



Downtown Streets & Open Space Improvement Plan Subcommittee

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STAFF REPORT

Downtown Streets & Open Space Improvement Plan Subcommittee – Meeting #1 Monday, March 8, 2010, from 6 to 10 pm

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

The SOSIP Process

The Streets & Open Space Improvement Plan presents an exciting opportunity to make Downtown more attractive, livable, and responsive environmentally. The SOSIP Subcommittee will play a critical role in its development. I look forward to working with you, and hope that I can meet with each of you individually to better understand your special concerns.

Membership. Voting members of the Subcommittee represent the four Commissions with a direct interest in what happens on public land, including rights-of-way: Parks & Recreation Commission, Planning Commission, Public Works Commission, and Transportation Commission.

The Subcommittee also includes two ex-officio members representing UC Berkeley, in recognition of the critical role the University will continue to play in the development of Downtown. In addition, the Landmarks Preservation Commission and Design Review Committee may also designate a non-voting liaison to the SOSIP process.

Each "parent commissions" (as well as LPC and DRC) will also have an opportunity to be involved directly with the development of the SOSIP. SOSIP Subcommittee recommendations will be taken to each commission for comment, before City Council takes up the SOSIP in late 2010. To flag critical issues and minimize disagreements, Staff also plans to report to each commission at appropriate milestones.

Work Plan. The Subcommittee will play a principal role in shaping recommendations, but will need to do so in a focused way. When it established the Subcommittee, the City Council resolved to disband the Subcommittee on September 30, and Council required that the Subcommittee not meet more than eight times.

Three types of recommendations are expected:

1. Design Concepts for Major Projects. Several opportunities for major projects exist Downtown. Most of these "subareas" are comprised of street segments where the number of traffic lanes can be reduced -- or where parking can be reconfigured in a strategic way (see "Related Efforts"). Additionally, City Council supported the closing of Center Street between Shattuck and Oxford, when it adopted a Downtown Area Plan (now rescinded). Design alternatives for each subarea are summarized below.

2. Area-Wide Features & Guidelines. Many kinds of improvements can occur throughout the Downtown Area and do not need to be associated with a major project. These features include: street trees; bicycle network & facilities; "low impact development" (LID) features for stormwater & urban runoff; street lighting; "wayfinding" signage; and a coordinated program for public art.
3. Financing Program. The consultant team of Economic Planning Systems (EPS) and Community Design + Architecture (CD+A) have begun to evaluate potential sources of revenue for street and open space projects, such as developer fees, an expanded improvement district, citywide assessments, grants, and other sources. Estimates for the "capacity" of potential revenues are expected in June. The consultant will also be estimating costs for subarea projects, area-wide features, and on-going maintenance. To maintain a good "fit" between near-term revenues and costs, the SOSIP Subcommittee will recommend funding priorities.

Cost estimating work needs to begin immediately so that the Subcommittee can recommend funding priorities before it is disbanded, (i.e. cost estimates will inform a financing strategy that will be presented in May or June). At the first meeting, design alternatives need to be selected for cost estimating for each major subarea. The Subcommittee may reconsider and will refine design preferences later in the SOSIP process, but cost estimates won't be possible for new or revised options.

Even though will challenge the cost estimating task, the "Mid-Shattuck" area will not be considered at the first meeting. This segment of Shattuck might include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and assumptions for BRT may be informed by City Council deliberation on BRT scheduled for March 23.

The Subcommittee will review an outline for the Plan and have an opportunity to refine its schedule at its second meeting. Using "givens" discussed above, the SOSIP Subcommittee's schedule is likely to look like this:

March	Consideration of Goals Design Concepts for Cost Estimating
April	Mid-Shattuck Concept for Cost Estimating Street Trees LID Features Lighting & Furnishings
May	Pedestrian-Supportive Features Bicycle Network & Facilities Wayfinding & Public Art
June	Financing Program Funding Preferences Refine Preferred Design Concepts (in Context of Costs)
July	Draft SOSIP Document
Sept	Finalize SOSIP Recommendations

Related Efforts. SOSIP impacts on-street parking will be addressed by a "Parking and Transportation Demand Management" program (PTDM). The PTDM program will promote the use of underutilized off-street parking garages through appropriate pricing and dynamic signage. The PTDM is also expected to reduce demand for parking by downtown residents and employees, and to establish new publicly-accessible ("shared") parking facilities as part of new development proposals.

New zoning provisions are also being developed that will promote on-site open space for use by the public. Development on larger parcels and at greater heights will be required to provide street-facing plazas and/or midblock walkways and courtyards – or make "in lieu" contributions for public street and open space improvements.

The Subcommittee will have an opportunity to discuss these efforts at a future meeting.

Alternative Design Concepts

For each subarea, selection of a design concept for cost estimating is a time critical task. Subcommittee members will want to keep general goals and key issues in mind during its deliberations.

Four subareas will need to be considered at the first meeting:

- Ohlone Greenway along Hearst Avenue;
- Lower Shattuck Avenue;
- Shattuck Square and University Avenue; and
- Center Street Plaza and Greenway.

Design options have been developed for each subarea, and are presented in the Subcommittee's agenda packet and online at: www.cityofberkeley.info/sosip

A new option has been developed in response to Open House comments. There is a new design option for Lower Shattuck that places traffic and parking at the center of the Shattuck right-of-way and places pedestrian amenities in front of shops. Staff continues to have reservations around this configuration because it could reduce the visibility and perceived accessibility of shops.

Open House comments also led to careful analysis as to the possible depth of Strawberry Creek if it was to be daylighted adjacent to Civic Center Park. The correct depth is about 12 feet below grade.

Open House Comments

Community member comments recorded at the February 6 Open House have been summarized and appear in the Subcommittee's agenda packet and online at: www.cityofberkeley.info/sosip . These comments are an important resource for considering alternative design concepts for each subarea.