



Berkeley City Council

ACTION CALENDAR

March 23, 2010

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmembers Jesse Arreguín, Linda Maio and Kriss Worthington

Subject: Support of Walter Hood's proposed conceptual design for a Strawberry Creek Plaza on Center Street between Oxford Street and Shattuck Avenue

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Adopt a resolution supporting landscape architect Walter Hood's proposed conceptual design for a Strawberry Creek Plaza on Center Street between Oxford Street and Shattuck Avenue, directing the City Manager to refer the proposed conceptual design to staff for review and to work with Ecocity Builders and Citizens for a Strawberry Creek Plaza in developing a plan for technical study and design development and work with Ecocity Builders and Citizens for a Strawberry Creek Plaza to actively identify possible funding sources both public and private and to apply for the capital needed to raise the monies needed to execute the project.
2. Request that the City Manager report back to Council in 6 months with a report on the progress financing and the development of a plan for implementation of the proposed project.

BACKGROUND:

In 1999, the City of Berkeley completed an initial data collection study for daylighting Strawberry Creek in downtown, compiled by Wolfe/Mason and Associates Landscape Architects.

The City of Berkeley General Plan policy LU-17 calls for an evaluation of daylighting Strawberry Creek as part of an ecological demonstration/mixed use project in the downtown. City of Berkeley General Plan policy LU-20 says "Continue to explore costs and plans for the daylighting of Strawberry Creek." and "Encourage development of public spaces, plazas and restoration of natural areas in the Downtown and other areas of the city where appropriate to enhance the pedestrian environment."

In June 2004, the City Council unanimously passed the UC Hotel Task Force recommendations that supports opening Strawberry Creek as part of a public pedestrian-oriented open space or plaza on Center Street between Shattuck Avenue and Oxford Street. In January 2007, the Downtown Area Plan Advisory Committee also supported, as the preferred option for Center Street between Shattuck Avenue and Oxford Street, the pedestrianization of the street and the creation of a public pedestrian-oriented open space or plaza.

In May 2007, Berkeley citizens, through nonprofit Ecocity Builders, commissioned renowned landscape architect Walter Hood to convene a detailed public process to develop a proposal for Center Street in alignment with the City's policy directives and specifications. Public meetings were held over the course of two and a half years involving all sectors of the public, the City, UC Berkeley, the Center street merchants and property owners, the Downtown Berkeley Association, BART, EBMUD, the Berkeley Fire Department, and local advocacy and interest groups.

In July 2009, the Berkeley City Council adopted the Downtown Area Plan with the wording, "Several small plazas are also called for, most notably the creation of Center Street Plaza, on Center between Shattuck and Oxford." (lines 2003-2006). And also "Create a pedestrian-oriented urban space and prioritize pedestrian access on Center Street between Shattuck Avenue and Oxford, the primary pedestrian connection between BART and the UC campus. Close Center Street Plaza to traffic (to create a pedestrian mall), except for deliveries and emergency services, subject to American Disabilities Act and State requirements. Passenger drop-offs should occur at the ends of the block. Creation for the plaza is of critical importance. Consider phasing and design options that minimize negative impacts on Center Street merchants, and consider design options that address impacts. Phase construction of the new Center Street Plaza and utility improvements so that segments become operational at the same time as the development of the north side of Center Street occurs. Consider providing bicycle access through the pedestrian plaza to accommodate safe and direct access to the UC Berkeley campus. Paths between uses on the north and south sides of the plaza should be reasonably direct." (lines 2326-2337)

In 2009, the HOOD proposal was presented to the Berkeley Planning Commission and on January 2010, the HOOD proposal was also presented to the City Council followed by a public unveiling at the David Brower Center.

Currently there is very little public open space in the Downtown area. Center Street is a major link between the UC Berkeley campus and the Downtown transit hub. The path from the center of campus that runs alongside Strawberry Creek feeds thousands of students, staff and visitors onto the southside of Center Street. Currently over 10,000 pedestrian trips are made every single day on Center Street. The current flow of pedestrians helps support the numerous local businesses.

The proposed Strawberry Creek Plaza will provide needed public open space, will promote healthy city planning and building, will support local businesses and help restore ecological functions and promote education about our environment.

A green downtown core project, such as the Center Street plaza, can revitalize the downtown and attract visitors to the city and serve as a model for the rest of the country and the world.

The proposed design has been a result of 20 years of public discussion and has been informed by stakeholders including environmentalists and businesses and is guided by recommendations of every single draft of the Downtown Area Plan.

Given that the project is ready to move forward toward positioning for upcoming grants and funding cycles and given that the prospects of receiving grants, foundation funding and private donations to further advance this project are very likely, it is important that the City Council approve Walter Hood's proposed design and direct staff to actively identify possible funding sources both public and private and to apply for the capital needed to raise monies to execute the project as well as come up with a process for moving forward with the project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Staff time to analyze the proposed conceptual design and work with community partners (Ecocity Builders and Citizens for a Strawberry Creek Plaza) and any consultants in developing technical studies, identifying funding for the project and design development. Staff time and city resources involved in this project can potentially be funded by any federal funding and additional funding allocated to the project.

CONTACT PERSONS:

Jesse Arreguín, Councilmember, District 4	981-7140
Linda Maio, Councilmember, District 1	981-7110
Kriss Worthington, Councilmember, District 7	981-7170

Attachments:

1. Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

APPROVING THE HOOD DESIGN PROPOSAL AS THE PREFERRED DESIGN OPTION FOR A PEDESTRIAN PLAZA ON CENTER STREET BETWEEN OXFORD STREET AND SHATTUCK AVENUE

WHEREAS, well designed public spaces with access to elements of nature improve the social and environmental health of the entire community, and, when centrally located near excellent public transportation, provide easy access and benefits to all citizens, including low income, seniors, children and disabled; and

WHEREAS, Strawberry Creek is an urban stream currently underground in downtown, available to be opened to public view and enjoyment; and

WHEREAS, the partial flow daylighting proposed for Center Street will restore some ecological function to the creek; and

WHEREAS, partial daylighting, underground stormwater catchment and permeable pavement directed to the channel as described in the HOOD proposal would also enhance flood protection by increasing in-channel storage and attenuating peak flows; and

WHEREAS, the General Plan specifically supports exploring costs and plan for the daylighting of Strawberry Creek (LU-20); and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley's 1999 data collection study conducted by Wolfe/Mason Landscape Architects concluded that next steps towards downtown daylighting goals should include a detailed technical analysis and design, an environmental assessment and site specific cost estimates which have now been completed; and

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley has now spent over \$400,000 on feasibility studies specifically for researching Strawberry Creek daylighting options for Downtown; and

WHEREAS, the UC Hotel/Conference Center/Museum Complex Task Force and the 2009 Downtown Area Plan recommendations (which includes the exploration of daylighting Strawberry Creek) were adopted by Berkeley City Council: and

WHEREAS, nonprofit Ecocity Builders and Citizens for a Strawberry Creek Plaza raised over \$150,000 primarily from Berkeley citizens to fund the recent design work and technical studies; and

WHEREAS, the project is now well beyond the conceptual phases; and

WHEREAS, the project is ready to move forward toward positioning for upcoming grants and funding cycles; and

WHEREAS, the project is also in alignment with and in support of current public processes underway; and

WHEREAS, the HOOD proposal would be a model of sustainability and excellence that would likely attract additional support and funding to the City of Berkeley's related processes and projects for downtown; and

WHEREAS, the prospects of receiving grants, foundation funding and private donations to further advance this project are very likely.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that it hereby approves the HOOD Design proposal as the preferred option for Center Street between Oxford Street and Shattuck Avenue.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council directs the City Manager to refer the proposed conceptual design to staff for review and work with Ecocity Builders and Citizens for a Strawberry Creek Plaza to develop a plan for technical study, design development and construction of the project.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council also directs the City Manager to work with Ecocity Builders and Citizens for a Strawberry Creek Plaza to actively identify possible funding sources both public and private and to apply for the capital needed to raise the monies needed to execute the project. Priority should be given to meeting funding deadlines for local, regional, state and federal grants which will become available in the next year.