



Development Department
Land Use Planning Division

TO: Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Alene Pearson, Deputy Director of Planning and Development
Sharon Gong, Principal Planner
Lisa Gordon, Senior Contract Planner

SUBJECT: 600 Bancroft Way Research and Development Project and Development Agreement

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend that the Planning Commission review the staff report, receive the staff presentation, consider public comments, and provide feedback on the proposed project.

SUMMARY

The City of Berkeley Land Use Planning Division has received an application for the development of a research and development (R&D) project located at 600 Bancroft Way. The project would include a development agreement to facilitate offsite infrastructure and park improvements and provide the developer certainty for their development entitlements. This staff report will provide information on the project and development agreement process.

PROJECT

The 2.93 acre project site is located at 600 Bancroft Way (APNs 56- 1949-7 and 56-1949-6-2). The project site is bounded by Bancroft Way to the north, the Union Pacific Railroad to the east, Dreamland for Kids Playground and parking lot to the south (both are part of Dreamland Park) and Bolivar Drive and the City of Berkeley Aquatic Park to the west. Bolivar Drive is located within City owned property, as is the adjacent playground, parking lot, and Aquatic Park.

The applicant has submitted an application (#ZP2025-0010) to demolish an existing 47,783 square foot light industrial/R&D facility consisting of three buildings constructed in 1972 and 1973 and construct a new three- to four-story, 251,816 square foot R&D facility with an attached five-story, 524-space parking garage.

Primary vehicular access to the project site would be via new driveways located along Bancroft Way, providing access to a 524-space parking structure. A raised median along Bancroft Way would stop westbound vehicles from turning directly into the parking structure. The median is required to prevent vehicles waiting to enter the garage from queuing across the railroad tracks. A roundabout at the terminus of Bancroft Way would allow westbound vehicles to reverse direction and access the parking structure by traveling eastbound. Bolivar Drive does not provide a passenger drop-off area and terminates at the Dreamland Park parking lot.

Vehicular access to the rear of the site would be limited to emergency vehicles and large delivery trucks via Bolivar Drive, through the Dreamland Park parking lot and along the rear of the proposed building. This access would be controlled by a locked gate at the parcel boundary. Four loading spaces are proposed at the rear of the building. A total of 128 long-term and 25 short-term bicycle parking spaces would also be provided throughout the project site.

A total of approximately 17,302 square feet of open space and landscaped area would be provided on the site, including a plaza located at the center of the site at the main project entry, landscaping along the front and portions of the sides of the building, exterior balconies located at the second, third and fourth levels of the building. The stormwater planters are designed to absorb roof runoff and protect against street flooding, enhance the building's robustness and mitigate flood risks. A proposed bio-retention basin to the south of the property will shift the existing parking lot south. The bioretention pond is located on City-property and does not count towards the project's open space.

Height

The proposed building heights would exceed the 45-foot maximum allowed under the MU-LI zone and will require approval of a Modification of Development Standard in the West Berkeley Area Plan pursuant to BMC 23.406.080.

To accommodate increased ground floor setbacks that incorporate pedestrian pathways and landscaping features, the project applicant proposes a diversity in height, with a stepped-up design from the north to the south. The natural slope from east to west across the site, and the need to address sea-level rise, places the building elevation at eight feet above current average sea level.. The southern half of the building is proposed at four stories and approximately 69 feet in height. The northern half of the building is proposed at three stories and approximately 58 feet-5 inches in height. Rooftop equipment would be shielded from view by a 13-foot mechanical penthouse that may accommodate art and signage.

The garage is proposed to be approximately 53 feet in height, which is lower in height than the parapets of the proposed R&D building, and the proposed rooftop solar array on the fifth floor of the garage would be lower than the R&D building mechanical screens. Additional benefits of the stepped-up height include providing architectural and visual diversity along the existing built environment along Bolivar Drive, which includes Berkeley Commons to the north.



Figure 1: Looking northeast from the southwest portion of the site. Taller massing is at the south of the site, reducing in height as the building approaches Bancroft Way.

Sustainability

The building is proposed as an all-electric building. The proposed project would be designed to strive to achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold equivalence. The project proposes photovoltaic (PV) solar panels on the rooftops of the parking garage and 53 electric vehicle parking spaces.

Employment Potential

The project has the potential to generate hundreds of new jobs across a range of experience, education, and wage levels. The project could also support the City's goal of strengthening West Berkeley as a hub for research and development and contribute to continued growth of the R&D sector in Berkeley.

Fiscal Impacts

The development proposes to demolish an outdated R&D facility and replace it with a larger, state-of-the-art R&D facility. The new construction would increase the property value and result in additional property tax revenue for the City. The proposed project also has the potential to generate hundreds of new jobs within the R&D facility. Employees may also contribute to increased sales tax revenues in the nearby commercial areas through increased business activity.

Development Agreement

The developer has submitted an application for a Development Agreement (DA). The terms of the agreement are being negotiated, but the DA is intended to facilitate the use

of City property for emergency access and deliveries (Bolivar Drive) and to allow for applicant-sponsored infrastructure and park improvements. See the section below on the DA process.

Adjacent City Projects and CEQA

Two future City projects, a bio-retention basin and improvements to Dreamland Park, are located directly adjacent to and south of the proposed R&D project. To avoid CEQA piecemealing, and because the projects are contiguous and the design of these future City projects impacts the R&D's project design and access, the City will prepare one Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration that analyzes the impacts of all three projects.

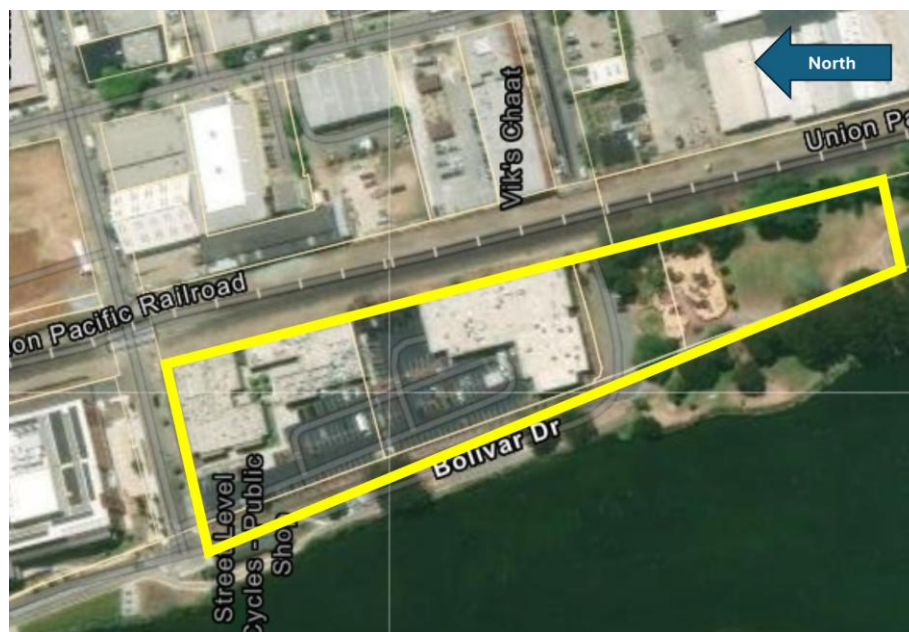


Figure 2: Existing R&D site, parking area and Dreamland Park



Figure 3: Conceptual rendering of southern portion of future R&D site, bio-retention basin and

Dreamland Park.

Bio-Retention Basin

The City of Berkeley Public Works Department is working on a project to construct a bio-retention basin directly south of the proposed R&D project in the location of the existing Dreamland Park parking lot. The proposed project would replace the existing paved parking lot with an approximately 8,000-square-foot bioretention basin at the north end of the existing park adjacent to the Dreamland for Kids Playground area. The proposed bio-retention basin would be bisected by a concrete pathway connecting the R&D parcel with the existing park to the south.

To replace the parking lot, a small, paved parking area would be constructed along the west side of Bolivar Drive. A total of 12 parking spaces, one of which would be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant, would be provided. A pedestrian crosswalk would be striped on Bolivar Drive to provide connectivity between the parking area and the development parcel at 600 Bancroft Way.

Dreamland Park

The Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Department is the lead on a project to upgrade the existing Dreamland Park. Improvements include installation of new playground equipment, relocation and replacement of an existing restroom facility, enhanced connections to existing walking and biking routes, expansion of parking, addition of new shaded picnic areas, and new landscaping and irrigation.

DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT PROCESS

Development Agreements (DA) are negotiated contracts between a public agency and project sponsor that govern land uses within a specific area. A DA establishes site specific standards for a project that must also be consistent with local land use policies and may freeze existing zoning to provide assurance that the project will not be blocked by future regulatory changes.

A DA can reduce the risk a project sponsor faces by vesting certain rights and can benefit a city by funding improvements that would not otherwise be required under zoning. Other benefits, such as off-site improvements, community benefits, or project components, can also be negotiated. The process is elective and both parties must agree to enter into the negotiating process.

The City of Berkeley City Council adopted an amendment to BMC Chapter 22.16 [Development Agreement Procedures] in November 2024. The Planning Commission discussed the amendment at their September 4, 2024 meeting and provided a recommendation to City Council.

The components and provisions of DAs are negotiated between the developer and the City Manager on behalf of the City. The City Manager will make a recommendation to the Planning Commission and City Council.

The role of the Planning Commission is to review the DA and make a recommendation to the City Council. The Planning Commission can also seek recommendations from other boards or commissions, including the Zoning Adjustments Board, Design Review Committee, and Landmarks Preservation Commission. The proposed R&D project will be heard at all of the above noted boards and commissions as part of the normal application process specified in BMC Chapter 23 [Zoning].

The Planning Commission recommendation on the DA will include an analysis of the DA's consistency with the following findings:

1. Is consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, general land uses and programs specified in the general plan and any applicable specific plan.
2. Is compatible with the uses authorized in, and the zoning district in which the real property is located.
3. Has duly considered City mitigation programs in effect at the time of execution of the agreement.
4. Will be non-detrimental to the public health, safety and general welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood and to property and improvements in the neighborhood.
5. Complies with the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act and City's procedures adopted pursuant thereto.

ANTICIPATED TIMING

The project is currently in the application processing phase. It is anticipated that the exhibits and plans will be reviewed by City staff at least one more time before the application can move forward for approval by the hearing bodies. The CEQA document is also being prepared and is anticipated to be available for public review in January 2027. A timeline of past and estimated future project milestones is provided in the table below.

Date	Action
January 16, 2025	Application Submitted
April 4, 2025	Application deemed complete
April 4, 2025-current	Application processing ^a Exhibits and reports have gone through two rounds of review.
July 23, 2025	CEQA Kick-off
October 7, 2026	Planning Commission Preview
October 15, 2026	Design Review Committee meeting
January 2027	Anticipated CEQA public review
January/February 2027	Anticipated Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing (demo referral)
April 2027	Anticipated date CEQA document will be ready for adoption

Date	Action
April 2027	Draft DA available for public review – BMC requires that the DA is available for public review 30 days prior to the PC hearing on the DA
April 2027	ZAB Hearing on Development Project ^b
May 2027	PC Hearing on DA
June 2027	CC Hearing on DA
Notes: a. Application processing reflects the project compliance review after the application is deemed complete. Submittals are reviewed within 30 days of receipt, pursuant to the Permit Streamlining Act. b. Entitlement will be conditioned upon approval of the DA.	

Environmental Review

There are no identifiable environmental effects or opportunities associated with this informational report.

Next Steps

The Planning Commission can provide feedback on the proposed project. Upon completion of the application processing and CEQA process, Staff would return to the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing and request a recommendation to City Council.

Staff Contacts

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