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Architecture and Urban Design in Oakland: An Inventory of Programs, Organizations, and Projects

Robert Dobruskin



The University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum is a partnership of the University of California at Berkeley; California State University, Hayward; Mills College; Holy Names College; the Peralta Community College District; and the Oakland community.

University of California at Berkeley
Institute of Urban and Regional Development

Inventory of existing programs, organizations, and projects concerned with architecture and urban design in Oakland:

1. Bay Area Partnership City Assets Committee
2. Oakland Design Advocates
3. Oakland Heritage Alliance
4. Oakland City Planning Department
5. Oakland Tours Program

This inventory has been compiled to assist the members and staff of the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum in developing priorities and establishing networks of common interests. Urban design and civic features are important to both the city's image and to its economic development, and this compilation will hopefully be useful to Forum committees that are concerned with both issues. The inventory will be expanded and amended during 1988.

Bay Area Partnership, City Assets Committee
337 17th Street
Oakland, CA 94612
763-8447

Contact: Steve Costa

Keywords: architecture; urban design; private organizations

The Bay Area Partnership was founded by Steve Costa in 1983. Costa intended the Bay Area partnership to be a sort of clearinghouse for what he calls "city-shapers" -- people from diverse areas of the public and private sectors who are actively involved in the development of cities. BAP tries to act as a facilitator and catalyst for these people.

BAP has a full-time staff of two and a ten-member board of directors, of which Costa is president.

BAP has successfully sponsored several design-related projects in Oakland:

- 1) The Lake Merritt Channel Park project. BAP facilitated a half million dollar grant that went to the city to establish a sculpture garden in the park in Lake Merritt Channel.
- 2) BAP sponsored a competition to design flags for unused flagpoles in Oakland. The banners were intended to reflect Oakland's "renaissance". Fifteen designs were chosen and displayed for over a year.
- 3) BAP has sponsored design competitions for Lathar Square and for a cafe at the intersection of Franklin and Broadway.

BAP's Oakland City Assets Committee, founded in 1986, is in BAP's own words "a coalition of 40 key leaders involved in the cultural, historical, architectural, environmental, and economic life of the city." The City Assets Committee has a "1987 Action Agenda" consisting of an ambitious list of projects relating to parks and open space, streetscape improvements, culture and entertainment, urban design, and city promotion: [Action Agenda].

Costa thinks there is an active role that the University can play in promoting improvements in Oakland's physical environment and image. He says that he is pleased that there is a serious attempt on the part of UC to evaluate this role.

**OAKLAND CITY ASSETS COMMITTEE
1987 ACTION AGENDA**

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

City Hall Plaza: begin construction by Summer 1988. In 1987:

- A. Establish a City Hall Plaza Committee involving local landowners and other interested parties to determine the Plaza renovation work plan and budget.
- B. Complete the development of the final Plaza design and construction specifications according to the winning competition design of Y.H. Lee Associates.

Oakland Park Future Plan: Outline a strategic plan for the future acquisition, rehabilitation, maintenance, financing and security of parks city-wide.

Latham Square Renovation: At Broadway and Telegraph. Implement the winning 1985 competition design of Singer & Hodges, Oakland-based landscape architects.

STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENT

Broadway Streetscape Improvements: Begin implementation as outlined in the Central Development District Program (C.D.D.P.) by Summer 1988. In 1987:

- A. Establish a Broadway Streetscape Improvement Committee to develop with City staff the scope of work, alternative financing mechanisms, and process of hiring design professionals to develop a design plan.
- B. Proceed with the hiring of design professionals to develop the Broadway Streetscape Plan.

Street Tree Program and Guidelines: Adopt Greenstreet Plan and downtown guidelines and begin implementation of Downtown Program.

Gateway Programs: There are three Gateway projects:

- A. Downtown Gateways: the Broadway-Interstate 880 underpass area, establishing a stronger link between downtown and Jack London's Waterfront, and landscape improvements at all Interstate 980 downtown exits.
- B. East Bay Gateway: strengthen environmentally and artistically the primary entry into East Bay-Oakland, north and south of the Bay to Bridge toll area.

Follow up on The Partnership's recommendations to the California Coastal Conservancy with proposals for implementation.

- C. The West Oakland Front Door Project: focus on the Prescott Neighborhood which surrounds the West Oakland Bart Station. Working with neighborhood leadership, make recommendations and identify necessary resources for implementation.

Broadway and Downtown Transit Study: Complete studies.

CULTURE/ENTERTAINMENT

Oakland Cultural Plan: Complete plan.

Oakland Fox: Initiate rehabilitation of this site into a major new Cinema Center.

Alice Arts Center: Initiate Phase II rehabilitation.

Mayor's Task Force on Symphonic Music: Begin implementation of the recommended actions of the Task Force.

Percent for the Arts Ordinance: Draft, and seek City Council adoption of an ordinance requiring that a percentage of all new construction be used for art.

Artists Live/Work Space: Review and adopt public policies and strategies which encourage increased development of spaces within the city.

Local Major Arts Organizations and National Touring Presentations: Explore new sources of support for increased performances and exhibitions at downtown facilities.

Oakland Science of Sports Museum: Identify a site and potential sources of support.

Banners on Broadway: Install 166 banners on light standards along Broadway highlighting arts and special events.

Arts Factory Building: Identify a site and potential sources of support for a building where artists can work and the the public can visit.

URBAN DESIGN

Oakland City Center Urban Design Strategy: Establish a strategy which will encourage stronger design and linkages between new key downtown development projects south of 14th Street including Old Oakland, City Center, Preservation Park, Housewives Markets, Oakland Convention Center, Hyatt Regency, Trans Pacific Center and Chinatown.

"Light Up Oakland": Create innovative lighting strategies using professional lighting designers and artists to enliven downtown streets and buildings.

Downtown Design Guidelines: Adopt as outlined in the C.D.D.P. and amended by City Planning.

Historic Preservation Design Element: Develop and implement appropriate Historic Preservation policy guidelines.

CITY PROMOTION

Oakland City Assets Map: Produce a map which highlights the City's many historical, architectural, environmental, retail and cultural assets.

Oakland City Promotion Network: Establish a network where persons and organizations actively involved in promoting the city would come together on a regular basis to exchange information, avoid duplication, and explore greater collaboration and coordination.

Annual Oakland City Assets Awards Program: Establish a program which would recognize projects and the persons and organizations behind them which have contributed significantly to enhancing the City's asset base.

Oakland Design Advocates

Chris Pattillo

337 17th Street, Suite 214

Oakland, CA 94612

465-1284

Keywords: architecture; urban design; private organizations

Oakland Design Advocates grew out of and split off from OCCUR's design committee. The group is made up of volunteers, mostly architects and landscape architects who live and work in Oakland. ODA has breakfast meetings once a month with invited speakers (typically an architect, developer, or city staff person.) Following the presentation, there is a question and answer period, and members generally discuss projects in downtown Oakland. There are 25-30 paid members of ODA, and about 10-25 of them show up for the monthly meetings.

ODA has an executive committee comprised of six members, who also meet monthly. Overall, ODA is run informally; there are no real officers, although Chris Pattillo does serve as the organization's chair. ODA is funded by membership fees, by the AIA, and by a few sponsorships.

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ODA has been involved in the review of every major recent project downtown, including City Center, the historical preservation of Roos Bros., the Central District Development Program, and Kaiser Center. ODA provides conceptual and planning critiques. Currently, ODA is proposing the opening up of a cross street through the City Center project, and opposing the construction of a bridge over Franklin Street. Chris Pattillo says that ODA members are "avid spokespeople" for street level pedestrian retail activities. ODA has also recently looked at Phases II and III of the Chinatown development project and the preliminary proposals for the EBMUD building.

The goal of ODA is to increase the awareness of City staff, the city council, and others with power in Oakland to architecture and the built environment.

For the future, Pattillo sees no dramatic reductions or increases in membership, but she does envision an increase in ODA's participation in the design review process.

Pattillo would like to be more active in the discussions over the new GSA building downtown. She asserts

that she is "adamant" that GSA not be allowed to do whatever it wants to do in Oakland. Preliminary proposals for the GSA building, for example, include a central rotunda that will destroy the axis on line with the fountain in Preservation Park.

Regarding possible Forum activities, Pattillo thinks that it would be "tremendously beneficial" if the Forum could get students to do some of the legwork in ODA's design studies. With more help, ODA could possible redirect its energies and take the offensive in design debates, rather than always being in a "reactive mode."

Oakland Heritage Alliance, P.O. Box 12425 Oakland, CA 94604
or c/o Leslie Flint
5569 Lawton Avenue
Oakland, CA 94618
658-4915 (home)
742-7526 (work)
Keywords: architecture; urban design; historic buildings;
private organizations; historic districts; historic
preservation

The Oakland Heritage Alliance was formed in 1980 "to bring together community groups and individuals sharing an interest in the history of Oakland, and in the preservation and conservation of the city's archaeological, architectural, cultural, environmental, and historical resources." (From OHA literature).

OHA has a 12-member board of directors which meets the first Monday of each month. A Preservation Action Committee and a Publications Committee (which is working on a guidebook and history of Broadway) also meet regularly.

OHA is involved in many projects relating to architecture and urban design.

- during the summer, OHA sponsors a series of walking tours in Oakland. Nearly 400 people participated in this summer's tour series.
- OHA's Preservation Action Committee monitors preservation issues in Oakland and reports on them in OHA's quarterly newsletter, OHA News.
- OHA sponsors lectures concerning preservation in Oakland.
- OHA publishes an excellent quarterly newsletter, OHA NEWS. The newsletter features articles on historic buildings and districts in Oakland, updates on preservation issues, and a calendar of preservation-related activities.

City Planning Department
 One City Hall Plaza
 Oakland, CA 94612
 273-2941

Keywords: architecture, urban design, historic preservation, public agencies, landmarks, historic buildings, historic districts

Several of the City Planning Department's programs are particularly relevant to architecture and urban design issues in Oakland.

1. Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (LPAB)
 City Planning Department
 City Hall, 6th Floor
 One City Hall Plaza
 Oakland, CA 94612
 273-3941
 Chris Buckley, LPAB Secretary

The Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board is a seven-member citizens group appointed by the Mayor and City Council. The Board makes recommendations to the Planning Commission on designating landmark status to historic buildings and districts in the city. After holding public hearings on the Board's recommendations, the planning commission votes in favor or not in favor of granting landmark status. Proposals which receive a favorable vote are sent to the City Council, which has the final vote on the matter.

The granting of landmark status ensures that under current zoning regulations, alterations to the landmark's exterior must be reviewed and approved by the city. The city may also delay the issuance of a demolition permit on landmark buildings for up to 240 days.

The Board meets on the third Wednesday of every month at 3:30 p.m. in Room 211 of City Hall. Chris Buckley, a planner in the Planning Department, serves as the Board's secretary and staff; he works about 25% to 33% time in this position.

The Board maintains a list of current landmarks and preservation districts. There are now 106 landmarks and four districts. (The Board also maintains a preservation study list, made up of buildings being considered for landmark status. Placement on the study list enables the city to delay the issuance of demolition permits for these structures for up to 60 days. As of 7/1/87, there were 306 properties or areas being studied.) In 1979, the Board published a book, Landmarks and Preservation Districts, featuring photographs and descriptions of each of the city's landmarks and preservation districts, which totaled 24 at the time. The Board hopes to publish an updated version of this book, but has no immediate plans to do so.

Other than Chris Buckley, the Board has no regular

staff, and depends on volunteer help to do research on buildings and districts which have been nominated for landmark status.

The Board is currently interested in writing a set of design guidelines for preserving landmark buildings and districts. The Board's Fundraising Committee is also interested in developing a plaque program to assist in providing plaques for landmarks.

2. Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey

City Planning Department
One City Hall Plaza
Oakland, CA 94612
Gary Knecht, Coordinator

The Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey is a project of the City Planning Department, with some assistance provided by the city's Landmark Preservation Advisory Board and the Oakland Heritage Alliance, a preservation organization. The survey is also funded partially by grants distributed by the California State Office of Historic Preservation.

The survey evaluates and inventories buildings, districts, sites, natural features and other properties having historic, architectural, visual, or cultural value. The most notable of these properties receive State Historic Resource Inventory Forms, which describe the properties, state their significance, and relate their history.

Oakland Tours Program

Evelyne Myatt, Coordinator
Human Resources Development Division
Office of Personnel Resource Management
1417 Clay Street
Oakland, CA
273-3234

Keywords: architecture; urban design; tours; historic districts; historic buildings

This city program offers free guided walking tours in Oakland during April through October.

The tour areas are: Old Oakland, City Center, Uptown, Chinatown, Preservation Park, and the Port.

The tour guides are city volunteers, and the tours usually attract anywhere from four to forty participants.

The tours program also offers special group tours as well as childrens' tours.