



Peace and Justice Commission

ACTION CALENDAR
October 25, 2005

To: Honorable Mayor and
Members of the City Council

From: Peace and Justice Commission

Submitted by: Steve Freedkin, Chair, Peace and Justice Commission

Subject: Bevatron Preservation

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution recommending that the City Council request: 1) the Department of Energy, the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and their managing agency, the University of California, to continue with their original plan to preserve the Bevatron Facility as a place of merit on the National Register of Historic Places for the benefit of future interested individuals and students of science, history and architecture; and 2) that the \$85 million budgeted for the demolition of the Bevatron be primarily redirected to the decontamination of toxic underground plumes at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory as promised with enough spared to complete the conversion of the accelerator facility for safe public access.

BACKGROUND

The Bevatron, a huge nuclear accelerator apparatus and the distinctive building that houses it, were constructed in 1954 at a huge cost to taxpayers. The facility should be saved from the wrecking ball and preserved for the benefit of future science students and historians. Preserving the world famous Bevatron also protects Berkeley citizens from numerous avenues of exposure to large amounts of radioactive and hazardous substances that will be released into the air and creeks if demolished.

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) requested and received in 1995 an eligibility status to the National Register of Historic Places. Four physicists were awarded Nobel Prizes for their work at the facility, which was continuously upgraded so as to continue contributing valuable research to medicine, cosmic ray experiments, and radiation therapy for cancer treatment. Experiments ceased at the Bevatron in 1993.

The Bevatron's experiment process utilized numerous hazardous substances such as mercury, asbestos, lead, and others. The actual operation of the accelerator induced radioactive elements

of many types deep inside the walls and shielding blocks. Most of these hazardous elements would remain relatively harmless undisturbed inside the structure which would be in accordance with the new “decay in place” philosophy advocated by leading environmental organizations.

Extensive study of the geology and hydrology of LBNL and the Bevatron site itself has shown an extensive web of interconnecting feeds into all the major creeks in Berkeley. Demolishing a project of this size with the release of this amount of toxic and radioactive substances demands serious study and public consideration as many of the affected creeks are now day lighted and openly flow through public and residential areas.

The LBNL facility, including the Bevatron site, is laced with underground plumes of many types of hazardous and radioactive substances which the Department of Energy and Laboratory officials have promised to clean up as soon as funding can be secured. Some of these plumes are already leaching into Berkeley’s creeks and are threatening the sub-surface water systems, which are the emergency reserve water for Berkeley inhabitants in the event of a loss of supply from our prime sources. The more these plumes spread the more costly they will be to clean up.

LBNL has acknowledged that with all the recent and current construction underway, there is no replacement project planned for the Bevatron site. It is disingenuous for Lab officials to delay promised toxic plume clean-ups for lack of funding and then spend \$85 million on a low priority and dangerous demolition of a facility of historic and architectural interest to many. LBNL must think so also as they included the Bevatron’s design on their logo.

M/S/C (*McDonald, sorgen*) adopt a Resolution (ATTACHMENT A) recommending that the City Council requests that the Department of Energy, the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and their managing agency, the University of California, continue with their original plan to preserve the Bevatron Facility as a place of merit on the National Register of Historic Places for the benefit of future interested individuals and students of science, history, and architecture. Further that the City Council request that the \$85 million budgeted for the demolition of the Bevatron be mostly redirected to the decontamination of toxic underground plumes at LBNL as promised with enough spared to complete the conversion of the accelerator facility for safe public access. **Ayes:** Beltran, Bohn, Brody, Cohen, Kashner, Litman, McDonald, Seaton, Sherman, sorgen, Wagley, Weddle, Winkelman; **Noes:** Wornick; **Abstain:** Freedkin, Wornick; **Absent:** None.

Commissioners Freedkin and Wornick abstained from the vote because, while they personally support the resolution, as written it does not address justice or peace issues as defined in the ordinance that created the Peace and Justice Commission and therefore not within the purview of this Commission.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager takes no position on the content and recommendations of the Commission’s Report.

RESOLUTION NO. -N.S.

PRESERVING THE BEVATRON FACILITY AS A PLACE OF MERIT ON THE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

WHEREAS, it is the function of the Peace and Justice Commission to help create citizen awareness around issues of social justice and develop educational programs for the implementation of the Council (BMC 3.68.070. B), and the Nuclear Free Berkeley Act, BMC Section 12.90.80 E states “The City of Berkeley...shall assist and promote educational activities including but not limited to curriculum in all public schools and adult education programs, to advance public awareness and understanding of work for nuclear weapons and related matters as addressed in this Act”; and

WHEREAS, the Bevatron, an accelerator built in 1954 at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL), played a critical role in the nation’s scientific research efforts which resulted in four Nobel prizes and has historic and educational value for people involved in science, history and architecture; and

WHEREAS, the complex and unique machinery that remains represents the majority of the accelerator, is accessible, in good condition and would be an excellent teaching aid and field trip for students of science, physics, etc.; and

WHEREAS, the large circular structure with a conical roof that houses the Bevatron is also unique and worthy of preservation; and

WHEREAS, the many years of accelerator activity resulted in significant amounts of radioactive materials deep inside the walls, ground and structural elements and these together with many hazardous and toxic substances also buried in the structure would be released during deconstruction and hauling and would best be handled by being allowed to decay in place as recommended by leading environmental experts; and

WHEREAS, toxics, especially radioactive materials, are very hard to dispose of and this disposition will impact yet another community in addition to our own; and

WHEREAS, in 1995, LBNL requested and received eligibility status on the National Register of Historic Places for the Bevatron facility from the Office of Historic Preservation, State of California; and

WHEREAS, the complex geology and hydrology of the Bevatron site require a comprehensive and public analysis of the impact of the demolition upon Berkeley’s creeks, air, soil, and emergency water systems; and

WHEREAS, LBNL has promised to clean up other hazardous and radioactive plumes on its site when funding was available; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Energy has budgeted \$85 million for demolishing the Bevatron even though there is no need or plans for a replacement project.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Berkeley requests that the Department of Energy, the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and their managing agency, the University of California, continue with their original plan to preserve the Bevatron Facility as a place of merit on the National Register of Historic Places for the benefit of future interested individuals and students of science, history and architecture.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Berkeley requests that the \$85 million budgeted for the demolition of the Bevatron be mostly redirected to the decontamination of toxic underground plumes at LBNL as promised with enough spared to complete the conversion of the accelerator facility for safe public access.