



Office of the Mayor

ACTION CALENDAR
March 13, 2007

To: Members of the City Council
From: Mayor Tom Bates
Subject: Public Commons For Everyone Initiative (PCEI)

RECOMMENDATION

Request that the City Manager 1) direct staff to develop Public Commons for Everyone Initiative (PCEI), a comprehensive package of recommendations that would promote health, safety and accessibility in our commercial corridors and address problematic street behavior through enhanced and coordinated services and a law enforcement effort that offers diversion to services; and 2) to return by the May 8th council meeting with a report and recommendations. (Detailed recommendations are contained on pages two and three of the report.)

BACKGROUND

In the past year the City Council has made a substantial investment in our commercial business districts by supporting the Business Improvement Districts, addressing permitting processes, and most recently in approving the Telegraph Avenue package of economic development strategies. Additionally, our community has a long and strong history of funding and supporting services dedicated to improving the lives of people who are homeless or living in poverty and for people facing issues of substance abuse and/or mental illness.

The Public Commons for Everyone Initiative (PCEI) is comprehensive approach, building on the strategy the City Council approved for Telegraph Avenue earlier this year. In the February 27, 2007 Evaluation of Telegraph Avenue Improvement Plan we heard about the benefits of such a coordinated approach across city departments, and we understand the challenges that persist. One of those challenges has been the unintended consequence of transferring some of the street behavior problems to the downtown and surrounding areas.

In the past year, the City has seen a significant number of long-time Berkeley businesses close or relocate to other jurisdictions. Throughout the city, merchants and community members cite a variety of issues including a lack of parking, an onerous permitting process, regional economic and shopping trends, slumping sales due to Internet activity, and the physical and social deterioration of our streets.

Many cities, such as Portland, Santa Cruz, and Palo Alto, have developed safe street programs that provide a combination of service enhancements and enforcement and present an integrated strategy for creating more viable and inviting commercial districts. Like these cities, the City of Berkeley needs to take the lead to create public commons that are safe, healthy and vibrant throughout our community.

The PCEI proposal includes a broad, citywide effort to apply an inter-departmental coordinated approach deploying mental health, social services, economic development, and law enforcement

efforts to improve the overall health and climate of all our commercial districts. The proposal addresses the physical conditions by improving streetscapes and sidewalk areas and working with local merchants to develop clear expectations for street appearances. It addresses social conditions by improving outreach and access to services and by creating consistent community standards for public behavior -specifically preventing behaviors such as prolonged sitting and smoking in front of businesses, yelling at people as they walk along the corridor, and/or selling or consuming drugs.

This PCEI package is designed to create a healthy public commons by:

- Increasing opportunity and access to services for individuals in need.
- Improving the cleanliness and accessibility of the sidewalks in the commercial areas.
- Supporting merchants and businesses by promoting and marketing our commercial areas and creating opportunities to channel street donations to local non-profit agencies that provide resources and services to low-income populations.
- Strengthening links to regional programs like the Alameda County Detoxification and Sobering program and the Everyone Home efforts to end homelessness.
- Creating standardized and consistent policies and practices across the City's commercial districts, and providing clear enforcement mechanisms for BPD and the City's social services when violations occur.

By working together to reinvigorate our "commons", to bring Berkeley citizens back to socialize in our public spaces and regularly patronize our businesses, we have the ability to generate increased tax revenue that could be reattributed to providing quality of life services. There is a clear nexus between increased economic activity within our borders and increased resources that can be used to insure community health and safety.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

Council requests that the City Manager approach this comprehensive package of coordinated services and strategies by:

1. Researching and developing a proposal for a diversion-to-services program that is coupled with Berkeley Police Department enforcement.
 - Include increased outreach and referral by the Mobile Crisis team and service enhancements. The Telegraph Avenue evaluation identified the effectiveness of increasing referrals by Mobile Crisis, yet it also identified the challenges that persist in addressing individuals resistant to services, particularly individuals who have extensive criminal justice and substance abuse histories and are not receptive to human services referrals. According to staff, these individuals require on-going law enforcement attention and/or referral to drug detoxification services.
 - When appropriate, update Police Department training and protocol to include the diversion program.
 - Identify the potential impact of PCEI on the capacity of City and community agencies.

2. Drafting language amending the Berkeley Municipal Code and relevant council resolutions to:
 - Make regulations and protocols consistent in all Berkeley commercial districts.
 - Provide effective legal tools for keeping the sidewalk free from obstruction.
 - Expand the no smoking ordinance to 25 feet in front of all buildings in commercial districts.
 - Present the pros and cons of various enforcement mechanisms, such as citations, administrative citations, and misdemeanors. This is in conjunction with a wider city effort to create a comprehensive program for improving the quality of our business districts.
3. Reviewing the current street cleaning program and ensure that there is a base-line level of sidewalk cleaning service throughout the commercial districts.
4. Conducting an inventory and assessment of existing public seating.
5. Working with merchants and service providers to create a series of marketing and outreach campaigns:
 - Inviting residents to donate to organizations that serve the homeless community, thus educating the public and giving them an option to channel street donations to critical services.
 - Educating merchants and property owners on ways they can partner with the city, the community, and each other to help improve the quality of our business districts.
6. Requesting that the Homeless Commission, the Mental Health Commission, and the Human Welfare and Community Action Commission review recommendations and present comments.
7. Identifying funding and staffing requirements. Ensure no reductions in homeless service funding in FY 2008.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

Staff time to prepare package of recommendations. Possible future referral to the budget process for implementation.

CONTACT PERSON

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