

May 24, 2023

To: Landmarks Preservation Commission
Fr: Steven Finacom

Regarding: **Berkeley Civic Center Planning**

For the past three years the City has undertaken a Civic Center planning process. The process has now come to an end, with the conclusion of both its public meetings and its funding.

A report is being submitted by consultants and City staff who managed the planning process. The current schedule is for the report to appear on a City Council agenda in late June—probably the last week of the month—for the Council to comment and adopt the report findings as a basis for next steps.

I've been a long term participant, in part on behalf of the LPC, in the Civic Center planning. The LPC has one of the strongest connections to this process, since it will be reviewing and granting structural alteration permits for any future work on two of Berkeley's most prominent Landmarks, "Old City Hall" (the Maudelle Shirek Building), and the Veterans Memorial Building.

I believe it is important to the process for the LPC to have at least a brief discussion of the findings to date and consultant recommendations and send comments to the Council in advance of its review.

By and large, from a historic preservation standpoint, the process has reached a good point. General public sentiments, and the final recommendations of the consultants, have been that the Shirek Building and the Veterans Memorial Building should be restored and put back into public use, rather than demolished or radically / insensitively altered. This is a big "win".

Below is a series of bullet points that I am suggesting the LPC review, discuss, and hopefully adopt, as a correspondence item to the Council regarding specific aspects of the recommendations.

In order to minimize length, I have not provided extensive written background / context for any of the comments. However, also attached is a graphic summary provided by the City staff and consultants that lists and illustrates their key recommendations. **If you review the attachment first, most of my suggested comments below will make more sense.**

You'll note in particular that the second comment / recommendation is a procedural one, that the "super subcommittee" of several Commissions continue in operation through the next phases of Civic Center planning and implementation. That would continue to ensure that the LPC is up to date on planning, rather than simply waiting passively for Structural Alteration Permit applications to arrive near the end of the process.

If you have questions for clarification about specific comments below, I would be more than happy to see them in advance. To avoid trespassing into impermissible Commission discussion or deliberations outside of our public meeting, I request you send any questions to me and to the Commission Secretary in advance. I won't respond directly to individuals sending questions, but will respond in public / at our June meeting so everyone hears the questions and my response at the same time.

DRAFT

Members of the City Council:

The Landmarks Preservation Commission has watched with interest, periodic participation, and encouragement the lengthy planning process for renovation of Berkeley's Civic Center. By and large, from a preservation standpoint, the process has worked and the direction of the recommendations by consultants is generally sensitive to historic issues. We provide the following comments as context for your deliberations on next steps. The Landmarks Preservation Commission specifically:

1. Calls for and supports, as a general principle, the **restoration, refurbishment, and sensitive adaptive re-use of the two historic buildings in the Civic Center and the park**, rather than their radical replacement, demolition, or alteration;
2. supports **continuation of a joint subcommittee of Commission representatives connected to the Civic Center** (including the LPC, Civic Arts, Parks & Waterfront, Disability, and Transportation / Public Works). The ongoing subcommittee has been, and should remain, a useful place to cooperatively discuss civic center issues, interact with staff, consultants, and the public, and advise the Council on planning proposals and projects for the Civic Center. The subcommittee can particularly serve as a sounding board and anchor for the proposed 2024-2007 "*research, schematic design and approvals funding plan, design development*" phase;
3. supports, and **strongly urges the Council to actively prioritize and proceed with further planning and identification of funding for the renovation of the Shirek Building and the Veterans Building, particularly funding for seismic strengthening**. There should be no substantial pause in planning. These are highly important structures that are both historic and useful, and the City should make it a high priority to bring both of them back into full use. Both buildings are currently living on borrowed time, given the high and growing likelihood of a major earthquake in the Bay Area;
4. supports **full accessibility for the buildings, with a design approach that also minimizes impacts / alternations to the main facades**. In particular, the awkwardly placed zig-zag ramp on the front of the Veterans Building should be redesigned / modified or replaced not only to meet current accessibility standards but to better harmonize with the historic front steps / facade;
5. supports **recommendations of the consultant / staff reports that emphasize restoration and refurbishment of the historic buildings, both inside and out, including original finishes, details, and maintaining general historic interior layout**. The two buildings should be sensitively renovated and for full use through adaptive design, as opposed to insensitive gutting and replacement of the interiors;

6. supports, in concept, the **addition of infill structures placed behind the two buildings to expand their useable square footage**. Additions should be designed and detailed so they follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and do not detract from, compete with, or alter the principal facades of the historic buildings;
7. supports **study and planning that would add maximum sized infill structures to one or both courtyards of the Veterans Building**. Courtyard infill would considerably expand the useable space within the building and its functionality for a large number of simultaneous arts events and activities, and is also best constructed in conjunction with overall building renovations. The courtyards are near-ideal locations for infill structures since new construction there would not have an impact on the visible exterior appearance of the building;
8. **supports the consultant suggestion of adding a deck / event space to the roof of the Veterans Building**, so long as it is designed in such a way that it is concealed behind the roof parapet and recedes above and behind the historic facade, especially when seen from across the park;
9. Supports **primary use of the Veterans Building for civic arts uses, including performing arts and visual arts. Supports the broadest possible access of arts and community groups to the building**, rather than exclusive or extensive use of the building for / by a small number of groups / organizations;
10. **Supports primary use of the Maudelle Shirek Building (Berkeley's original town hall) for City and civic meeting and educational use**, including **maximizing the provision of flexible meeting spaces suitable for gatherings of many sizes**, so several meetings can take place at the same time in different parts of the building, and so facilities are provided for hybrid meetings that seamlessly combine virtual and in-person participation;
11. Supports **inclusion of facilities in the Shirek Building for use by Berkeley Community Media and the Berkeley Historical Society & Museum (BHSM)**. Both uses are compatible with the history / use of the building. Berkeley Community Media also provides support for civic meetings (such as broadcast of Council and Commission meetings), while BHSM's proposed operation of a museum and history research center would bring users to the building;
12. Supports **City encouragement for a variety of community groups and city programs interested in local history** (such as the History Room in the Public Library) **to work cooperatively to make the Shirek Building a "one-stop" center of local historical education, research, display, and archives**;
13. Supports, in particular, the **preservation and re-use of specific key historic spaces in both buildings including: within the Veterans Building, the fine**

auditorium, and four lodge / meeting rooms, and extensive lobby; within the Maudelle Shirek Building, the interior halls and grand staircase, and the historic Council Chambers on the upper floor (the Council Chamber room is currently proposed as a large hearing room for civic and other meetings such as Commissions that expect a considerable audience).

14. Supports the **creation of a new, large, multipurpose room addition to the rear of the Shirek Building that can accommodate City Council meetings and large Commission meetings**, as well as serve as space for other types of meeting use and activities. The room should be designed flexibly without fixed / built-in seating or furniture, so it can be easily and quickly adapted to multiple uses;
15. Encourages **consideration of moving Berkeley's Visitor Center to the Shirek Building** to bring more users, tourists, and visitors to the Civic Center;
16. Encourages **providing both buildings with 'catering kitchens' and support infrastructure** so appropriate spaces within them can be used flexibly for civic and rental events such as receptions, social gatherings, and even meals / dinner events;
17. calls for, and supports creation of, **a comprehensive interpretative signage and website program that would educate the public about the history and development of the Civic Center;**
18. **Opposes transferring any substantial amount of existing City office space from elsewhere in the Civic Center to the Shirek Building or Veterans Building.** This would do little or nothing to activate the Civic Center with additional uses / users, and would reduce the availability and usability of the buildings for broader active uses. In addition, an approach that emphasizes "more city staff offices" will simply not resonate with the general public and voters whose support will be essential to future Civic Center renovations; discourages any pre-reservation or design of space in the buildings for programs that do not currently exist;
19. Notes that the Veterans Building was specifically constructed for the use of local veterans organizations, which were large and active at the time it was built. **Permanent reuse plans should recognize that origin and history and provide a means for remaining or future Berkeley veterans organizations to have ongoing and affordable access to meeting / event space in the Civic Center;**
20. Encourages the City to **plan, renovate, and manage the Civic Center buildings so they can be rented**—when not in civic uses such as public meetings or community arts events—for uses, both small and large, from concerts, festivals, and fairs to meetings, conventions, and conferences. If effectively designed and managed the Civic Center overall can be the location Berkeley has long needed to hold conferences and events, while also producing income for the City;

21. Encourages the City and the Berkeley Unified School District to work together so the **Community Theater on the Berkeley High School campus, which is the largest indoor theater space in Berkeley, can be restored and integrated into Civic Center activities and use;**
22. Generally supports a **design of the park** that prioritizes maintaining maximum green spaces and existing trees, provides unobtrusive infrastructure (bathrooms, power sources, lighting, etc.) to support multiple uses, emphasizes not only event use, but supports active day to day use of the park spaces by a wide variety of users, reuses rather than unnecessarily demolishes, existing hardscape, emphasizes the park as a harmonious, historic, and generally symmetrical civic space, and brings water back to the fountain; discourages any redesign or physical renovation of the park that unnecessarily detracts from its historic character or is not important for future functionality;
23. Emphatically supports **removal of the intrusive and non-historic parking lot behind 2180 Milvia**, at the east end of the park, and supports integration of this area into the park space overall. A portion of this area could (as plans currently propose) remain hardscape, not for daily parking, but for use as a staging area for larger events within the park;
24. Supports **park design that provides facilities and infrastructure for large gatherings, festivals, and similar events**. Opposes construction of new permanent structures (particularly buildings) in the park space, and encourages event facilities to be designed unobtrusively (for example, it should be planned and possible for temporary event stages to be erected in the park, but building big outdoor permanent stage is not desirable since it could displace every day uses / users. The consultant recommendations do not propose any permanent stages.)
25. Urges that **all existing historic markers and features within the Civic Center (including memorial trees, and memorials incorporated in or affixed to the buildings) be fully identified, maintained, and protected**, particularly memorials to veterans. Damaged memorials should be restored and maintained.
26. **Reserves judgment on the possibly of “daylighting” Strawberry Creek within the Civic Center until specific design concepts are further explored and vetted**. The LPC looks forward with interest to any specific studies / proposals for daylighting the Creek and will need to evaluate such proposals for their potential impact on the historic design and character of the park in particular. **The LPC encourages all, including the City and private groups, studying daylighting to take into account two key issues:** preserving the overall physical framework / historic character / design of the Civic Center; ensuring ample and adequate access for the public, especially for disabled users, to the buildings and outdoor spaces of the Civic Center.

Berkeley Civic Center

Design Concept Report Preview

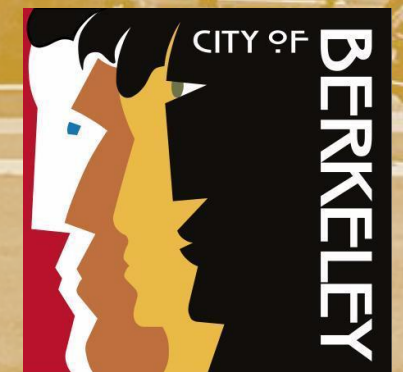
May 16, 2023

SIEGEL & STRAIN Architects

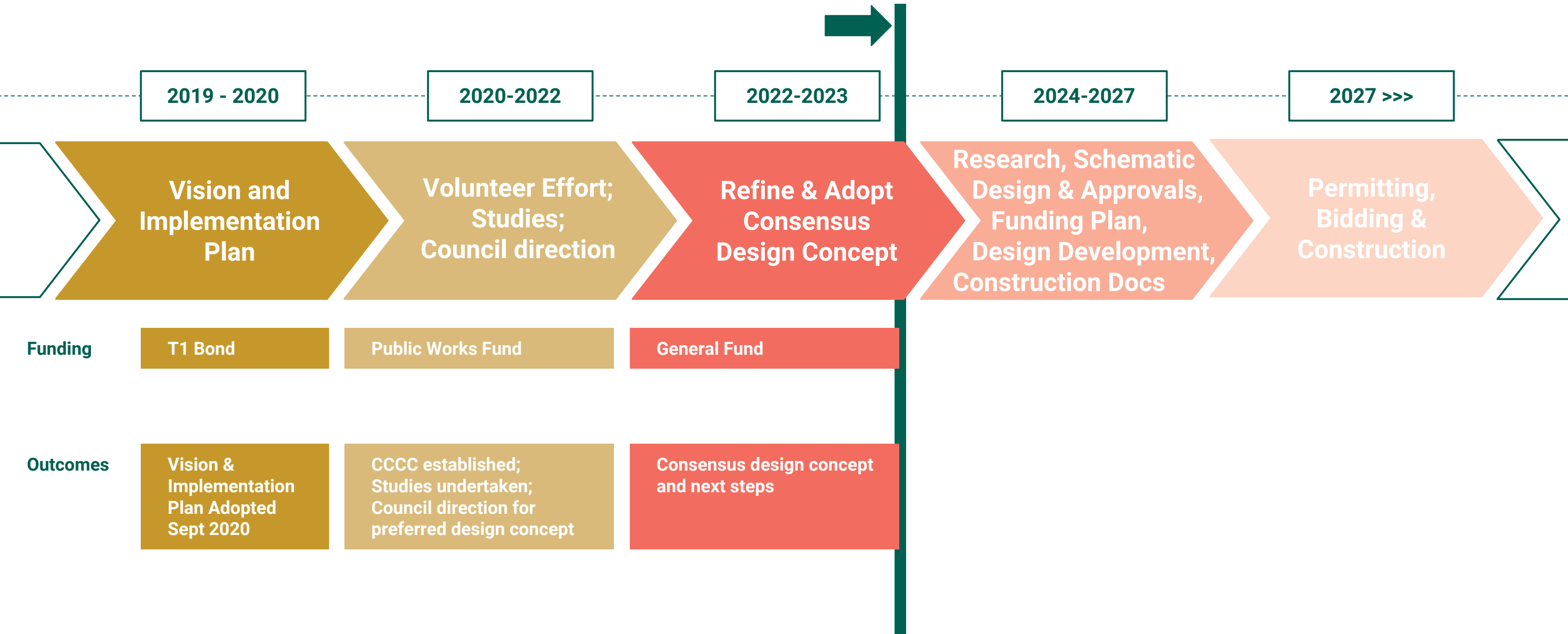
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EQUITY
COMMUNITY
BUILDERS



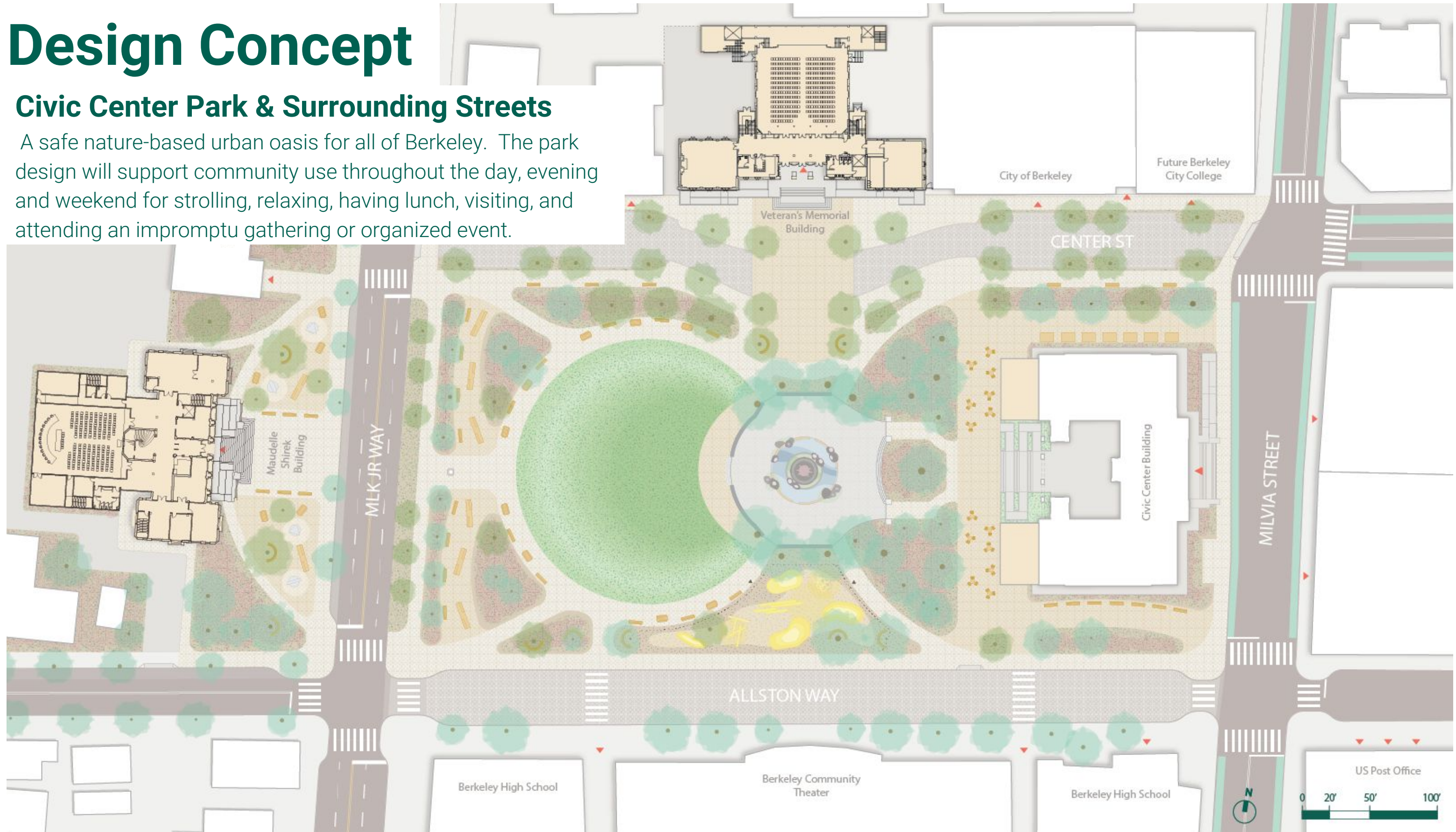
Overall Project Schedule



Design Concept

Civic Center Park & Surrounding Streets

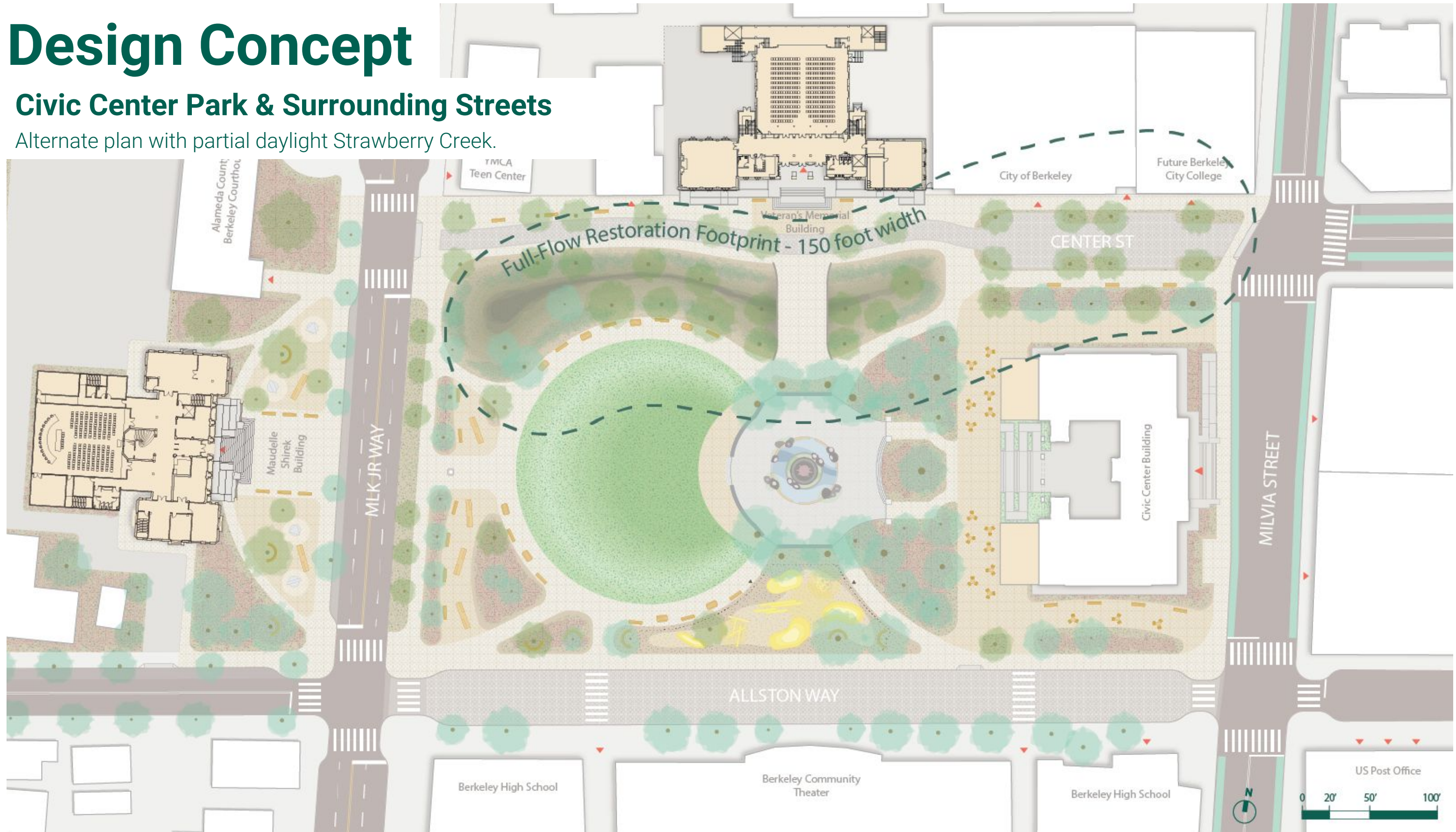
A safe nature-based urban oasis for all of Berkeley. The park design will support community use throughout the day, evening and weekend for strolling, relaxing, having lunch, visiting, and attending an impromptu gathering or organized event.



Design Concept

Civic Center Park & Surrounding Streets

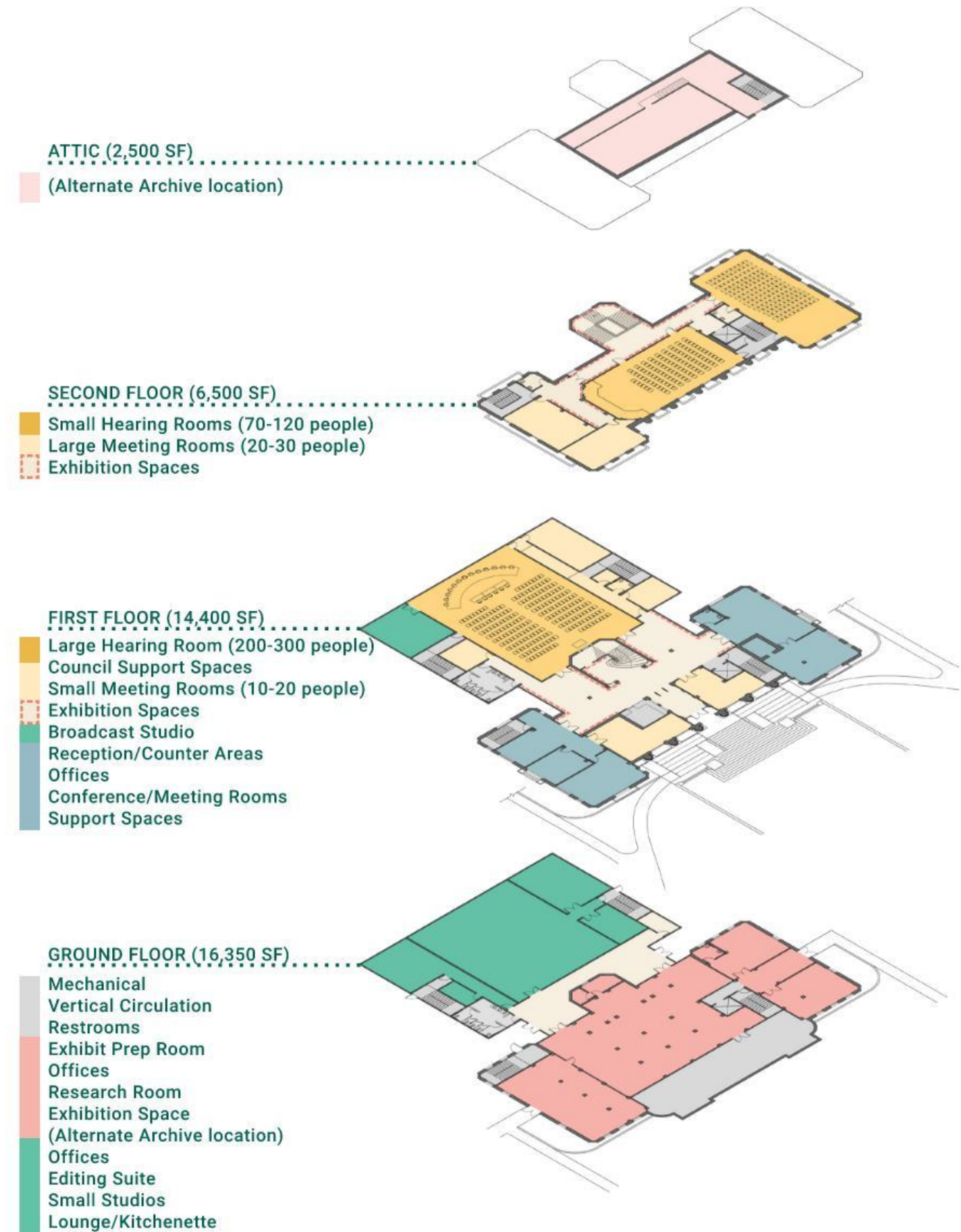
Alternate plan with partial daylight Strawberry Creek.



Design Concept

Maudelle Shirek Building

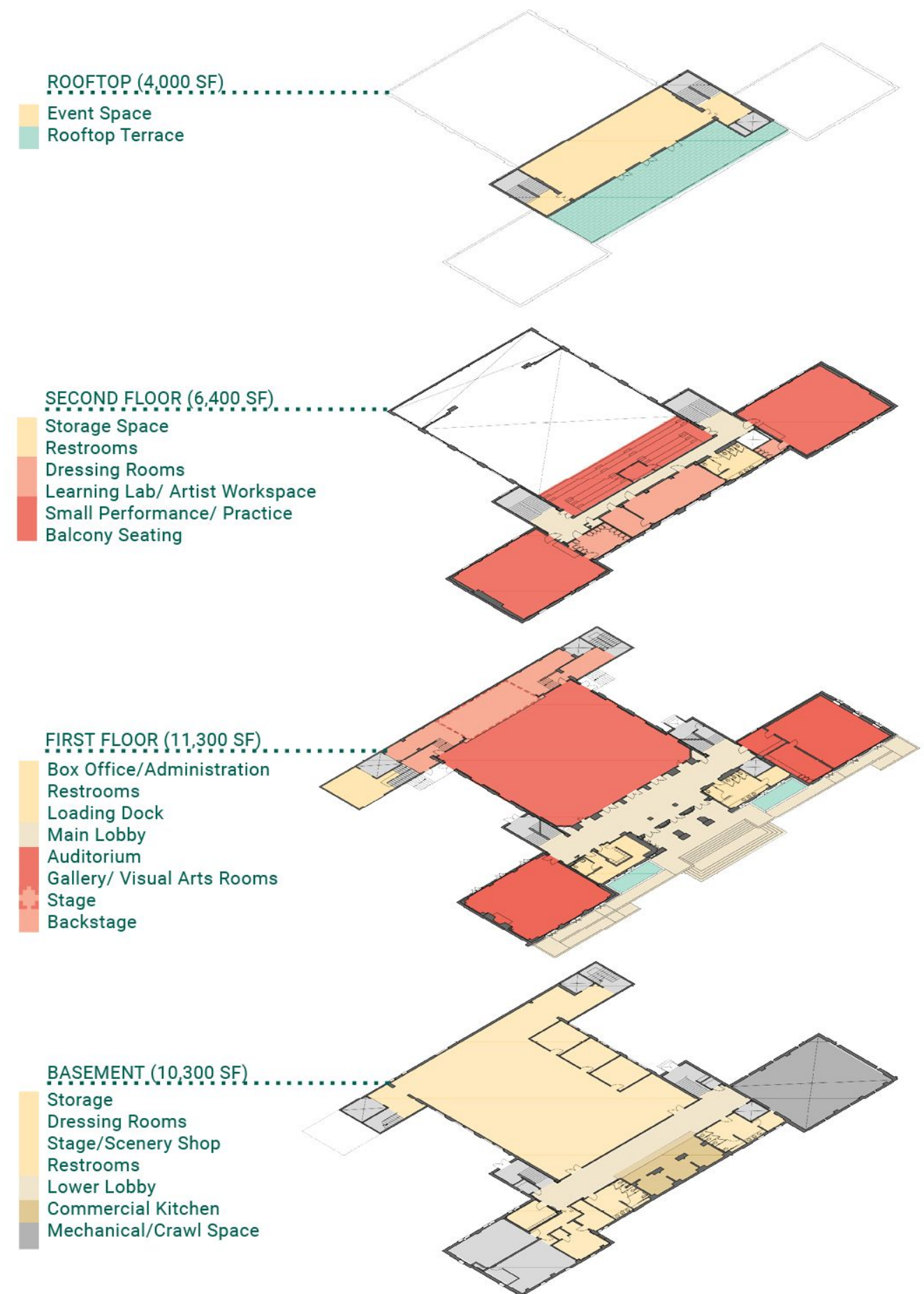
Seat of Berkeley's democracy with flexible meeting spaces and supportive and vision-aligned city services and educational uses.



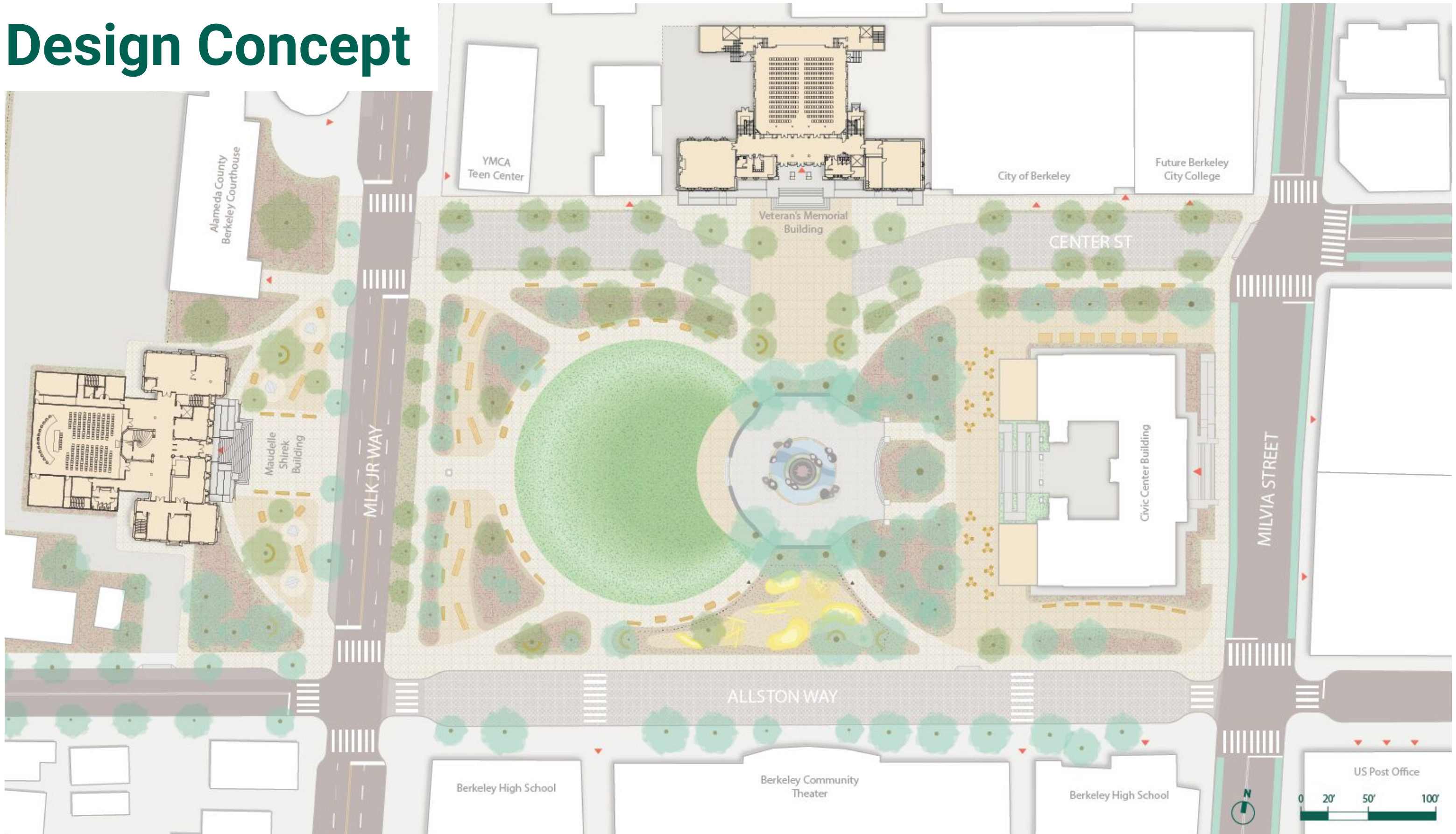
Design Concept

Veterans Memorial Building

A Community Arts Center, run by the city, with performance venues, teaching and exhibit space, accessible by all in the community.



Design Concept



Preliminary Cost Ranges

Construction Costs

Preliminary construction cost ranges provided in this report are based on the March 2023 Draft Berkeley Civic Center Design Concept Report, the 2021 Civic Center Buildings Study by Tipping Structural Engineers, and guidance from the City of Berkeley Public Works Department. See Appendix A for a full list of exclusions.

	Low (x \$1,000)	High (x \$1,000)
Maudelle Shirek Building - 27,500 GSF Existing + 15,000 GSF Addition	\$ 51,200	\$ 62,600
Seismic Retrofit - Damage Control+ to near Immediate Occupancy	\$ 13,400	\$ 16,400
Envelope & Systems (Electrification, Accessibility, upgrades, finishes)	\$ 15,500	\$ 18,900
Two-story addition on West side	\$ 19,000	\$ 23,200
PVs at new addition, panels & infrastructure	\$ 600	\$ 800
Site Improvement & Utilities	\$ 2,700	\$ 3,300
Veterans Memorial Building - 28,000 GSF Existing + 5,950 GSF Addition	\$ 26,300	\$ 36,900
Seismic Retrofit - Building Performance Objective for New Buildings	\$ 6,300	\$ 7,700
Envelope & Systems (Electrification, Accessibility, upgrades, finishes)	\$ 15,800	\$ 19,400
New Addition at Stage	\$ 2,900	\$ 3,500
Roof Terrace (in high range only)	(excluded)	\$ 4,600
PVs at new addition, panels & infrastructure	\$ 500	\$ 700
Site Improvement & Utilities	\$ 800	\$ 1,000
Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park & Streets	\$ 16,470	\$ 20,130
Paths/paving, planting/irrigation, new trees/tree protection, utilities	\$ 14,670	\$ 17,930
Site Improvements to 2180 Milvia entry, VMB entry, restrooms	\$ 1,800	\$ 2,200
ESTIMATED CONSTRUCTION COSTS	\$ 93,970	\$119,630
+ Construction Contingency (10%)	\$ 9,783	\$ 11,957
TOTAL ESTIMATED CONSTRUCTION COSTS	\$103,753	\$131,587
DRAFT ESTIMATED CONSTRUCTION COSTS	\$101,000	\$129,000

Other City Costs

Leading up to and during construction, the City will incur costs related to technical studies, existing conditions, design, planning approvals, permitting and management, to name a few. These costs will be further refined in future efforts as more is defined about review process, design requirements and parameters, funding and financing, and timeline.

	Low (x \$1,000)	High (x \$1,000)
Other City Costs (estimated at 20% of construction costs)	\$ 21,523	\$ 26,305
TOTAL ESTIMATED CONSTRUCTION COSTS + OTHER CITY COSTS	\$125,276	\$157,892

Operations & Maintenance Costs

Utilizing the 2023 annual Operations & Maintenance budget from the 1947 Center Street building, a \$/SF annual cost was determined for O&M at the common and occupied spaces in city-owned buildings. That was applied to the areas of the Maudelle Shirek and Veterans Memorial Building to arrive at the following annual Operations & Maintenance budgets:

Maudelle Shirek Building	\$1,234,389
Occupied Space -	\$1,167,936
Common Space -	\$ 66,453
Veterans Memorial Building	\$1,069,860
Occupied Space -	\$1,012,900
Common Space -	\$ 56,690

Funding Strategies

With an approved design concept, this project would move into its next phase of additional recommended studies, environmental reviews, and initiating specific design projects. This work is estimated to cost ~\$10 million and take 2-3 years.

A variety of funding sources could contribute to the City’s approach to funding. The first approach would involve many different sources of funding all leading to one large project, phased in over the course of years. The following funding sources might contribute to the project:

- **Congressionally Directed Spending Requests** (aka earmarks). These are typically in the range of \$750,000-\$1.5 million. The City has submitted a request to our federal legislators for this project and should learn in the fall whether the earmark is successful. If so, funding would commence in calendar year 2024. There is no match requirement.

- **Federal Infrastructure Funding.** staff and consultants have not yet been able to find a category within the current funding stream that is a strong fit for this project, but that may change as future opportunities arise. Grant match requirements vary.
- **FEMA/Cal OES Hazard Mitigation Grants.** These grants require a cost/benefit calculation that makes the BPON+ standard more likely to qualify for a grant. For that reason, the Veteran’s Building is more likely to benefit. Grants require a 25% match.
- **Sustainability/Resiliency Grants:** the state and federal government offer grants that might help fund the electric conversion, green infrastructure, permeable paving, etc. Grant match requirements vary.
- **Urban Greening Grant/Coastal Conservancy Grant:** these grants may fund a feasibility study of daylighting the creek. Grant match requirements vary.

- **City Funding.** The City’s General Fund, a future tax measure, or Certificate of Participation could contribute to the project. In addition, traffic safety and stormwater elements of the project might get contributions from Measure BB, Gas Tax, and/or the City’s Storm Fund.
- **Foundations and/or Private Individuals.** Given the Civic Center’s history and importance, private foundations and individuals might be a component to the overall funding strategy.
- **Bonding Capacity/Debt Service** - Using early construction costs estimates, and the general fund as collateral, assuming the Maudelle Shirek Building has a project cost of ~\$54M, the annual debt service would be ~\$3,900,000/year (30 year amortization). A ~\$71M project cost would have debt service of ~\$4,900,000/year. For the Veterans Memorial Building, a project cost of ~\$34M would have annual debt

service of ~\$2,400,000 and a project cost of ~\$41M would have annual debt service of ~\$2,900,000. There would be a reduction in annual debt service of approximately \$50,000/year if both projects were financed together.

An alternative, more opportunistic approach would be to identify specific project components that would be good fits for available grants, and when successful in gaining grants, move those elements forward, e.g., the project’s raised sidewalks and bulbouts. This approach would likely take more time, involve more project cost overall (less efficiencies of scale), but might be more realistic.

Regardless, this project will be significantly more attractive for funding with an adopted design concept. Recognizing that strong plans need funding, and funding is attracted to strong plans, and staff are excited to work with City Council on moving this project forward.

A Design Concept for Berkeley's Civic Center



Bay Area Book Festival - May 7, 2023, Berkeley Civic Center

Civic Center will be the heart of Berkeley's community. Civic Center will be the prime space for civic life, culture, and the arts. It will reflect the city's diverse identities, celebrating its history and contributing to shaping its future. A place of shared resources and a platform for free expression accessible to all, the Civic Center aims to manifest the city's values, advance social justice, and demonstrate the power of true public space.

From Berkeley Civic Center Vision & Implementation Plan dated July 10, 2020 and adopted by Berkeley City Council on September 22, 2020

