

DISTRICT 4 CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES RESPONSES TO DOWNTOWN BERKELEY ASSOCIATION QUESTIONS

January 17, 2017

In the fall of 2106 the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA) invited Mayoral and City Council candidates to respond to the eight questions regarding the future of the Downtown Berkeley. Now with the District 4 vacancy, created by Jesse Arreguin being elected Mayor, the DBA does so again with the candidates for this March 7 special election (via mail-in ballot).

While the DBA does not endorse candidates, we see these questions as an opportunity for the DBA to express our concerns and priorities, and then for the candidates with their responses help inform the DBA, Downtown stakeholders, and the entire Berkeley electorate about the candidate's positions on these Downtown and city-wide issues. District 4 candidate responses are of particular interest since District 4 encompasses most of Downtown Berkeley.

Unedited answers have been posted on the [DBA website](#), and will be shared with local media. The eight same questions were asked of all candidates:

1. What is your near-term vision for the Downtown and its role in the City? Your vision over the next four years? Ten years?
2. What are your thoughts regarding the persistent street behavior challenges in the Downtown, Telegraph and other areas in the City? Do you support the Community Sidewalks Ordinances?
3. What is your perception regarding parking in the Downtown? Do you support the DBA position of doubling the parking at the City's Berkeley Way lot in the event the parcel is developed?
4. What are your ideas for making Berkeley more welcoming environment for new businesses, particularly for retail and office space in the Downtown?
5. What is your vision and ideas for revitalization of the Civic Center Historic District?
6. Would you support public/private partnerships to adaptively reuse the Downtown Post Office?
7. What is your vision for public art in the Downtown, including visual and performing arts? Also, what is your vision for additional visual and/or performing arts venues in the Downtown?
8. What do you see as the critical management and financial issues facing the City over the next several years?

We received responses from both District 4 candidates Ben Gould and Kate Harrison.

In the spirit of fairness we have alternated the response between the two candidates.

You can view all of the candidate responses under the Documents/Other section of the DBA website at www.downtownberkeley.com/documents/#other

1. What is your near-term vision for the Downtown and its role in the City? Your vision over the next four years? Ten years?

Ben Gould

As a resident of Downtown Berkeley, I am very excited for its future. As the City Councilmember for District 4, I will strive to cultivate Downtown Berkeley as a fully-realized neighborhood that is vibrant and welcoming for all.

Over the next four years, I want to expand upon the success of the Downtown Area Plan and the positive changes occurring Downtown. The remodeled BART plaza, the Center Street hotel, and the new housing coming to Downtown will all contribute to Downtown Berkeley's increasing vibrancy; and I will work to ensure that the City continues to foster opportunities for new housing, businesses, and public realm improvements in the Downtown. Upon completion of the new Center Street garage, I will also work to realize the vision of the Streets and Open Space Improvement Plan, with new pedestrian spaces, more parklets, and more efficient circulation. I also want to work with City staff, service providers, and our public safety officials to proactively and compassionately address ongoing issues with encampments and homelessness in the Downtown.

Over the next ten years, I want to pursue policies and projects that will solidify Downtown Berkeley as a model of sustainability and a major destination for everyone, from Berkeley residents to international travelers. I will collaborate with regional transit agencies to improve public transportation facilities and access to the Downtown. I will coordinate with the City's Office of Economic Development and the businesses community to enhance Downtown's selection of high-quality retail. And I would work with historic preservationists and private developers to retrofit, restore, and adaptively reuse Old City Hall, the Veterans' Building, and the Downtown Berkeley Post Office.

Kate Harrison

Berkeley's Downtown is in the heart of Council District 4 and the City. The Downtown can and should be the pride of every Berkeley resident, and especially those fortunate to live in close proximity to it. Within walking distance to the University of California, home of the Arts District and Berkeley's historic Civic Center, the commercial district should support thriving businesses that serve permanent residents, visitors, students, and alike.

A vibrant downtown is critical to the City's ability to meet housing goals, mitigate climate impacts and promote economic development and continued cultural vitality. Downtown development should be encouraged but with sensitivity to maintaining a vibrant streetscape with adequate light and open space, setbacks for surrounding residential neighborhoods and architecture that is unique and aesthetically compatible with surrounding buildings. We need to update the Streets and Open Space Plan (SOSIP), ask developers to include its features in their projects, and continue to seek funding for its elements. I served as a Commissioner on the committee and am proud of the vision incorporated in the plan, in particular making Center Street a shared street friendly to walkers, bicyclists and cafes, changing the traffic flow on the block around Shattuck Square, and adding other bicycle and pedestrian amenities.

Adding the new hotel will make the Downtown a much more viable destination. I support enhancements around the redesigned BART plaza, including public open space for informal gathering and planned events. We need to expedite completing the affordable housing and integrated homeless services/shelter/ transitional housing at Berkeley Way. These improvements can all be realized or at least begun in a four-year time horizon.

Over the five to ten year perspective, Downtown should become a showcase for environmental sustainability. We need to emphasize housing at all affordability levels downtown to reduce automobile traffic, green buildings, sustainable infrastructure and water recycling. Transit oriented development needs to serve us all, not just the affluent.

Existing downtown businesses will need support through grants and loans while this transformation is taking place.

2. What are your thoughts regarding the persistent street behavior challenges in the Downtown, Telegraph and other areas in the City? Do you support the Community Sidewalks Ordinances?

Kate Harrison

I recognize the negative impacts that result from disruptive street behavior. Safety is critical to increasing the willingness of residents and visitors to come here and the economic vitality of the area and the City as a whole.

When the disruption involves illegal activities, individual perpetrators should be cited or arrested to address the behavior. It needs to be recognized that disruptive street behavior is not synonymous with homelessness. Sufficient laws are on the books now – what we need is enforcement, not new laws which are overly broad, potentially criminalize innocent activities and invite unequal treatment.

Part and parcel of stopping some of the most disturbing, if not most criminal, behavior, would involve providing more public toilets (e.g., self-cleaning/opening ones made by JC Decaux). I support some limitations on property kept by the homeless on the street so that all of us can safely use the sidewalks but the prior two-foot ordinance was overly restrictive. However, this will require that we identify locations for the homeless to store their belongings.

The City moved quickly recently to increase shelter beds/warming centers and provide transportation between shelters and daily visits from staff. This emergency response is necessary but is not a long-term solution. I would work with the current City Council to implement solutions being developed to deal with homelessness. Housing first should be our goal, modeled after San Francisco, Portland, Seattle and other communities, and collaborating regionally. A new project on Berkeley Way will provide transitional housing for the first time for single men. However, the number of available units falls far below the need. I fully support creating tiny house villages and other solutions for relatively inexpensive but stable housing and working toward regional solutions. The recently passed A1 county housing and homeless services bond and U1 Berkeley increase in the business license tax both give us enhanced resources to approach this problem. We need to identify other new funding sources and shift some existing funds to expand mental health/social work crisis teams to a 24/7 schedule and move away from police being required to respond to mental health crises.

For some adults, providing housing will be enough. For others, wrap around services are needed. For youth, re-housing may involve interventions with family or mediation with roommates. For the mentally ill, I support Laura's Law which requires those with mental health issues to appear in court to discuss available services.

Before these solutions become a reality, we have to implement immediate measures. I support a sanctioned tent city with sanitation facilities, services and some self-governance.

Most importantly, we need to recognize that the problem of homelessness does not occur in a vacuum; it is linked to the displacement crisis caused by rising rents, elimination of SROs, and conversion of formerly rent controlled units. Efforts to stop displacement through protection and expansion of affordable housing are critical.

Ben Gould

I will work continuously to keep our public commons clean, safe, and welcoming for everyone, while standing firmly against criminalizing homelessness. Unlike my opponent, I do not support allowing encampments to go unchecked and I do not think that encampments are an acceptable "solution" to homelessness in Berkeley. Encampments are not welcoming to homeless families, particularly women and children, and do not address the actual problem of homelessness.

Allowing encampments to “self-police” is also unacceptable. As citizens and a city, we make, follow, and enforce rules that ensure equal, fair, and just treatment and protection. Encampments do not get to operate under a different set of rules from everyone else in Berkeley. I will work with City staff, mental health workers, homeless individuals, neighborhoods, and public safety officials to ensure that the City ordinances that protect everyone’s health and safety are consistently, compassionately, and fairly enforced.

Berkeley needs to engage in long-term, regional efforts that focus first and foremost on affordable housing. We need to address the root causes of homelessness, and provide real solutions—not “quick fixes”—and make sure these responsibilities are shared by all Bay Area cities. The passage of Berkeley Measure U1 and Alameda County Measure A1 mean that Berkeley has new funds available for housing, emergency shelters, and homeless services. As the representative for District 4, my priorities to address homelessness include:

- Collaborating with neighboring cities and regional governments, with the goal of ensuring that no one experiences homelessness in Alameda County.
- Building on the success of the City’s Homeless Coordinated Entry (the “Hub”) by funding programs with a track record of success, reducing duplicative services, and strengthening a “continuum” of care.
- Expanding access to public restrooms, shelters, and warming centers.
- Pursuing creative solutions to provide housing for the homeless, including micro-units, tiny homes, and public-private partnerships.

I believe the Community Sidewalks Ordinance was well-intended, but flawed. As a community, we should set and uphold expectations about how everyone in Berkeley should treat and use our public spaces. We also have to make sure that those expectations are reasonable and fair for everyone. I support working collaboratively to ensure Berkeley adopts policies and programs that:

- Ensure that shelters and service providers have sufficient and well-managed storage space for homeless individuals;
- Ensure our public spaces are available to be fairly, safely, and comfortably used by all;
- Emphasize outreach, supportive services, and treatment for addiction and other mental health issues; and

Engage in regular reevaluation and fine-tuning to ensure we are in engaging best practices that are fair and effective.

3. What is your perception regarding parking in the Downtown? Do you support the DBA position of doubling the parking at the City's Berkeley Way lot in the event the parcel is developed?

Ben Gould

Parking in Downtown can be difficult, and this is definitely a challenge for those who lack adequate public transit access or who otherwise need to use a private vehicle. However, given the goals of creating a vibrant, walkable, and sustainable Downtown, I want to encourage alternatives to driving and reduce the amount of public space needed for parking. Meanwhile, services like Uber and Lyft are increasing popular, and autonomous vehicles appear likely to become a reality in the not-too-distant future. For these reasons, I don’t believe that large amounts of new parking are the answer.

Instead, we need smarter parking, improved transit, and better bicycle infrastructure. I want to build on the success of the GoBerkeley parking program, which adopted demand-responsive pricing and time limits, and dramatically improved parking signage in the Downtown. By adapting the prices and hours for paid parking to reflect typical or even real-time demand, we can encourage long-term parking in garages, ensure on-street spaces are available for short-term parking, and reduce circling and congestion in the Downtown. By improving transit and bike access to Downtown, we can make it more convenient for people to leave their cars at home and visit Downtown on foot or on a bicycle, bus, or BART.

I believe that these approaches and coming changes to the transportation system are likely to make doubling the parking at the Berkeley Way lot unnecessary. The purpose of the Berkeley Way project is to provide homeless services, emergency shelter, and affordable/supportive housing. I am not inclined to support doubling parking at this location because I believe doing so would negatively impact project feasibility and costs, making it more difficult to provide this critically needed supportive housing. I also believe that doubling this parking would run counter to Berkeley's climate action goals and Transit-First policies.

Kate Harrison

Easy access to Downtown is our goal. Providing parking for those lacking alternative transportation options is a must. While I support increased parking, I will advocate for viable alternatives such as enhanced bicycle lanes and parking; well lit streetscapes to encourage walking; and creating a city-wide shuttle services to connect residents between all eight districts and the Downtown. A good model to examine is the Emery-go-round" shuttle that provides free between BART and Emeryville commercial areas. The City could encourage larger businesses to provide shuttle services for employees and local residents. Sutter Health currently transports its workforce, patients, and local residents between BART, Alta Bates and Herrick's and Sutter's Milvia Street campuses. This community benefit is worth adopting as part of new business development.

Nevertheless, some residents will need to drive to Downtown some of the time, particularly the elderly, those with small children, those picking up materials that cannot be carried on transit, merchants and night-time visitors. We should build upon Go Berkeley's Transportation Demand Management. Parking meter and garage fees that reflect times of heaviest use should be expanded. More signage about where parking available is needed to reduce emissions from idling and circling the block. Garage parking should be incentivized by charging less; however, for this to be effective, garages need to be and feel safe. Reserved parking should be provided at the top, not the bottom level of garages to encourage quicker in and out and charging stations need to be expanded.

Any parking that is built should incorporate a maximum of green features and be built in a way that allows conversion to other uses such as housing when car sharing, autonomous cars and better transit significantly reduce need for parking in the very near future.

I do not support doubling the parking at the Berkeley Way parking lot as it will add significantly to the cost of the affordable housing being built there. Our focus should be on the City of the future, using the elements discussed above.

4. What are your ideas for making Berkeley more welcoming environment for new businesses, particularly for retail and office space in the Downtown?

Kate Harrison

Retail and office properties help define the unique character of any commercial district. In recent years the Downtown has experienced an exodus of small and locally owned businesses. Commercial rents are prohibitively high for small and new business owners; we need to create financial incentives to offset this barrier. Included in my platform are proposals for a grant program for legacy businesses, as exists in San Francisco, a one stop center for small business with over the counter permits for the most straightforward requests, and vacancy taxes to discourage blight. More of the focus of the economic development staff should be directed to these unique businesses and art amenities. Investments in public spaces will also create an environment supportive of small and local businesses in particular.

The ambassadors as originally conceptualized are an important addition to the Downtown. The sidewalks are cleaner, the plantings look better and businesses and visitors have a visible presence to whom to address

concerns. However, their role must be strictly limited to beautification and reporting incidents to others with the experience and training to diffuse difficult situations.

Ben Gould

Downtown Berkeley already features numerous amenities that make it attractive to businesses, but there is still much we can do to remove the obstacles to starting and running a business in Downtown Berkeley.

I want to make Berkeley a more welcoming environment for new businesses by ensuring that the permitting process is simple and straightforward, and by offering more assistance to businesses trying to find space in Berkeley. The City has already made some improvements to its permitting systems, but I think we could go much farther. Permitting should be a service provided by the City, not an obstacle to doing business in Berkeley. As the representative for the economic center of Berkeley, I would make it a priority to revamp the City website and adopt a “customer service” approach to the permitting process. Additionally, I want the City to explore innovative programs that could help existing businesses find new spaces when their current spaces are considered for redevelopment.

For Berkeley to attract, create, and retain new businesses, those businesses need space and room to grow. To do this, we need to continue to create new housing, office, retail, and cultural spaces in Downtown Berkeley. Businesses also need to know that their employees will be able to find housing that they can easily access and afford. Right now, the entire Bay Area is facing a housing crisis that makes it hard for businesses to recruit all but the highest-paid workers. Berkeley needs to ensure we have ample affordable housing to foster new business creation and local hiring.

Lastly, new businesses spun out from the University would benefit greatly from additional resources and opportunities for collaborative partnerships. It can be challenging to make the transition from laboratory or research settings and into the world of startups and real office space. Creating new spaces for offices and commercial laboratories in Downtown could further help new businesses, especially with the easy transit access to Berkeley Lab and University research facilities. I would also like to explore opportunities for the creation of larger office spaces so that our most successful locally-founded businesses have room to grow.

5. What is your vision and ideas for revitalization of the Civic Center Historic District?

Ben Gould

Berkeley’s historic Civic Center has fallen into disrepair and disuse. I support reinvesting and restoring our parks, historic buildings, and public infrastructure through new spending and/or public-private partnerships. I would like to see the Berkeley High School Community Theater and the Little Theater restored and used more frequently for public performances, which can charge admission to help defray the cost of the renovations. Similarly, I will push for the repair and modernization of Civic Center Park to encourage more regular public events, such as food stands, live music, movie nights, markets, and festivals. I also want to retrofit, restore, and adaptively reuse Old City Hall and the Veterans Memorial Building. By exploring options for a mixture of public and private uses, we could offset costs and restore the role of these buildings in Berkeley’s public life.

Kate Harrison

Preserving and revitalizing the historic character of Berkeley’s Civic Center will help insure our city’s aesthetic and cultural identity. We need develop a funding source to rehabilitate the Maudelle Shirek old City Hall building and refurbish the Civic Center Park behind City Hall. The recent street improvements along Center Street and Allston between Milvia and Martin Luther King Jr. Way are a step in the right direction. I would like to extend this trend with street beautification along MLK Jr. Way and Shattuck Avenue retaining the early 19th century era design

influences. I believe we should expand the historic district's boundary to include all pre-war construction along this corridor, including the Shattuck Hotel and the Herrick Campus.

Attractions and activities in the area could include an expanded historical museum and live performances. The farmers' market needs more programming. The live music and poetry readings at El Cerrito, Santa Cruz and other farmers' markets create an inviting environment. More specific activities for children would also add to the attraction. The efforts to add the food courts on different days is a good start. Also, the nature of the layout in a long strip is not inviting. Perhaps more of the park could be used for the market as is true in other cities. We should also work with the school district to reopen and creatively use the Berkeley High Theater and Florence Schwimley Little Theater (I saw Frank Zappa there!).

Public/private partnerships should be encouraged, with the addition of a Friends of the Civic Center.

6. Would you support public/private partnerships to adaptively reuse the Downtown Post Office?

Kate Harrison

The U.S. Post Office on Allston Way is a historically landmarked building. I support it remaining a public asset with the inclusion of public banking. The rear portion of the Post Office could be a community resource for one of the uses allowed by the Civic Center Overlay. I would support a comprehensive and inclusive process to decide its future use. Factors to consider are its local and national historical significance; central location; and proximity to other civic institutions. Performing arts groups are woefully short of space in Berkeley. As mentioned by Sophie Hahn, using the rear of the building as a concert hall is one possible creative reuse.

Ben Gould

Yes. The Downtown Berkeley Post Office is a treasured part of Downtown's historic fabric and part of Berkeley's unique architectural heritage. I am committed to preserving the historic front section of the Post Office and to ensuring that this portion of the building, like the Civic Center, continues to play a role in Berkeley's public life.

I am open to supporting the relocation of post office services to another location, if it creates an opportunity to restore and adaptively reuse the elegant lobby. I want to explore the potential for a public-private partnership to create a new attraction and resource for Downtown Berkeley. I'm very excited about the potential to create a performance/event space, a museum, or even a market hall in the main building, while considering additional options for the warehouse portion.

7. What is your vision for public art in the Downtown, including visual and performing arts? Also, what is your vision for additional visual and/or performing arts venues in the Downtown?

Ben Gould

I am excited about the direction Downtown is moving with the existing Arts District, the new Berkeley Art Museum / Pacific Film Archive, the newly renovated UC Theater, and the upcoming improvements to Shattuck Cinemas. Additionally, with the "1% for the Arts" requirement, new construction in Downtown will add to public art or make a contribution to the city's art fund, further enhancing our city.

I will continue to support the arts in Downtown, especially around the Arts District. I believe having a diverse range of activities and businesses in Downtown is crucial for keeping it vibrant and thriving, and the arts serve as an important year-round attractor, stimulating other businesses and activities, and making Downtown an appealing

place for new businesses and residents to locate. I would like to see the Berkeley High Community Theater and Little Theater renovated and used for more community events, and see Civic Center Park used for live open-air music and festivals.

Kate Harrison

Berkeley has made a good start at establishing the Downtown district as an arts center. Home to two regionally acclaimed theatres, jazz and theatre schools, music venues, media centers, museums and film archives, it is a destination point for art enthusiasts of all disciplines. The next step is to build upon this foundation by expanding public access and participation in the arts. I would encourage better utilization of open space and under-used commercial spaces. The renovated BART plaza will provide a focal point to develop public art, both visual and performance. How we allocate our dedicated budget line for arts-funding is worth examining – we need to use the funding for more living, interactive art and fewer static pieces. More use could be made of vacant storefronts and lots as art spaces.

8. What do you see as the critical management and financial issues facing the City over the next several years?

Kate Harrison

The challenge in managing and balancing our City's budget is not only to identify the most crucial priorities but also to insure that actual performance is measured. My career has been devoted to improving the way public sector agencies use resources – financial, human and capital – to ensure they are meeting their goals in the most efficient way possible. The government cannot do it all and must keep in mind the primary goals we are trying to achieve. I would advocate for a comprehensive strategic plan, a process I have managed for cities, states and countries working to enter the European Union. Clarity and more transparency regarding the budget process will instill public trust in our government.

One way we can improve city services is to invest in technologies that support better management decision making and transparency. The new financial system under development is only one part of that. Other software applications that need updating are those related to the business license process. As discovered during the campaign for the recent increase in the business license tax on larger landlords, we are losing potentially millions of dollars in potential revenues by not comparing data across available data bases between the Finance Department and the Rent Board.

Technological improvements to ease access for its citizens and business owners is also a priority as they will improve services and help save staff time. Technology to expand citizen participation in council proceedings is in place in many municipalities and should be introduced here.

Another key management opportunity involves capitalizing on the twin tools of U1 for affordable housing and T1 for infrastructure spending. A challenge for the City is to not carry out business as usual but to insure that these funds are used to support housing for all people below the median income and insure we are using infrastructure funds sustainably.

The issue of pension and retiree health benefits is real but should not be exaggerated. As with having a mortgage which may not be payable all at once today, we need to insure we know how this obligation will be paid over its lifespan. Defined benefit pension plans are the backbone of a secure, middle class. We also have contractual obligations to those whom we have employed. This situation did not arise in a day nor will it be solved in the short run and it cannot be solved by not honoring our obligations. We need to come together in negotiations to address the situation. Employees have already begun to contribute to retirement and we have instituted a two-tier system

and more will need to be done. The more serious debt issue relates to retiree health which in reality can only be solved with a single-payer health system.

Increasing revenues is also a key priority. Working to meet the needs of the small business community and investment in the Downtown and commercial districts will boost city revenues. On a local level, I support increasing the transfer tax on property sales above a certain value (e.g., \$5 million) and assessments for parks, transportation and other infrastructure for which new developments create new demands.

Ben Gould

I think the biggest financial issues facing the City are ensuring we have a strong reserve fund to protect against the likelihood of an economic downturn in the next few years; and addressing our unfunded capital and pension needs. Fortunately, the current reserve fund is over 12% of the General Fund, and only requires prudent policies and good stewardship to preserve and grow. However, addressing our unfunded capital and pension needs will be more challenging, with \$500 million needed to address deferred maintenance and capital improvements alone (a number that dwarfs the \$160 million General Fund). The passage of Measure T1, \$100 million for infrastructure spending, is a step in the right direction. However, it will only begin to pay down the backlog, and do nothing to address the ongoing structural deficit.

Berkeley needs a comprehensive review and plan to address this structural deficit and rebuild our public resources, likely through some combination of efficiency improvements, adjustments in level of service, economic development, and tax adjustments. I also want to work with City staff to expedite the replacement of the obsolete, floppy-disk-era FUND\$ system for budget tracking. Modern budgeting and record-keeping software is essential to making City operations and budgeting more transparent and efficient. By working with City staff, other Councilmembers, and up-to-date technology, I will push for new cost-saving and revenue-generating opportunities for the City.