

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE BERKELEY GENERAL PLAN

The Berkeley General Plan is a comprehensive, long-range, and internally consistent statement of policies for the development and preservation of Berkeley. It is a statement of community priorities and values to be used to guide public decision-making in future years. The Berkeley General Plan is a compilation of goals, objectives, policies, and actions designed to manage change. The Plan's goals, objectives, and policies serve as a guide to the day-to-day decisions that are essential for responsive government. Decisions made by the Berkeley City Council and its advisory boards and commissions about the physical development of the city should be consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of this Plan. The City Council and the Planning Commission will use the General Plan when evaluating land use changes and making funding and budget decisions. It will be used by the Zoning Adjustments Board and City staff to help regulate development proposals and make decisions on projects. The policies of the Plan apply to all property, both public and private, within the Berkeley city limits. Although the University of California and other State and County agencies are not legally obligated to comply with the Plan, mutual cooperation benefits the City, the County, and the State.

Given the broad scope of the General Plan, inherent tensions exist between Plan objectives and policies that must be balanced against one another through the decision-making process on particular development and land use decisions. It is not the intent of the General Plan to predetermine these decisions, but rather to help guide the decision-making process.

CREATING THE GENERAL PLAN

Although a number of public workshops and several important publications were completed in the mid-1990s for the update of the General Plan, this General Plan document is the result of an intensive two-and-a-half-year effort by the Berkeley Planning Commission with help from the Berkeley community and City staff. In February 1999 the City Council authorized the Planning Commission and city staff to begin work on drafting a new General Plan for the City of Berkeley. City staff prepared the first draft in May 1999. After a series of five community workshops, staff prepared a second draft in October 1999 for Planning Commission consideration. Over the next 12 months, the Planning Commission held seven public workshops, which included over 20 hours of "roundtable" discussions. Hundreds of Berkeley citizens participated in the workshops or submitted written suggestions for the Planning Commission Draft General Plan. After an additional series of Planning Commission meetings dedicated to focused discussion of particular policies and policy alternatives, the Planning Commission published a Planning Commission Draft General Plan in October 2000. Following publication of the Planning Commission Draft Plan, the Commission initiated a series of public hearings on the Draft Plan and authorized work on a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluating the Draft Plan. During the spring of 2001, the Planning Commission dedicated another ten Planning Commission meetings to the consideration of additional public testimony and proposed amendments to the Planning Commission Draft Plan and held three public hearings for the public to comment on the Draft EIR and the Draft Plan. The goals, objectives, policies, and actions included in this General Plan are the result of four drafts, approximately 100 hours of public workshops, meetings, and hearings, close to 1,000 pages of policy suggestions submitted by Berkeley citizens, and the hard work and dedication of the Berkeley community and Berkeley Planning Commission.

On July 11, 2001 the Planning Commission concluded its work on the update of the Berkeley General Plan and forwarded its recommended General Plan to the City Council for consideration and adoption.

GENERAL PLAN ORGANIZATION

State law requires each city to adopt a general plan for the physical development of the city. State law requires that the general plan include at least seven specified elements: land use, transportation, housing, open space, conservation, noise, and safety elements. The Berkeley General Plan includes the seven required elements. In the Berkeley General Plan, the noise and conservation elements are covered in the Environmental Management Element. The Plan also includes three optional elements: Economic Development and Employment, Urban Design and Preservation, and Citizen Participation.

This General Plan is designed to work in concert with the City's more detailed Area Plans, which were adopted as amendments to the 1977 Master Plan. The General Plan replaces the 1977 Master Plan, the 1980 Economic Development Element, and the 1990 Housing Element. Since this Plan supersedes the 1977 Master Plan, the existing Area Plan documents were adopted as amendments to this General Plan.¹ (Figure 1 on page I-3 shows the areas of Berkeley covered by adopted and proposed Area Plans.) Area Plan goals and policies and General Plan goals and policies must be internally consistent and each must be considered when making decisions. In cases where amendments to Area Plans were necessary to establish consistency between the Citywide General Plan and the Area Plan policies, those amendments are specifically identified in the General Plan.

Each Element of the Plan includes a background section, which provides information on specific topics covered by the Element and a technical basis for the objectives, policies, and actions. In many cases additional reports and plans are referenced as part of the background section. Each Element also includes objectives, policies, and actions. **Objectives** identify the results that the City is trying to achieve or direction in which the City is trying to move. A **policy** is a specific statement of principle that provides direction on a particular issue and ensures that actions are consistent with the direction or end result described in the objectives. **Actions** are strategies, programs, or specific actions to be carried out that will help the City achieve its objectives.

¹ Berkeley City Council Resolution No. 61,533-N.S., April 23, 2002.

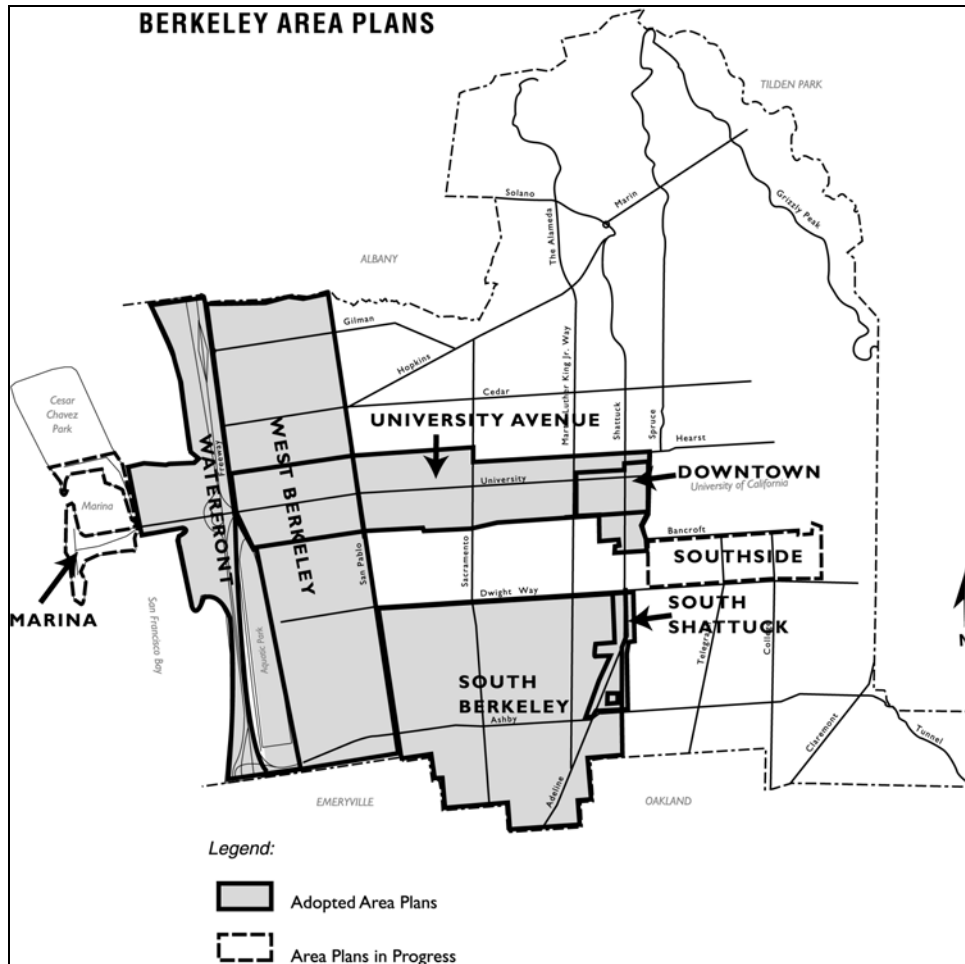


Figure 1. Berkeley Area Plans (Note: Southside boundaries subject to revision)
BERKELEY GENERAL PLAN GOALS

The General Plan identifies seven major goals:

1. Preserve Berkeley's unique character and quality of life.
2. Ensure that Berkeley has an adequate supply of decent housing, living-wage jobs, and businesses providing basic goods and services.
3. Protect local and regional environmental quality.
4. Maximize and improve citizen participation in municipal decision-making.
5. Create a sustainable Berkeley.
6. Make Berkeley a disaster-resistant community that can survive, recover from, and thrive after a disaster.
7. Maintain Berkeley's infrastructure, including streets, sidewalks, buildings, and facilities; storm drains and sanitary sewers; and open space, parks, pathways, and recreation facilities.

The Plan's goals are implemented through decisions and actions consistent with the objectives, policies, and actions of each of the nine Elements. The goals and associated policies and actions are intended to work together in concert to establish and maintain Berkeley as a sustainable community that promotes social equity, environmental quality, and economic prosperity to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations.

Goal #1: Preserve Berkeley's unique character and quality of life.

Berkeley is a unique place. It has a population that is ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse and its citizens value that diversity. Its citizens care deeply about their community and many participate actively in its civic affairs. Berkeley is fortunate to be located in the center of the Bay Area with its desirable climate and physical beauty. While much more than just a university town, Berkeley benefits from the University of California's cultural and educational facilities and its positive impact on the local economy. As one of the older cities in the East Bay, Berkeley has a number of lively pedestrian-oriented commercial areas that developed along former streetcar routes and near the University. It has many pleasant, livable residential neighborhoods with many attractive older homes. It has largely avoided the newer car-oriented suburban sprawl and strip mall style of commercial development found in other parts of the Bay Area. This plan includes policies and actions to ensure that Berkeley retains its unique character and quality of life.

Maintain City Infrastructure, Parks, and other Public Assets. To preserve both the physical character and livability of the city, the City must adequately maintain its streets, sidewalks, pathways, parks, and sewers. The General Plan contains policies to do so. The Plan also calls for the expansion of open space and recreational resources to meet the needs of all segments of the community.

Prepare for Natural Disasters. While there are many advantages to Berkeley's physical location with the hills to the east and San Francisco Bay to the west, there are also disadvantages. Earthquakes on the Hayward Fault and fires in the hills pose a threat of severe physical damage to the city and the loss of life to Berkeley residents and visitors. The General Plan calls for enhanced preparedness for natural and man-made disasters to minimize damage and effectively implement recovery operations.

Reduce Traffic and Encourage Transit. The increase in automobile traffic volume on city streets, its spillover onto local residential streets, and the increased congestion on a number of major streets have eroded the livability of some parts of the city and pose a continuing threat to Berkeley's quality of life. Berkeley has too many accidents involving pedestrians and bicyclists. There are major gaps in and problems with the transit service available to Berkeley residents. The General Plan contains policies to improve and to encourage use of alternative modes of transportation, including working with transit agencies to establish a citywide or regional "Eco-Pass" program that would provide free transit passes. There are also policies to calm traffic and improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Encourage Appropriate Infill Development. With little vacant land available for development, all new development in Berkeley will be infill development. To preserve Berkeley's character, it is essential that infill development be sensitively designed and thoughtfully planned to fit in with the existing built environment. The General Plan leaves in place most development standards and zoning created and implemented through previous area plan processes. This zoning encourages housing and mixed-use development in Downtown and along the city's transit corridors. The General Plan calls for new development to contribute to the provision of necessary public improvements to serve current and future populations such as open space, transportation, and affordable housing. The Plan also makes a commitment to preserve the city's historic resources.

Goal #2: Ensure that Berkeley has an adequate supply of decent housing, living-wage jobs, and businesses providing basic goods and services.

To maintain Berkeley's unique character and quality of life, Berkeley must strive to maintain the cultural, social, and economic diversity that is such an important aspect of the character of Berkeley. If Berkeley is to remain a diverse community with a wide range of races, incomes, cultures, and ideas, Berkeley must take steps to maintain an adequate supply of decent, affordable housing, a range of jobs, and a variety of local goods and services.

Increase the Supply of Affordable Housing. One major threat to Berkeley's character and to its diversity is gentrification. As rents and home prices rise, fewer people can afford to live in Berkeley. The General Plan contains policies and actions that provide incentives to develop new affordable housing, including revisions to Downtown height bonuses. It also contains policies and actions to maintain and increase the affordability of the existing housing supply, including acquisition of existing rental housing.

Support Local Businesses and Neighborhood-Serving Businesses. There are many independent locally owned businesses in Berkeley, many of them predominantly neighborhood-serving, with others serving broader regional markets. Berkeley also has corporate-owned chain stores. The fact that chains have not come to dominate has contributed to the vitality of Berkeley's commercial areas. The Plan contains policies to support local ownership and neighborhood commercial districts.

Promote a Strong Industrial Base and Living-Wage Jobs. Living-wage jobs for Berkeley residents are important for maintaining stable neighborhoods and quality of life in the city. The Plan supports continued implementation of the West Berkeley Plan with its emphasis on protecting industry. It also supports employment and training programs to increase access to local jobs by Berkeley residents.

Goal #3: Protect local and regional environmental quality.

Without a healthy environment, the high quality of life in Berkeley will be degraded for present inhabitants and future generations. This Plan emphasizes the protection of the environment, both locally and regionally. It addresses City programs and actions, the importance of regional solutions, and the importance of the actions of the individual in day-to-day decisions on the health of the environment.

Reduce the Waste Stream Generated from Berkeley. Berkeley was a pioneer community in the area of recycling. Plan policies continue to support recycling of as much of the solid waste generated by residents and businesses as possible. The Plan also includes policies to regulate hazardous materials and reduce hazardous waste.

Restore Creeks and Plant Trees. Berkeley has a network of creeks, many of them in culverts and not visible. The Plan encourages the daylighting of creeks. Berkeley has been adding trees in recent years and the Plan calls for maintaining street trees and for planting additional trees.

Improve Air Quality and Conserve Resources. Air quality in the Bay Area is threatened by increased emissions from motor vehicle use and other sources. The City Council recently adopted the Resource Conservation and Global Warming Abatement Plan. Many policies from that plan are incorporated into the General Plan. The Plan's Transportation Element contains policies to reduce automobile use and the Land Use Element encourages housing development along transit corridors to reduce the need for automobiles.

Goal #4: Maximize and improve citizen participation in municipal decision-making.

The high level of citizen participation is another important and distinctive characteristic of Berkeley. Several hundred citizens serve on boards and commissions and help to formulate policy and advise the City Council. There are many active neighborhood associations, merchant groups, and advocacy groups.

Improve Notification and the Dissemination of Information. Citizen complaints about inadequate notification about public meetings are common, and access to relevant information and reports can be difficult. The Plan contains policies to improve notification and to take advantage of recent technological changes that can make important information broadly available to the public.

Improve Citizen Participation. Citizens should be actively involved in making decisions about anything that will have an impact on them and their families and neighborhoods. The Plan mandates maximum

citizen involvement in all public planning and decision-making processes. The Plan stresses the important role of neighborhoods and neighborhood groups in land use decisions.

Improve the Responsiveness of City Administration and Staff. Plan policies call for staff training and citizen involvement in evaluating the performance of the City's administrative units.

Goal #5: Create a Sustainable Berkeley.

The Berkeley General Plan is committed to the challenge of creating and maintaining a truly sustainable community—locally, regionally, and globally. A sustainable community is one that meets its existing needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The General Plan also recognizes that sustainability must be an organizing principle for all Berkeley actions and programs and that we must always consider the interdependent goals of protecting the environment, promoting social equity, and achieving a healthy economy.

Protect the Environment. The Plan is committed to protecting the environment through appropriate environmental management actions and programs as described above in Goal #3, but also through actions and programs such as improvement of the regional and local public transportation system and development of multi-family, affordable housing on transit corridors and near job centers such as the Downtown and the University of California.

Promote Social Equity. The Plan is committed to ensuring that all members of the community benefit from Berkeley's natural setting, high quality of life, economic opportunities, and unique neighborhoods. The Plan's housing, transportation, economic development, and citizen participation objectives and policies are designed to ensure that all economic groups benefit from equal opportunities, services, and participation in government.

Achieve a Healthy Economy. The Plan is committed to ensuring that the Berkeley economy is sustainable, closely linked to the needs of Berkeley citizens, and sensitive to the environment. The Plan includes policies to support local businesses, encourage and when possible require local hiring, improve job placement and retraining services, and support green businesses.

Goal #6: Make Berkeley a disaster-resistant community that can survive, recover from, and thrive after a disaster.

While there are many advantages to Berkeley's physical location, there are also disadvantages. Earthquakes, fires, landslides, floods, and hazardous materials releases are primary hazards confronting the Berkeley community. There is also new recognition of the additional threat from human-caused disasters. The city's healthy environment with its unique character and quality of life based on cultural, social, and economic diversity could be dramatically and enduringly altered by a serious hazard event. Berkeley must protect what we already have as well as what we build through employing sound development practices and building and planning code enforcement, and continuously working to reduce the vulnerability of existing buildings and infrastructure, to improve emergency response, and to prepare for recovery. Without these measures, disasters will occur and the other goals of the General Plan will be lost.

Identify and Reduce Vulnerabilities. Berkeley must build on its work that has made it a nationally recognized leader in mitigating risks. Since the community is urbanized and densely populated with an aging building stock, the Plan recognizes the challenge to improve the safety of the built environment and calls for a variety of systematic, ongoing, and incremental actions based on sound analysis of hazardous conditions and economically realistic interventions and incentives.

Improve Emergency Response and Preparation. Because some hazard events such as earthquakes cannot be prevented, the community must be prepared to respond quickly and effectively to such events. The Plan contains policies to ensure that emergency response and recovery plans are comprehensive, current and coordinated with other agencies and jurisdictions. The Plan also stresses the crucial role the City must play in educating and preparing residential, business, and special needs communities.

Utilize Disaster-Resistant Land Use Planning. Berkeley continues to undergo substantial new development as well as redevelopment and reuse of existing facilities. The Plan highlights the need and the opportunity to ensure that new construction reduces rather than increases risk. Policies call for improving the identification of the locations of hazards through the designation of flood, landslide, or earthquake zones, improving awareness of their presence and consequences, and adopting and enforcing regulations to minimize the exposure to such risks.

Goal #7: Maintain Berkeley's infrastructure, including streets, sidewalks, buildings and facilities; storm drains and sanitary sewers; and open space, parks, pathways, and recreation facilities.

IMPLEMENTING THE GENERAL PLAN

The City Council, City boards and commissions, City staff, and others including Berkeley residents and business owners will implement the General Plan. Plan policies will be carried out through the adoption and revision of ordinances and City programs, through annual budgeting and capital improvement programming, through the participation of citizens and neighborhood community groups, and through decisions on development proposals.

The Plan is intended to be a living document that changes with changing local conditions and community priorities. To ensure that the General Plan remains up-to-date and reflective of current City policy, the General Plan will be reviewed annually by the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission will recommend to the City Council any modifications that it considers necessary. The Planning Commission will also review the General Plan prior to adoption of the biennial (two-year) budget. Through the annual reports on the General Plan, staff will provide a status report on the City's progress toward implementation and any recommended amendments to the Plan. (General Plan amendments will be encouraged in conjunction with this review, although amendments may be considered at other times of the year.) As part of this review, the Planning Commission will also be asked to make recommendations to the City Council on budget priorities for General Plan implementation.

AMENDING THE GENERAL PLAN

Community needs and priorities change over time in response to changing local, regional, and worldwide conditions. To ensure that the Berkeley General Plan always reflects current community needs and priorities requires that the Plan be amended when necessary to reflect these changes.

The Planning Commission, City staff, City Council, or the general public may initiate amendments to the General Plan. Amendments require submittal of an application to the City and public hearings by the Planning Commission and City Council. General Plan amendments will also be subject to environmental review in accordance with the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Public decisions to recommend or adopt a General Plan amendment must be supported by findings of fact. These findings are the rationale for making a decision either to approve or deny the amendment. While specific findings may be applied on a case-by-case basis, at least the following standard findings should be made for each General Plan amendment:

1. The proposed amendment is in the public interest.
2. The proposed amendment is consistent and compatible with the rest of the General Plan.
3. The potential effects of the proposed amendment have been evaluated and have been determined not to be detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare.
4. The proposed amendment has been processed in accordance with the applicable provisions of the California Government Code and the California Environmental Quality Act.