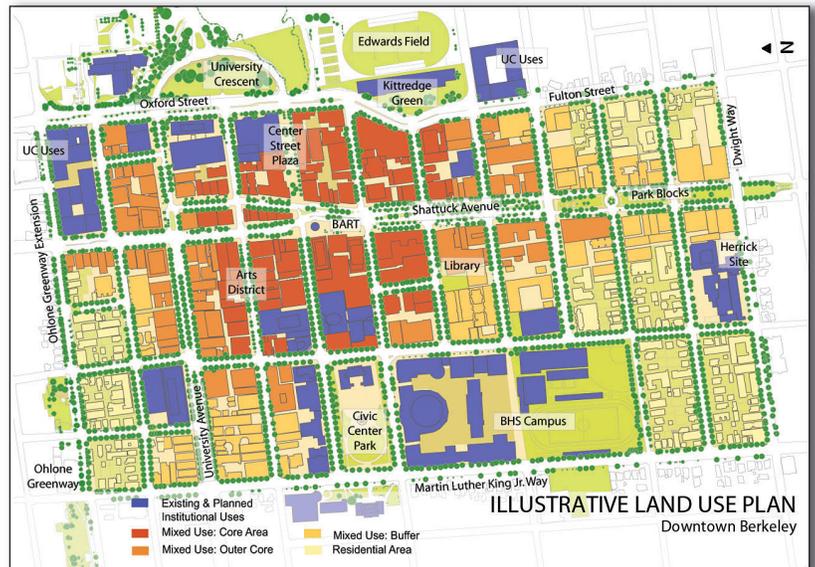
Democracy does not make for the most efficient decision-making, but it elevates debate and requires hard work to accommodate different and sometimes radical views. And as a consequence, Berkeley is committed to a plan for a revitalized downtown that will be a model of livability and sustainability.

Finding new relevance

The 2012 "DAP" replaces a 1990 Downtown Plan. The 1990 Plan banked on revitalization through historic preservation and previously overlooked economic and environmental advantages of infill.

The downtown area extends a quarter mile from Berkeley's BART station and runs along the west edge of the UC Berkeley campus. More than 30 bus lines converge here, making it the second busiest transit hub in the East Bay.

In the streetcar era, Berkeley's downtown was also the East Bay's second largest retail destination. But with the automobile age, downtown retail lost its locational advantage. Department stores closed, and downtown was left with a soft market for a million square feet of ground-floor space. Downtown needed a new reason for being.



Building heights and intensities. The DAP doubles the zoned capacity of downtown Berkeley. Six-story buildings are generally allowed within a quarter-mile of BART. High-rise buildings would be allowed within a few blocks of BART. (North is to the left.)

Two factors eventually emerged to put the brakes on downtown Berkeley's decline. Beginning in the early 1990s, community leaders recruited live theater and music venues to create a new arts district. And developers began to build high-density infill housing. But while housing and cultural attractions gave new relevance, most in Berkeley agreed downtown fell short of its potential.

Grassroots plan-making

The Downtown Area Plan was initiated in 2005 as part of a legal settlement between the City of Berkeley and UC Berkeley to address the university's expansion plans. Each saw the advantages of comprehensive planning, and leaders saw the Plan as a way to move past historic town-gown tensions.

A Downtown Area Plan Advisory Committee (DAPAC) was established in late 2005, with nonvoting UC Berkeley representatives. The committee was given two years to draft a plan — a rapid pace compared with other Berkeley planning efforts. Impassioned DAPAC

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Technology, despite its benefits, can add new pitfalls to an already grueling process. Long-term urban planning "requires leadership, and standing up, and saying, 'You know, you elected me, this is what we're going to do,' and not take a referendum on every single thing." —NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg. <http://nyti.ms/GUoqS6>

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

APA Conference, Los Angeles

By Hanson Hom, AICP



As I write this, I am stuck at LAX due to low cloud cover at SFO, and pondering reasons to advocate for high speed rail. The weather for the four-day conference in Los Angeles was outstanding. It was a perfect backdrop for exploring the changes that have occurred in the downtown core and the region since the last national conference was held in LA in 1986.

The host committee seized the opportunity to showcase how the Los Angeles basin and the city are being reinvented as a transit connected metropolitan region and vibrant livable urban center. The conference coincided with the launch of David C. Sloane's book, *Planning Los Angeles*, which highlights the changing face of Los Angeles in recent decades and analyzes the successes as well as continuing challenges. You can read an interview with the author at <http://bit.ly/JgrlCX>.

The conference opened with a keynote address by Andrew Weaver, a scientist and leading authority on climate change. He removed any doubts that climate change is a reality despite the continuing politics and rhetoric surrounding this issue. Many planning sessions underscored the heightened awareness of climate change — from discussions that integrated energy, transportation, and land use to presentations highlighting case studies for local sustainable planning.

In line with the climate theme, the conference's closing address was given by Renée Jones-Bos, ambassador from the Netherlands to the United States. She enlightened the audience with promising initiatives for adapting to sea level rise in her country, where survival and urban form have been shaped by the power of water for centuries. Her message of “designing with water” is pertinent to all coastal areas in the United States that will be tackling this difficult issue in the decades to come.

With no intent of diminishing the importance of climate, I found it merciful that the conference topics extended beyond this issue. **Mitchell Silver, AICP**, APA President, set the proper tone for the conference in his opening remarks. The overarching theme was change itself, not just climate change, but also dramatic

shifts that are reflected in social issues (e.g., national and regional demographic trends, lifestyle preferences, and economic/equity disparities) and planning practice (e.g., new models for effective planning and evolving technologies for the profession.) Myriad sessions touched on these topics, with some more pertinent to big city planning but many applicable to smaller cities and rural areas.

In a follow-up session, Mr. Silver focused on the unprecedented population and lifestyle changes that are taking place in the America — the “browning and graying” of America, the decline of “traditional” households, and the diverse differences in generational values. It is tough to concede that the planning profession has not adequately responded to the impacts of these changes, while acknowledging that public reaction to the realities is often a formidable challenge. Planners in many regions of the United States are now or will be grappling with the implications of these demographic shifts in their communities, whereas California planners have recognized and responded to these trends for many years. In this arena, California is a leader for responsible community planning and lessons learned.

The conference lived up to its promise of providing an invigorating forum for dialogue and for reconnecting with colleagues, and many Northern Section planners took time out to travel south for the event. Last but not least, a huge congratulation is extended to two exceptional Northern Section projects that were recognized at the conference: Receiving the APA National Planning Excellence Award for Implementation was the *Contra Costa Centre Transit Village Plan*, Contra Costa County, <http://bit.ly/J2U5EH>; and receiving the APA National Planning Achievement Award for Hard-Won Victory was the *Candlestick Point – Hunters Point Shipyard Phase II EIR*, Atkins North America, <http://bit.ly/16x4KH>. (The links take you to a synopsis of each project in the April issue of *Planning*. You will be asked to log in.) ■

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Democracy in action: Berkeley's *Downtown Area Plan*

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members immediately voted to meet twice as often as originally proposed — 50 times in all — to give more time for debate. Then, as DAPAC's deadline approached, members redoubled their commitment and formed subcommittees to hammer out language — in another 50 meetings.

Taking advantage of a unique opportunity for partnership, one subcommittee worked with UC Berkeley staff to develop guidelines for property owned by the jurisdictionally independent university. Among the subcommittee's goals were to recruit UC museums for downtown locations, maintain retail frontage in key locations, and create new public open spaces.

DAPAC's hard work paid off as it reached unanimity around every chapter — except for the Land Use chapter and its policies on building heights and development requirements.

The DAP vision that everyone continues to agree on has three parts:

- 1) Downtown models Berkeley's commitment to sustainability by minimizing human impacts on the environment, through its emphasis on walking, bicycling, transit, green streets, and green architecture.
- 2) Downtown is an economically vibrant destination that increasingly serves Berkeley's residents and visitors with attractive retail, exceptional restaurants, and remarkable streets and open spaces.
- 3) Downtown is a great neighborhood with diverse housing options, and where local shops, services, and amenities meet daily needs.

Despite agreement on other issues, building heights and development requirements left DAPAC bitterly divided. Every technique for mitigating the effects of height and density was deployed, and a quota was proposed for buildings higher than 75 feet. Yet the committee remained philosophically split over whether higher densities — taller buildings in particular — would help make downtown more vibrant or do irreparable harm to the community's character. In an 11-10 vote, DAPAC recommended against the tallest buildings that were being considered (180 feet with an additional 45-foot bonus for a hotel).



Mid-rise or high-rise. Decision makers opted for high-rises over mid-rises because residential mid-rises were shown to be financially infeasible. High-rises are "stepped back" to avoid shadow and view impacts.

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Democracy in action: Berkeley's *Downtown Area Plan*

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Further deliberations

The Berkeley planning commission took up the DAP next. To the dismay of some DAPAC members, commissioners used their prerogative to recommend that tall buildings be allowed, and that policies avoid requirements that could make development infeasible.

The Planning Commission made its case by pointing to an economic study showing that residential projects exceeding 75 feet — the limit of wood-frame construction — generally need to reach 160 feet to pencil out. Only then can developers recoup the cost of going from wood-frame to steel construction. The commission eventually recommended that six high-rise buildings be allowed downtown: four residential buildings at 180 feet (equal to the tallest existing buildings), and two hotels up to 225 feet.

From the planning commission, the draft DAP moved to the city council early in 2009. The council kept half of the high-rises. It also required that new development meet tough green standards such as:

- LEED Gold or equivalent buildings,
- Transit passes for residents and employees,
- On-site carsharing,
- Unbundled pricing for on-site parking, and
- Contributed toward complete streets and green infrastructure.

The reuse and renovation of existing buildings would be exempt.

Now you see it, now you don't

In July 2009, Council adopted the DAP by a 7–2 supermajority. Four years had passed since the planning effort had begun — not bad by Berkeley standards.

Distrust of government and developers runs deep in Berkeley. Within 30 days, opponents of the plan gathered 8,000 signatures — enough to require a referendum. Opponents dismissed the benefits of transit-oriented development as “greenwashing.” They claimed the DAP’s focus on sustainability was a ruse to profit developers and politicians, and downtown’s better qualities would be destroyed. As one opponent put it:

Berkeley has its own urban, low-rise, small-town quality because citizens fought hard for decades to keep it that ... Carbon-neutral development is creative reuse of what we have, not search and destroy development ... Developer apologists would happily bulldoze the entire downtown and replace it with canyons of steel for a few more bucks.

Those who supported the DAP thought such critics were “too obsessed with building heights.” Said one supporter:

I've been living in Berkeley for almost 20 years, and I'm glad of all the new development that has happened, and I want more. More density, more residential buildings, more commercial spaces.

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Democracy in action: Berkeley's *Downtown Area Plan* (continued from previous page)

Measure R

Battle lines were drawn in anticipation of the referendum. Rather than put the entire 130-page 2009 DAP to a vote, the council rescinded its 2009 plan and put only five pages — the most controversial components — on the ballot. The resulting “Measure R” raised three central questions:

- Will a limited number of high-rise buildings near BART harm downtown’s character?
- Is high-density infill really best for the environment, or are the rhetoric and green building requirements just a form of “greenwashing”?
- Should a “green pathway” entitlement option limit review time for potential historic resources if a developer contributes additional community benefits like affordable housing and prevailing wages?

In effect, the green pathway option would reduce developer risk for extraordinary projects. Many existing downtown buildings had been identified as contributing to the area’s character, and efforts to replace them could be entangled by landmarking efforts. However, using the green pathway option, a developer could seek a predetermination of historic status within 90 days. To speed entitlements further, the green pathway would rely on predefined development standards and limit the scope of design review.

In November 2010, Measure R passed by a wide margin (65 percent to 35 percent). While opponents explained it away, the vote showed overwhelming support for high-density, transit-oriented development in Berkeley, even when it included high-rises. The vote showed residents’ belief that without dense development, their city would fall short of its environmental goals, and its downtown would continue to struggle.

No time lost

While politics for the DAP were sorting themselves out, an MTC-ABAG grant allowed city staff and consultants to develop three critical implementing documents:

- a new downtown zoning district and regulations;
- a parking and transportation demand-management strategy; and
- a plan for street and public open space improvements.

Of note, these documents were completed before the DAP returned to the city council for final action in March 2012. New zoning, which took effect at the same time as the 2012 DAP, regulates urban form, green buildings, and parking/TDM. And while the street and open space plan has not yet been adopted, it has been carefully vetted and unanimously endorsed by eight commissions, and should be before Council soon.

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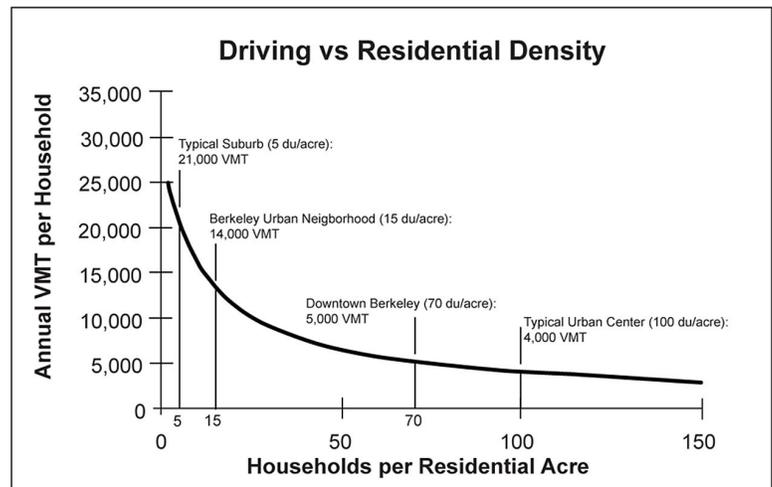
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Highlights of Berkeley's Downtown Area Plan

Environmental sustainability. Downtown Berkeley should be a model of sustainable development. New construction will be LEED Gold or equivalent, and developers will be required to provide free transit passes for residents. "Green infrastructure" will be used extensively in private and public projects. The adaptive re-use of existing buildings will be encouraged.

Land use. The DAP doubles allowable residential and employment growth. Because Berkeley's downtown is a transit hub with easy-to-walk-to conveniences, growth there will significantly reduce regional car use and greenhouse gas generation compared to conditions if this growth were to be accommodated elsewhere. If the estimated 1,500 new downtown dwelling units are built in the next 15 years, the release of an estimated 240 million pounds of carbon will be avoided. Land use policies will further strengthen downtown as a cultural destination and realize positive synergies with UC Berkeley.

Mobility. The DAP gives priority to pedestrians and promotes alternatives to the car. Where motorists' and pedestrians' needs conflict, priority will be given to the pedestrian.



Adapted from "Location Efficiency: Neighborhood and Socio-Economic Characteristics Determine Auto Ownership and Use," by J. Holtzclaw, *Transportation Planning and Technology*, 25(1), p. 1-27. March 2002.

Car-free living. Downtown residents can be expected to drive a third as much as residents in typical urban neighborhoods and less than an eighth as much as residents in the suburbs. Research shows that density drives the availability of walk-to conveniences and justifies more frequent transit service.

Parking and demand management. The DAP will implement a full palette of demand-management programs. Parking will be priced to discourage all-day commuter parking and increase the availability of short-term parking for store patrons and visitors.

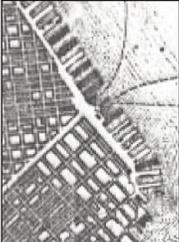
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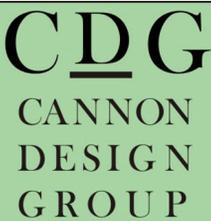
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Highlights of Berkeley's *Downtown Area Plan*

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Historic preservation. DAP policies reaffirm the community's commitment to historic preservation and the compatibility of new development.

Urban design. Form-based standards require that buildings address the street. Retail or similarly active storefronts must maintain a continuous shopping experience in some locations. Standards will minimize adverse solar and wind impacts. They also mandate that taller buildings step down to meet the scale of adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Streets and open space. Placemaking improvements are envisioned and connected to funding sources. Unneeded traffic lanes will be repurposed as widened sidewalks and bio-retention basins.



An enhanced public realm. A street and open space plan describes several major projects to make downtown a more inviting pedestrian-friendly destination. A realistic finance strategy accompanies the plan.

Affordable housing and social services. The DAP encourages the construction of affordable housing with a variety of incentives. Policies support the ongoing availability of social services and health care.

Economic development. The DAP emphasizes retail revitalization and the continued development of downtown as a cultural destination. New development will provide an important vehicle for the positive transformation of the downtown area.

Matt Taecker, AICP, is a member of the California Planning Roundtable and was principal planner for the downtown area of Berkeley from 2005–2011. He recently joined Dyett & Bhatia, Urban and Regional Planners, San Francisco. You can reach him at matt@dyettandbhatia.com ■

Any proposed housing development on the property would have to be "suited to the zoning, the people who live here and the people who come here." —Liz Dale, president of the Lucas Valley Estates Homeowners Association. Source: Terence Chea, "Lucasfilm abandons studio plan at NorCal site," Bloomberg BusinessWeek, <http://buswk.co/InUT6N>

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AICP lists pass exam rates

The American Planning Association has posted an "inaugural summary" of the AICP Exam pass rates of graduates of PAB-accredited planning programs, 2004–2011.

The list below depicts AICP Exam pass rates of graduates of accredited planning programs in California. The pass rate for all PAB-accredited schools in the United States and Canada can be seen at <http://bit.ly/IIouFr>. For this summary, an examination attempt was counted if the examinee graduated from an accredited planning program during that school's accreditation period.

For context, the Mean Pass Rate (all examinees) was 72 percent. ■

School	Degree	Total	Pass	Pass Rate
UC Berkeley	Master	52	48	92%
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo	Master	48	43	90%
UC Irvine	Master	34	30	88%
UCLA	Master	60	49	82%
USC	Master	89	63	71%
San Jose State University	Master	41	29	71%
Cal Poly, Pomona	Master	40	25	63%
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo	Bachelor	57	34	60%
Cal Poly, Pomona	Bachelor	62	29	47%
California average		483	350	72%