



Downtown Berkeley Association **STRATEGIC PLAN** June 2025



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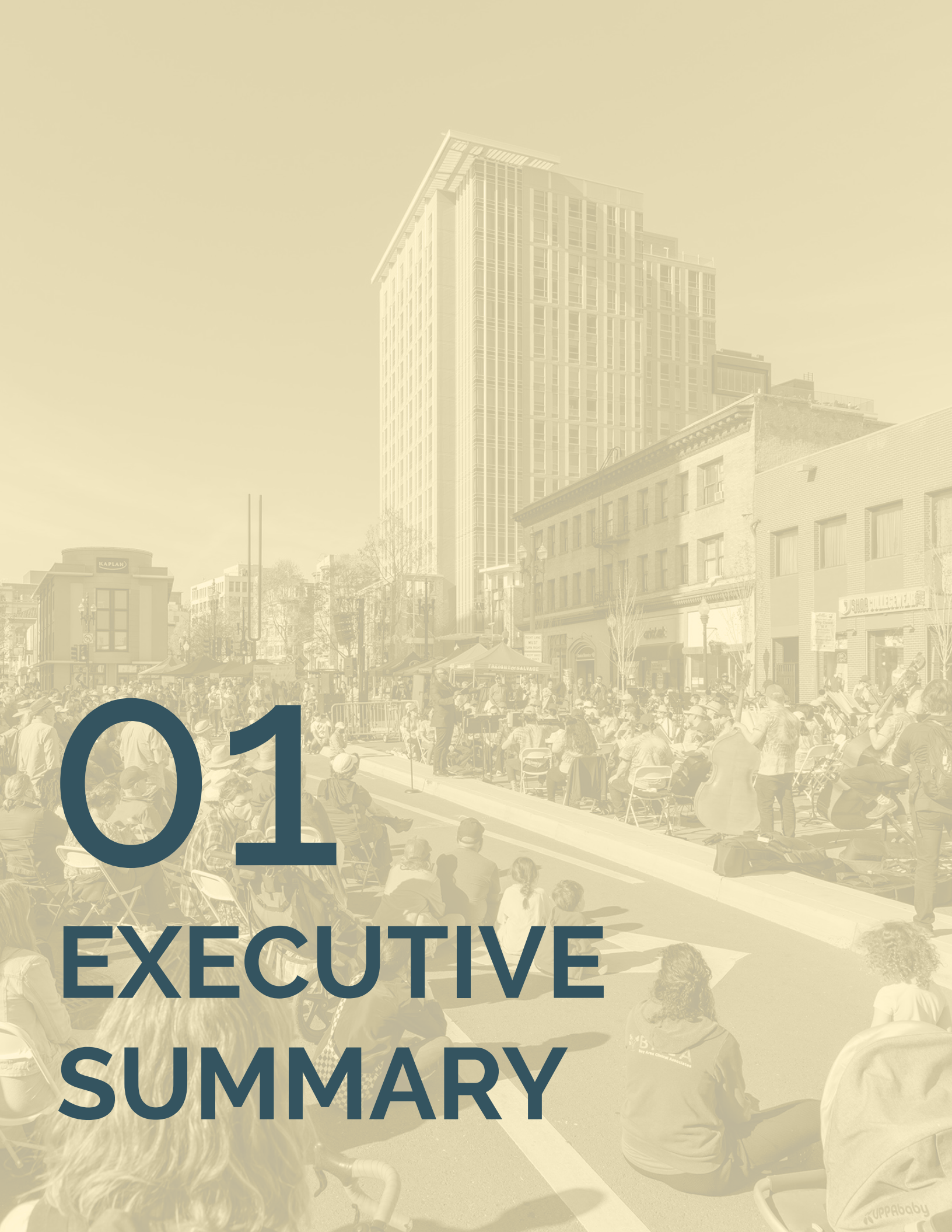
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01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

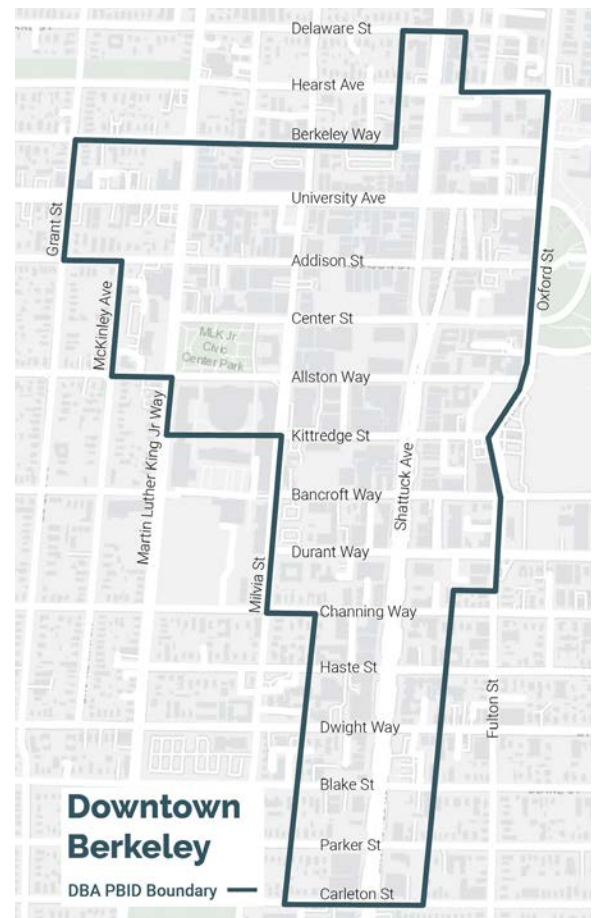
Introduction

Downtown Berkeley is the civic, cultural, and commercial heart of the city—home to leading academic institutions, a vibrant restaurant and entertainment scene, and a robust network of small businesses and nonprofits. Though it comprises just 2% of Berkeley's land area, Downtown accounts for 17% of all businesses, 10% of jobs, and 34% of the city's hotel rooms.

The **Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA)** is the 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization that oversees services funded through the Downtown Berkeley Property-Based Business Improvement District (PBID), including cleaning, maintenance, outreach, events, marketing, and advocacy. As the community emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and grapples with rising storefront vacancies, public safety concerns, and affordability pressures, the DBA's role has never been more critical.

DBA's 2025 Strategic Plan update outlines a ten-year roadmap to guide the DBA's programs and operations. The plan was informed by input from DBA staff and Board leadership, and broad community feedback from business owners, property owners, residents, non-profits, educational institutions, and other community members interested in Downtown's future. In addition to community input, the plan was also shaped through an evaluation of current market trends impacting Downtown and an internal assessment of the DBA organization.

This Strategic Plan will not only guide the DBA's services and priorities over the next ten years, but will serve as the foundation for the PBID's 2026 state-mandated renewal process.



External Conditions & Trends

Downtown Berkeley's landscape is shaped by broader trends in demographics, real estate, and public life:

Population Growth: Downtown's population has grown 23% since 2010, outpacing the city overall, with younger and more diverse demographics.

Employment: Downtown comprises just 2% of the City's total land area, but is home to 17% of its businesses and 10% of its jobs.

Storefront Vacancy: Vacancy has climbed as high as 28% amid economic uncertainty, stalled development, and lingering pandemic impacts.

Multifamily Residential: 40% of Downtown residential units were built since 2014. However, lease-up rates have slowed recently, reflecting possible softening in the student housing market.

Office: Office vacancy hovers around 10%—lower than San Francisco or Oakland—but absorption remains sluggish. Office supply has been steadily decreasing in Downtown as Class B office space is torn down for new multifamily residential.

Tourism: While substantial new hotel supply has come online since 2014 and occupancy rates are beginning to recover from pandemic impacts, occupancy has not fully rebounded to pre-pandemic levels.

Homelessness: While recent progress has reduced the visible street population in Downtown Berkeley, safety concerns and disruptive behaviors persist.

Community Engagement

More than 700 Downtown Berkeley stakeholders contributed to the strategic planning process, including property owners, merchants, nonprofits, residents, students, and civic partners. Outreach methods included regular touchpoints with the DBA Board, focus groups organized by stakeholder interest in Downtown, individual interviews, and a widely-distributed online survey. This engagement shaped the core of the Strategic Plan.

Focus Groups & Individual Interviews

Key findings from engagement with over 200 Downtown Berkeley community members in focus groups and individual interviews include:

Strengths

- Multi-modal access and connectivity
- Arts and cultural vitality
- Diverse and engaged community
- DBA Ambassador program

Challenges

- Visible homelessness
- Safety concerns
- High storefront vacancy
- Uninviting public realm
- Decreasing commercial & residential affordability

Priorities

- Ensure a safe, clean, and welcoming environment
- Activate vacant storefronts and support local businesses
- Make the public realm more cohesive

Online Survey Highlights

To broaden community engagement and build on focus group and individual interview themes, a widely-distributed online survey was conducted that gathered 495 responses. In the survey, respondents were asked which three services or programs are most needed to improve Downtown Berkeley in the future. The top three selections were:

1. Ensure Downtown is consistently clean and well maintained (56%)
2. Improve security and safety (52%)
3. Provide support to locally-owned and small businesses (52%)

When asked to choose amongst a set of physical improvements, which three are the most important for the future of Downtown Berkeley, the three top choices were:

1. Fill and activate vacant storefronts (74%)
2. Add more green and open spaces where people can gather (34%)
3. Add more diverse types of housing at a variety of price points (30%)

Word cloud summarizing respondents' top three words to describe their vision for Downtown Berkeley in the future. The larger the word, the more frequently it was used.



Key Takeaways

The following key takeaways summarize important findings from discovery, community engagement, and the internal organizational assessment for DBA:

1. Downtown is experiencing two concurrent crises impacting vibrancy and safety:

- A. Berkeley's ongoing challenges related to its unhoused population, including encampments, disruptive behaviors, and violent incidents
- B. Stubborn storefront vacancy that creates gaps in the street level experience and adds to the perception and reality of safety issues

2. DBA is currently under-capitalized given Downtown's challenges

3. Stakeholders have clear priorities for Downtown Berkeley moving forward:

- A. Ensure Downtown is consistently safe and clean
- B. Fill and activate vacant storefronts and support existing small businesses
- C. Create a more cohesive Downtown experience, including improved lighting, more parks and community gathering spaces, public art, etc.

4. DBA needs to build organizational and financial capacity to provide impactful solutions to address Downtown Berkeley's significant challenges

Strategic Plan Framework

This Strategic Plan provides roadmap to guide DBA's work over the next ten years. The Plan is grounded in a clear vision, a mission statement for DBA, and four strategic goals with supporting objectives. While the goals are intended to remain consistent over the next decade, specific tactics will be implemented through adaptable annual workplans, with a recommended five-year checkpoint to assess progress and realign as needed.

Vision

Stakeholder engagement conducted as part of the Strategic Plan process was synthesized into the community's vision for Downtown Berkeley:

Downtown Berkeley is the heart of the community, offering a dynamic mix of living, learning, working, shopping, dining, cultural, and entertainment experiences.

Mission

A refreshed mission statement aligns with themes that arose through engagement with the Downtown Berkeley community, and is intended to clarify the DBA's role in achieving the vision for Downtown:

The DBA provides leadership and enhanced services to create and sustain a clean, safe, welcoming, and prosperous Downtown.

GOAL 1

Ensure Downtown Berkeley is consistently clean, safe, and welcoming.

- Optimize DBA's Ambassador program dedicated to cleaning and maintaining the public realm.
- Re-establish DBA's safety-focused Community Engagement Ambassador program.
- Strengthen advocacy and partnerships to support compassionate solutions to unhoused challenges.
- Anticipate maintenance obligations of existing and new streetscape amenities.

GOAL 2

Attract, retain, and support locally-owned, creative, and innovative businesses and nonprofits.

- Support existing businesses and attract new storefront uses that diversify Downtown's offerings.
- Collect, analyze, and communicate relevant and compelling data on the Downtown economy.
- Advance placemaking/public realm investments that support economic vitality.
- Foster a vibrant arts, culture, and nonprofit community in Downtown.
- Work with merchants and property owners to maintain attractive public facing buildings, grounds, and businesses.

GOAL 3

Bring residents and visitors to Downtown to patronize businesses, nonprofits, and the arts.

- Lead to efforts to market Downtown Berkeley's brand identity.
- Develop promotions that support Downtown businesses and non-profits.
- Engage and communicate with Downtown stakeholders
- Utilize technologies (e.g., social media, video, AI) to engage various audiences.
- Offer programming and events that appeal to a wide variety of Berkeley community members.

GOAL 4

Be the leading convener and advocate for Downtown Berkeley.

- Advocate for local, regional, and state policies that benefit the Downtown economy and quality of life.
- Strengthen collaboration with key civic, institutional, and nonprofit partners.
- Work with partners to develop and implement plans and civic investments that align with DBA's vision for Downtown's future.

Organizational Alignment

To implement the preceding goals and objectives, DBA organizational recommendations emphasize near-term focus and optimization of resources to stabilize the Downtown environment and enhance the DBA's value proposition to ratepayers and key partner organizations.

Two key organizational recommendations that will substantially impact DBA's budget and annual work program are:

- 1. The addition of a dedicated staff member focused on Economic Development and Placemaking,**
- 2. The reinstatement of the DBA's Community Engagement/Safety Ambassador program.**

Additional recommendations include:



Organizational Structure

DBA will refine its organizational model by maintaining its 501(c)(6) structure and establishing a new 501(c)(3) affiliate to expand fundraising capacity and support special projects. Staff roles will be clarified across four key functions—Clean & Safe, Economic Development & Placemaking, Marketing & Communications, and CEO-led Advocacy—while the Board and prospective committees will reflect Downtown's evolving community and strategic priorities.



Revenue Diversification

To reduce reliance on PBID assessments, DBA will pursue a mix of revenue streams including sponsorships, earned income, contracted services, and charitable donations and grants through its new 501(c)(3). Diversified revenue can help support expanded clean and safe services, economic development, and public realm improvements.



Succession Planning

With the CEO planning to retire in 2027, DBA will initiate a formal succession process in late 2026. A search committee will guide recruitment and transition to ensure strong leadership continuity aligned with the Strategic Plan.



PBID Renewal

This Strategic Plan lays the foundation for DBA's 2026 PBID renewal, which will include updates to the Management District Plan, boundaries, service plan, and assessment methodology. Broad property and business owner support will be essential as DBA prepares for the petition and ballot process required by California law.



02

INTRODUCTION

About Downtown Berkeley

Berkeley is a nationally recognized center of academic excellence, cultural diversity, and civic engagement. Home to the University of California, Berkeley, the city benefits from a constant influx of talent, creativity, and global perspectives. At the heart of it all is Downtown Berkeley—the city’s commercial, cultural, and transit-oriented core. Known for its walkable streets, historic character, world-class performing arts institutions, diverse nonprofit community, and thriving independent food scene, Downtown Berkeley serves as both a vital neighborhood hub and a destination for the broader Bay Area. Its strategic location, with access to BART, AC Transit lines, and regional pedestrian and bike networks, reinforces its importance as a dynamic, connected urban center.

About the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA)

The Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA) is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit dedicated to fostering a welcoming, vibrant, and economically resilient Downtown. Originally founded in 1989 as a volunteer-led Main Street initiative, the DBA evolved into a Business Improvement District (BID) in the 1990s and later transitioned to a Property-Based Business Improvement District (PBID) in 2012 to address the district’s growing needs. The PBID is funded through a special assessment on properties within the district and is managed by the DBA, which provides a range of services designed to support the area’s vitality—including cleaning, maintenance, beautification, hospitality, outreach, marketing, events and programming, advocacy, and business support.

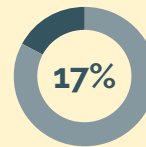
Today, the PBID represents 345 parcels, 264 property owners, and approximately 750 business and merchant tenants. Its boundaries extend from Delaware Street to the north, Carlton Street to the south, Grant Street to the west, and Oxford Street to the east, as illustrated in the map to the right.

The Value of Downtown Berkeley

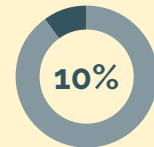
Downtown is just a **quarter square mile** or **2%** of the City’s total land area, but it is home to:

1,200 businesses

10,112 employees



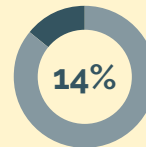
of the City’s total



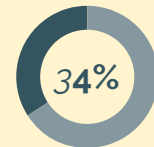
of the City’s total

187 restaurants, bars, and shops

636 Hotel Rooms

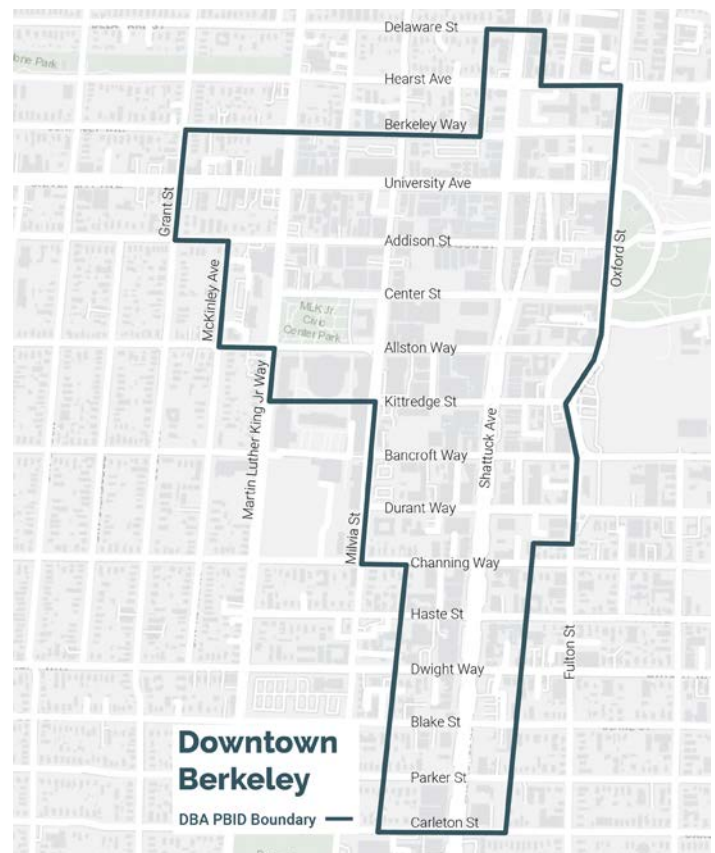


of the City’s total



of the City’s total

Data from: Esri Business Analyst, CoStar, City of Berkeley



As Downtown Berkeley continues to evolve, it faces a set of complex, interrelated challenges. Public safety concerns, increasing storefront vacancies, and broader economic uncertainty have created an environment that is markedly different from when the last DBA Strategic Plan was completed in 2015. Like many downtowns nationwide, Berkeley is contending with stronger post-pandemic headwinds than it has in decades, particularly in terms of lingering pandemic recovery, persistent safety issues, rising affordability concerns, and federal political uncertainty.

Despite these challenges, there is broad recognition of the essential role the DBA plays in championing Downtown. The DBA's ongoing efforts to maintain cleanliness, assist small businesses, and activate public spaces are widely valued by Downtown stakeholders and the broader community. These initiatives not only enhance the immediate experience of the area but also contribute to the long-term economic vitality and attractiveness of Downtown Berkeley as a thriving urban center.

DBA's Impact by the Numbers

With **\$2,119,471** in total 2024 revenue DBA's work includes:



20 Ambassadors



3,661 Merchant Checks



10,253 Hanging Baskets Watered



14 Community Events Produced, Partnered, or Supported



7,234 Visitor Information Contacts



5,015 Homeless Engagements



329,975 Trash Pounds Collected



3,217 Block Faces Weeded

Data from: DBA 2024 Annual Report

Strategic Plan & PBID Renewal Project Background

In early 2025, the DBA kicked off a process to update the organization's Strategic Plan and to renew the Downtown Property-Based Business Improvement District (PBID), as required by state statute. To facilitate the Strategic Plan and PBID Renewal process, DBA retained Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.) and Kristin Lowell Inc. P.U.M.A. and Kristen Lowell previously aided in establishing the Downtown Berkeley PBID in 2011 and the district's first renewal in 2016.

Overall objectives for the Strategic Plan and PBID Renewal processes include:

- Build on the work of past plans and respond to market trends to help guide the DBA in its response to conditions that can be reasonably expected through the next ten years
- Align the DBA with the dynamics of a rapidly changing economic, social, and political landscape, building on the organization's fundamental strengths, and exploring meaningful ways to become more responsive to community needs and aspirations

- Affirm program priorities for the DBA and develop holistic Strategic and PBID Renewal plans to sharpen the organization’s value proposition and ensure that initiatives strengthen and unify overall district management efforts
- Engage a variety of Downtown Berkeley stakeholders (i.e., DBA board members, property owners, businesses, employees, residents, civic partners, etc.) in a participatory process to develop the Strategic and PBID Management Plans

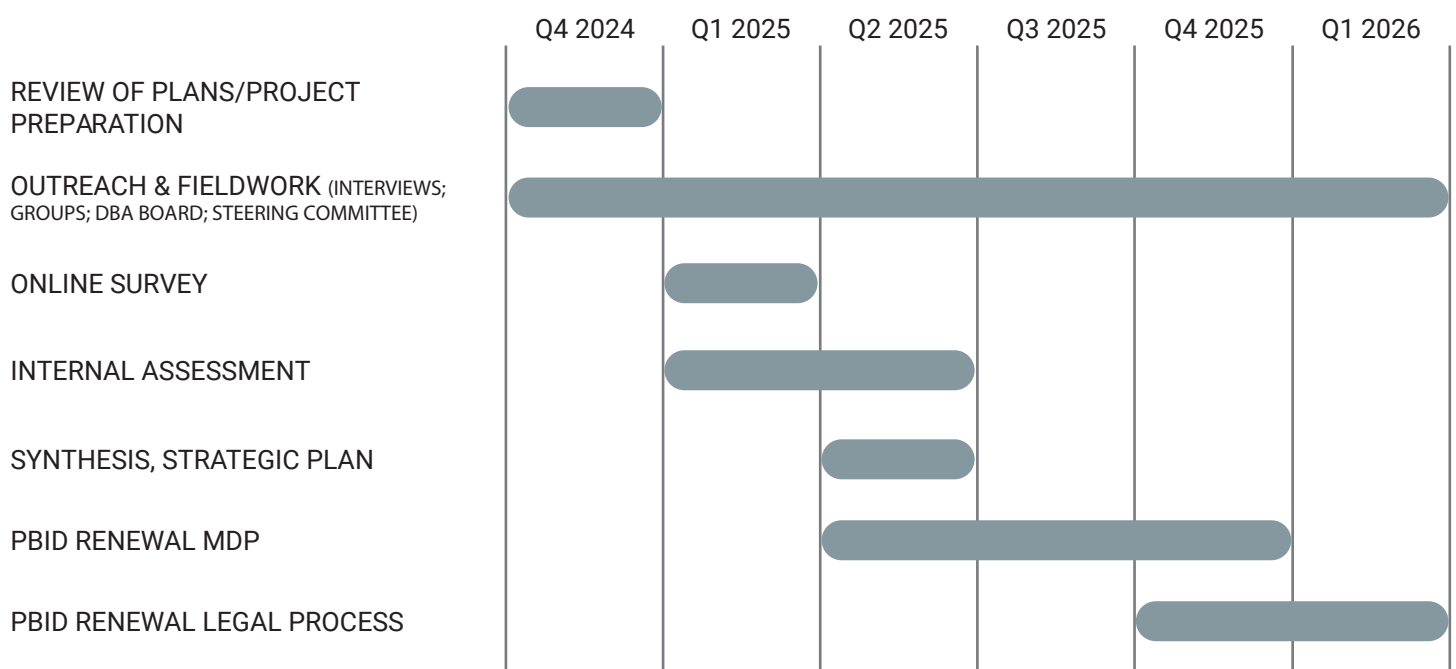
The DBA Strategic Plan and PBID Renewal Process included **discovery and community engagement** to understand the myriad economic, social, and political forces that are currently shaping Downtown Berkeley. The discovery and engagement processes engaged a variety of Downtown stakeholders, including property owners, businesses, non-profits, residents, and civic leaders.

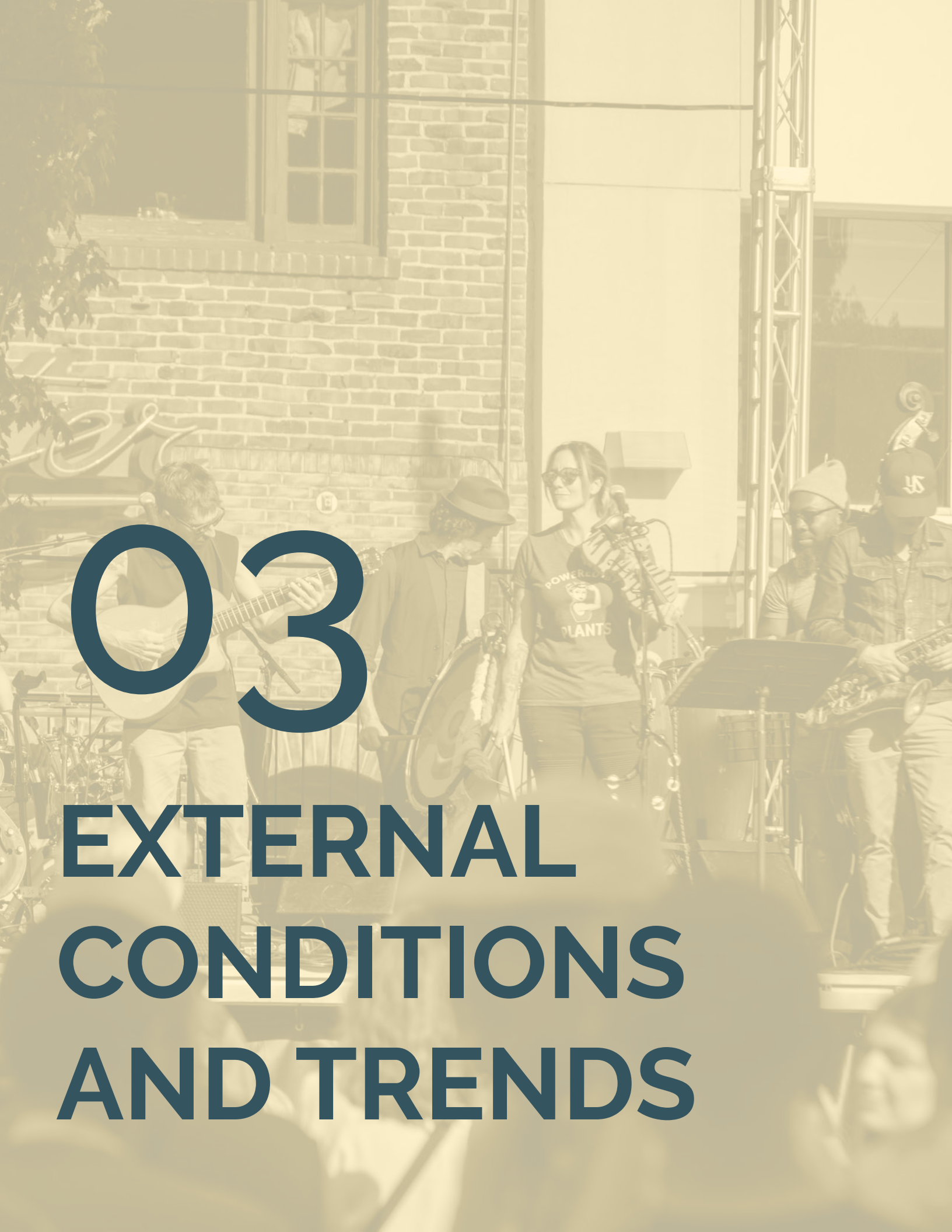
The process also included an **internal organizational assessment** to evaluate the DBA’s ability to

effectively address challenges and capitalize on opportunities affecting the district, including a comprehensive review of the programs, financing tools, and organizational structure.

Following the completion of the first two steps, a Strategic Plan document was compiled that includes findings from discovery, stakeholder engagement, and the organizational assessment plus recommendations for the DBA in the near- and long-term.

Per California state statute, PBIDs are required to undergo a renewal process every ten years. Teed up by the strategic planning process, the subsequent legal PBID renewal process for DBA will include the creation of a new management plan and an engineering report that describes the PBID’s rationale and objectives, any changes to boundaries, benefit zones, service plan and budget, assessment method, and governance structure. The full DBA Strategic Plan & PBID Renewal process and timeline is summarized in the graphic below.





03

EXTERNAL CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Overview

While the recommendations outlined in this Strategic Plan are grounded in extensive stakeholder input, they are also informed by several key factors and trends currently shaping the landscape of Downtown Berkeley. Although not exhaustive, these trends reflect recurring themes identified in the Plan's community engagement process, which are summarized in the subsequent chapter – *04 Community Engagement*. Many of these external factors fall outside the direct control of the DBA; however, DBA's influence on public perception and the vitality of the district underscores the importance of proactive attention and influence as DBA enters its next phase of organizational development.

Demographics

Since 2010, Downtown has outpaced the City of Berkeley's population growth by a ratio exceeding two-to-one. However, in both geographies, population growth has slowed since 2020. Downtown's population has grown by 23% since 2010, but only 5% since 2020, while the City lost population (-1%) since 2020.

Reflecting a high concentration of student households, Downtown residents tend to be younger, more diverse, and have lower annual household incomes than residents of the City as a whole. 60% of people living Downtown are between the ages of 15 and 34, compared to 44% in the City overall. Almost half (48%) of Downtown households make less than \$50,000 per year and few (9%) make over \$200,000. The numbers for City of Berkeley households are 28% and 30%, respectively.

Both Berkeley and Downtown residents are highly educated. 69% of Downtown residents and 76% of Berkeley residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Data from: Esri Business Analyst Online

Downtown residents tend to be younger, more diverse, and have lower annual household incomes than residents of the City as a whole.

Employment

Downtown comprises just 2% of the City's total land area, but is home to 17% of its businesses and 10% of its jobs. 32% of Downtown employment is in the knowledge sector, including 11% professional, scientific, and tech services, and 9% health care and social assistance. Other major job sectors represented in the Downtown area within the PBID boundaries include retail trade (14%), educational services (10%), and accommodation & food services (10%).

Data from: Esri Business Analyst Online

32% of Downtown employment is in the knowledge sector, including 11% professional, scientific, and tech services, and 9% health care and social assistance.

Storefront Economy

Pre-pandemic, Downtown Berkeley experienced several years of high performance in the retail landscape, particularly between 2015 and 2019 when the vacancy rate was less than 5%. Today, the official storefront vacancy rate in Downtown is estimated around 11%, however, given several shifting dynamics and broader economic uncertainty impacting development in Downtown, this rate is estimated closer to 28%. Several concurrent challenges include: 17 planned or entitled housing projects that have recently stalled in Downtown, street population issues, and storefront rent prices. While this increased vacancy rate is alarming, there are indications that the tide is shifting, as several new retailers and restaurants have recently opened or been announced in Downtown.

Compared to Downtown Berkeley, retail performance in the East Bay market overall experienced less dramatic pandemic-related shifts, as annual vacancy hovered between 3.5% and 5.5% (where it remains today).

Data from: CoStar

Multi-Family Residential

Downtown Berkeley has experienced significantly higher multi-family construction growth over the last ten years. 40% of all Downtown units were built since 2014 compared to the East Bay overall at 13%, indicating active development and resulting in Downtown's emergence as a residential neighborhood. There are roughly 3,233 multi-family units within the PBID boundary, currently serving a mostly student market. The asking rent is markedly higher in Downtown compared to other parts of the East Bay. Both markets have seen a similar rate of increase in rents – 24% in Downtown and 25% in the East Bay overall. Despite rent price increases, occupancy rates in Downtown remain strong at approximately 93%.

40% of all Downtown multifamily housing units have been built since 2014, compared to the East Bay overall at 13%.

According to local real estate brokers and developers, there is recent evidence of over-supply in Downtown's student housing niche. Several student-oriented developments were completed in 2024. Lease-up is reportedly sluggish in new buildings and rent concessions are more common, with reports of rent reductions up to 20%. Many new developments in process have stalled due to high interest rates and concerns with over-supply. The recent change is the federal administration is creating additional market uncertainty.

Data from: Esri Business Analyst Online

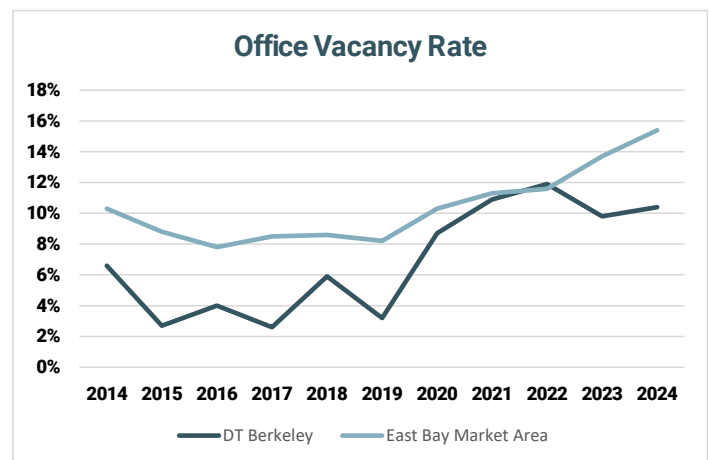
Office

Office Vacancy

Pre-pandemic, Downtown Berkeley's office market was characterized by low vacancy rates. Meanwhile, the East Bay Market had consistently higher office vacancy in those same pre-pandemic years, ranging from 7.8% to 10.3%, indicating slower absorption and less demand. As was seen nationally, both areas saw a sharp increase in office vacancy during the peak pandemic years between 2020 and 2022. Downtown Berkeley experienced a steep spike in vacancy. Today, downtown's vacancy rate hovers around 10%, which is markedly better than nearby Oakland and San Francisco. Overall office space has been decreasing in Downtown Berkeley, as Class B office space is torn down to make way for "multi-family"/ student rental housing.

Based on vacancy rates in the past couple years, Downtown Berkeley's office market may be stabilizing, as vacancy rates decreased slightly between 2022 and 2024, while East Bay Market Area vacancy rates continued increasing.

Data from: CoStar



Office Rents

Office rents in Downtown Berkeley remain notably higher than in surrounding areas, suggesting decreasing supply and a strong willingness among businesses to pay a premium for space next to transit and UC Berkeley. Notably, no new office construction has occurred recently in Downtown Berkeley, and recent patterns of negative absorption point to lingering softness in the market. While the broader East Bay office sector continues to face challenges, it is performing better than San Francisco’s, where vacancy rates hover around 30%—driven largely by tech-sector downsizing and sustained remote or hybrid work trends. In contrast, the East Bay’s more diverse business base and smaller concentration of large tech firms have helped buffer the region from some of the more severe post-COVID disruptions affecting office demand.

Data from: CoStar report East Bay - CA USA-Office Market Report April 2024

Tourism and Hospitality

Since 2014, Downtown Berkeley has added 329 hotel rooms with the addition of the Residence Inn Berkeley that has grown revenue per available room by 23%. However, while hotel room vacancy in Downtown Berkeley has decreased from its 2020 Pandemic high of nearly 50%, as of 2024, it had still not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

Data from: CoStar

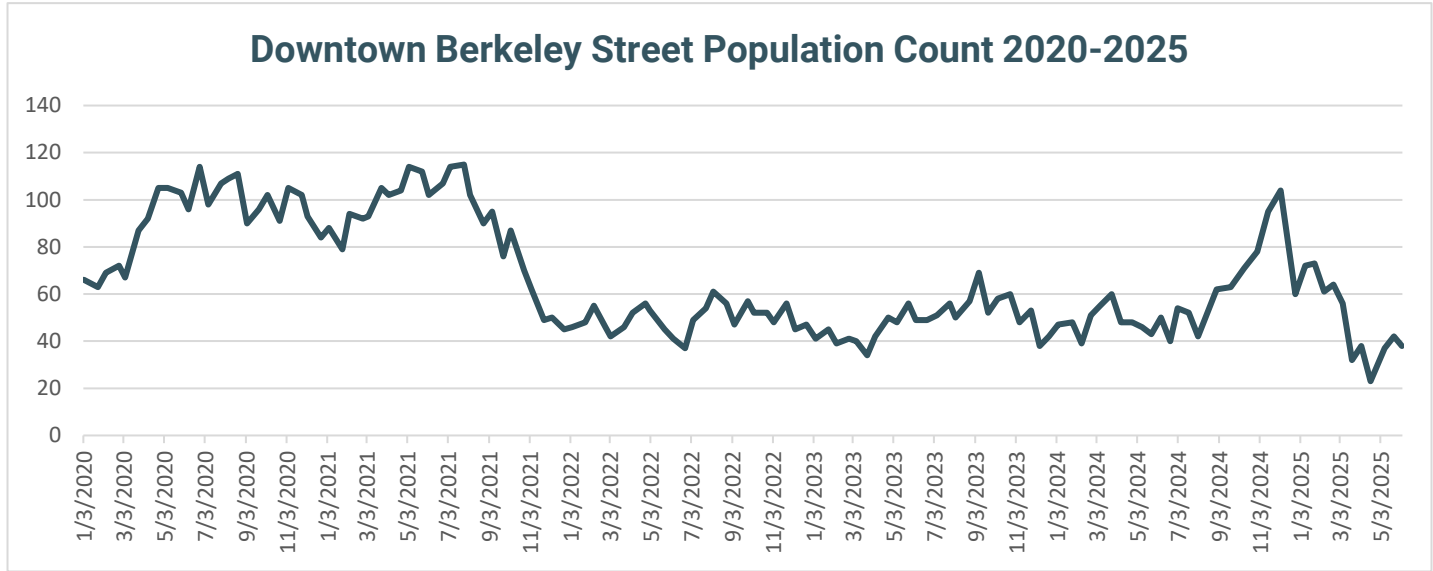
The Unhoused Challenge

While California boasts one of the most robust economies in the world, a different reality is reflected by the roughly 35,000 to 40,000 people who experience homelessness in the Bay Area on any given night, reflecting a 6% increase in 2024.¹ This issue is not unique to the Bay Area; it impacts all large cities across the country. Rapidly rising rents and an inadequate supply of affordable housing make the Bay Area particularly challenged.

While Berkeley made significant strides in 2024 achieving a 20% drop in homeless, and 45% drop in unhoused homeless, the City and the Bay Area continue to grapple with this crisis, with DBA staff and merchants on the front lines of issues concerning homelessness and mental health crisis within Downtown Berkeley. While the scope of need vastly exceeds the role and capacity of the DBA, the organization can play a role in connecting individuals experiencing homelessness and severe mental illness with services, providing a higher level of clean and safe services, and advocating for housing and other resources that will support the Downtown Berkeley community.

Homeless counts in Downtown Berkeley peaked in late 2024 with a large encampment at Civic Center Park. As of the latest point-in-time count, Downtown Berkeley’s street population is currently at its lowest point since DBA started counts in January 2020, as illustrated in the graphic below.

Data from: DBA Point-in-Time Counts



¹<https://www.sfgate.com/local/article/new-data-california-homelessness-problem-worse-20021177.php>



2099

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04

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Overview

Inclusive community engagement was critical to ensure a diverse array of voices were incorporated into the DBA strategic planning process. In total, **over 700 inputs** were gathered. Several methods were used to collect opinions and priorities from members of the Downtown Berkeley community, residents of Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods, property owners, business owners and entrepreneurs, elected officials, youth, institutional and nonprofit partners, members of the arts community, and others representing a cross-section of Downtown stakeholders. Outreach methods included regular touchpoints with the DBA Board, focus groups organized by stakeholder interest in Downtown, individual interviews, and a widely-distributed online survey. Highlights from engagement with the Downtown Berkeley community are provided below.

Interviews & Focus Groups

Key findings are summarized below from engagement with **over 200 Downtown Berkeley stakeholders** in focus groups and individual interviews that took place as part in the early stages of the strategic planning process. In each of these meetings, community members were asked to identify current strengths and challenges of Downtown Berkeley and the DBA, and determine improvement priorities moving forward. These themes and priorities helped inform the online survey that was then distributed to the broader community, and aided in establishing the foundation for this Plan’s goal framework.



▲ Residents/Neighbors Focus Group



▲ DBA Board Engagement

Interviews & Focus Groups

Number of Attendees (Approx.)	Stakeholder Groups Engaged
16	DBA Board
10	Merchants
18	Property Owners
8	Commercial Brokers
7	Office Workers
9	Nonprofit Organizations
50	Neighbors & Residents
14	Merchants & Nonprofits
40	Berkeley High School
28	Berkeley City College
8	Anchor House Residents
208	TOTAL ENGAGED

Strengths

- DBA Ambassadors and services
- Multi-modal transportation access, including BART, biking, and walking
- Improvements to BART Plaza
- Diversity in restaurant offerings
- Hub for cultural non-profits, the arts, entertainment, music, and theater in the East Bay
- The new Residence Inn hotel
- Educational institutions including UC Berkeley, Berkeley Community College, and Berkeley High School
- Sense of community pride
- Cultural diversity
- Community is empathetic regarding the unhoused population

Challenges

- The unhoused population situation has gotten worse with threatening and disruptive behaviors, mental health challenges, theft, and property damage
- Perception and reality that Downtown is unsafe and dangerous
- Storefront vacancy and lack of convenience retail and other resident-serving amenities
- Commercial and residential unaffordability
- A long-term vision for Downtown is lacking
- Shattuck Avenue is a wide street and has problematic parking bays and medians
- Supply and management of parking
- Lack of nighttime activation and entertainment
- Lack of lighting
- Lack of family-friendly amenities and activities for people of all ages
- Limited City resources
- Limited green/open spaces

Priorities for the Future

While many improvements and initiatives were identified, when participants were asked to vote on their top three improvements for the future of Downtown Berkeley, there was consensus around:

- **Ensure Downtown is consistently clean and safe**, including providing additional services for the unhoused population with a focus on addressing disruptive behaviors, managing real and perceived safety concerns, and ensuring Downtown is clean and well cared for
- **Fill and activate storefronts** with diverse and creative uses, including entertainment and destinations for people of all ages
- **Create a more cohesive Downtown experience in the public realm**, including public art, landscaping, additional public restrooms, and implementing Civic Center improvements

Additional priorities include:

- **Improve pedestrian-scale lighting throughout Downtown**, particularly at BART Plaza and the BART station
- **Foster entertainment and the arts**, including: support of challenged arts and cultural organizations, bringing a movie theater back

Downtown, reusing existing theater buildings, incentivizing arts and entertainment uses in new buildings, and holding outdoor events such as concerts and movie nights.

- **Improve the parking experience**, including exploring lower evening parking rates, allowing 24/7 access to existing structures, providing more parking options, improving wayfinding to existing parking, and exploring parking management that supports Downtown businesses, like offering the first 30 minutes or hour free
- **Support and retain innovation in Downtown**, including finding permanent Downtown homes for Skydeck and other startup businesses and supporting diverse entrepreneurship
- **Embrace sustainability in the Downtown public realm**, including planning for climate resiliency, possible daylighting of Strawberry Creek in MLK Jr. Civic Center Park, and incorporating native plant species in planters and landscaping
- **Provide economic data about Downtown to stakeholders**, such as square foot to sales comparison, hyper-local gross sales per square foot, and local versus chain storefront composition

Online Survey

To build on the key themes that emerged from stakeholder focus groups and individual interviews, an online survey was developed to gather broader community input as part of the strategic planning process. The survey was open to the public and invited participants to share their experiences in Downtown Berkeley today, as well as their priorities and hopes for its future. Running from February 7 to April 17, 2025, the survey received **495 responses**, providing valuable insight from residents, business owners, employees, and visitors. This feedback has played a critical role in shaping the direction of the plan and ensuring it reflects the diverse perspectives and needs of the community.

Key Findings

Downtown Today

When asked about conditions in Downtown Berkeley today, most survey respondents made it clear that they are unhappy with the current state of the district.

When asked to rate if conditions in Downtown Berkeley have gotten better or worse over the past five years, no conditions were rated as either much better or slightly better by participants. In fact, more respondents said that 10 out of the 14 listed characteristics (see page 5 in Appendix: Online Survey Summary) have gotten worse rather than better over the past five-years; and over 50% respondents said that **retail and shopping options** and **homelessness/encampments** have gotten slightly worse or much worse in the past five years.

Respondents generally view the DBA organization's services and programs more favorably than the current conditions of Downtown Berkeley. Over 50% of participants rated **landscaping and street and sidewalk cleaning** as either good or very good. Most respondents answered that they did not know how effective the DBA's **advocacy, merchant promotion and support**, and **homelessness outreach** are.

In an open-ended question, the top words used to describe participants' experience in Downtown today were **unsafe, sad, vacant, homeless, and dirty**.

Downtown Tomorrow

When asked to vote for their top three physical improvement priorities to achieve this vision, **fill and activate empty storefronts** was by far the most popular option, with 74% support. **Boutique retail, entertainment, and spaces for artists** were the top responses when participants were asked to select the types of businesses and services they want to see fill Downtown's empty storefronts. Additionally, returning movie theaters to Downtown was frequently mentioned in open-ended responses.

When asked to vote their top three physical improvement priorities for Downtown, fill and activate empty storefronts was by far respondents' most popular option, with 74% support.



◀ Word cloud summarizing respondents' top three words to describe their experience in Downtown Berkeley today. The larger the word, the more frequently it was used.

When asked to select the top three services and program priorities for achieving their vision for Downtown, respondents' top choices were **ensure Downtown is consistently clean and well maintained (56%)**, **improve security and safety (52%)**, and **provide support to locally-owned and small businesses (52%)**.

Opinions differed on how best to approach the homelessness crisis in Downtown Berkeley. **More mental health & substance abuse outreach and managed care (50%)** was the most popular choice overall. However, Bay Area residents living outside of Berkeley and especially Downtown business owners were more supportive of measures like **strengthening enforcement of crimes and more police and security presence throughout Downtown**. On the other hand, Downtown residents, younger respondents, and those representing households making less than \$50,000 per year were more likely to support **more social workers and the creation of more permanent supportive housing**.

Looking to the future, when asked to provide three words describing their vision for Downtown, respondents' most frequently used words were **safe**, **vibrant**, and **clean**.

Who Participated in the Survey

Survey respondents represented a cross-section of Downtown stakeholders. The largest group of respondents were those **living within walking distance of Downtown (47%)**, while **30% live in the City of Berkeley but not within walking distance of Downtown**, 18% work Downtown, 7% own a business Downtown, and 6% live Downtown. **29% of respondents said they come Downtown daily**, 34% once a week or more, and 25% approximately once or twice a month.

Besides respondents under 24, who represented only 3% of participants, all age groups were well represented and the **largest proportion of respondents were 55 or older**. 62% of respondents were female and 34% male. 77% identified as White, 9% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 5% as multiracial, 3% as Hispanic/Latino, and 1% as Black or African American.



◀ Word cloud summarizing respondents' top three words to describe their vision for Downtown Berkeley in the future. The larger the word, the more frequently it was used.



05

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Overview

The following key takeaways summarize important findings from discovery, community engagement, and the internal organizational assessment for DBA. Informed by a snapshot of economic and demographic trends, as well as robust engagement with a diverse cross-section of Downtown Berkeley stakeholders, these takeaways reflect both the challenges and opportunities facing the district today, and serve as a bridge to the Strategic Plan's recommendations, which outline clear priorities and strategies for DBA moving forward.

1. Downtown is experiencing two concurrent crises impacting vibrancy and safety:

- A. Berkeley's ongoing challenges related to its unhoused population, including encampments, disruptive behaviors, and violent incidents
- B. Stubborn storefront vacancy that creates gaps in the street level experience and adds to the perception and reality of safety issues

Through stakeholder engagement and the scan of external factors currently affecting Downtown Berkeley, two interconnected crises emerged as top concerns impacting the area's overall vibrancy and sense of safety. First, the presence of unhoused encampments, along with increasingly disruptive behaviors and a rise in violent incidents, has created an environment that many stakeholders described as unpredictable and, at times, unsafe. These public safety concerns are not new, and have been continuously affecting the day-to-day experiences of residents, workers, and visitors in Downtown since the PBID was established. Furthermore, these conditions present significant challenges for local businesses and organizations operating in the area.

At the same time, Downtown is facing a growing number of vacant storefronts—an issue that has been exacerbated by the lingering impacts of the pandemic, broader economic uncertainty, stalled development projects, and shifting consumer behaviors. These vacancies contribute to a perception of decline, reduce foot traffic, and make it harder to sustain a vibrant and welcoming street-level experience.

Together, these two crises are deeply interconnected and require coordinated, creative, and sustained responses. Stakeholders emphasized the urgent need for solutions that are both compassionate and effective, underscoring the importance of cross-sector collaboration to restore vitality and a strong sense of place in Downtown Berkeley.

2. DBA is currently under-capitalized given Downtown's challenges

While the DBA plays a critical role in supporting the Downtown's vitality, the organization is currently under-capitalized relative to the scale and complexity of the challenges facing Downtown. Issues like public safety, homelessness, and widespread storefront vacancy require significant, sustained investment and collaboration across sectors—resources that extend beyond the DBA's current capacity. Stakeholders acknowledged the value of the DBA's work to date, but also emphasized that without increased funding, staffing, and support, the organization cannot fully meet the moment or drive the kind of impactful, long-term solutions that Downtown Berkeley urgently needs. Strengthening the DBA's financial and operational capacity is essential to expanding its ability to lead, coordinate, and advocate effectively in response to these pressing external factors.

3. Stakeholders have clear priorities for Downtown Berkeley moving forward:

- A. Ensure Downtown is consistently safe and clean**
- B. Fill and activate vacant storefronts and support existing small businesses**
- C. Create a more cohesive Downtown experience, including improved lighting, more parks and community gathering spaces, public art, etc.**

Community members engaged in the strategic planning process expressed a clear and shared vision for the future of Downtown Berkeley. Their top priorities reflect both immediate needs and long-term aspirations for a more vibrant, inclusive, and welcoming Downtown. First and foremost, there is strong consensus around the need for a consistently safe and clean Downtown—conditions seen as foundational to restoring public confidence and attracting people to the area. In parallel, stakeholders emphasized the urgency of addressing storefront vacancies by supporting small, locally-owned businesses and creatively activating empty spaces to restore energy at the street level. Stakeholders also called for a more cohesive and engaging Downtown experience—one that includes better lighting, additional green spaces and gathering areas, and more public art and cultural programming. These priorities speak to a desire for Downtown Berkeley to be not only functional and economically resilient, but also a place where people feel a sense of community, connection, and pride.

4. DBA needs to build organizational and financial capacity to provide impactful solutions to address Downtown Berkeley's significant challenges

To increase its capacity and better address the pressing challenges facing Downtown Berkeley, the DBA should pursue a range of strategic actions aimed at securing additional resources and strengthening its organizational infrastructure. This includes renewing the PBID to provide a more robust and sustainable funding base. Diversifying revenue streams through grants, sponsorships, and partnerships with public, private, and philanthropic entities can also help support new and expanded initiatives. Additionally, investing in staff capacity—particularly in areas of public safety, economic development and placemaking, and marketing—will allow the DBA to take a more proactive and comprehensive approach to solving complex issues. Finally, by strengthening partnerships with civic agencies, nonprofit organizations, and local institutions, the DBA can leverage shared resources and expertise to amplify impact and deliver innovative, community-centered solutions.



06

**STRATEGIC PLAN
FRAMEWORK**

Overview

This Strategic Plan will serve as a roadmap guiding the DBA organization over the next ten years. The graphic below illustrates the structure of the Strategic Plan. Overarching and foundational to the Strategic Plan are the DBA's vision for Downtown Berkeley and a mission statement that defines the DBA's role in achieving that vision.

The four Strategic Plan goals align with areas where the DBA will focus its energy, efforts, and resources over the next several years, and each goal has a set of objectives that drill down further. Goals and objectives have a ten-year time horizon and are intended to be a constant throughout the term of the Strategic Plan. Tactics and actions will drive the DBA's annual workplan and will be evaluated and adjusted on a regular basis by DBA staff and leadership. While this Strategic Plan has a ten-year time horizon, a mid-point checkpoint is recommended after five years to ensure goals and objectives align with Downtown Berkeley's realities.



Vision

Stakeholder engagement conducted as part of the Strategic Plan process was synthesized into the community's vision for Downtown Berkeley:

Downtown Berkeley is the heart of the community, offering a dynamic mix of living, learning, working, shopping, dining, cultural, and entertainment experiences.

Mission

A refreshed mission statement aligns with themes that arose through engagement with the Downtown Berkeley community, and is intended to clarify the DBA's role in achieving the vision for Downtown:

The DBA provides leadership and enhanced services to create and sustain a clean, safe, welcoming, and prosperous downtown.

Goal 1: Ensure Downtown Berkeley is consistently clean, safe, and welcoming.

Why it Matters

Ensuring that Downtown Berkeley remains clean, safe, and welcoming emerged as the community's top priority during the strategic planning process. Clean and safe services are among the most visible and essential functions provided by place management organizations like the DBA, serving as the foundation for a thriving and vibrant district. The DBA's existing Ambassador program plays a vital role in this, offering cleaning and maintenance support and services that go beyond what the City of Berkeley can provide. Furthermore, in response to merchant concerns about the safety of employees and customers during the pandemic, the DBA piloted a Community Engagement Ambassador program. This initiative reflected a broader trend among place management organizations, many of which expanded their clean and safe services to address ongoing challenges such as public safety concerns, mental health crises, and open drug use.

While the DBA's Community Engagement Ambassador pilot program concluded after 18 months, most Downtown Berkeley stakeholders engaged in the strategic planning process expressed concerns about these issues and their continued impact on the vitality of the district today. Looking ahead, ensuring a welcoming, safe, and well-maintained Downtown remains a top priority for DBA. The upcoming PBID renewal process offers a timely opportunity to reassess service levels across the district and to explore ways to enhance clean and safe operations—including the potential reinstatement of a Safety or Community Engagement Ambassador program.

Objectives:

1. **Optimize DBA's Cleaning and Hospitality Ambassador program dedicated to cleaning and maintaining the public realm.**
2. **Re-establish DBA's safety-focused Community Engagement Ambassador program.**
3. **Strengthen advocacy and partnerships to support compassionate solutions to unhoused challenges.**
4. **Anticipate maintenance obligations of existing and new streetscape amenities.**

When asked to select the top three services and program priorities for achieving their vision for Downtown, respondents' top choices were:

56%

Ensure Downtown is consistently clean and well maintained

52%

Improve security and safety

Goal 2: Attract, retain, and support locally-owned, creative, and innovative businesses/entrepreneurs.

Why it Matters

Downtown Berkeley's unique character and appeal are shaped by its vibrant mix of small, locally-owned businesses, nonprofit organizations that serve diverse communities, and a rich array of arts and cultural venues. Like many cities across the country, Berkeley's storefront economy was hit hard by the pandemic and continues to face challenges amid ongoing recovery efforts and broader economic uncertainty. These conditions have strained local businesses and slowed or stalled new development, contributing to a high storefront vacancy rate in the Downtown area.

While the DBA has long supported business and property owners, there is now a clear opportunity to strengthen and formalize this area of work within the organization. Many place management organizations provide dedicated support to local and prospective new small businesses and nonprofits by offering services such as technical assistance workshops, one-on-one permitting and licensing guidance, block-by-block commercial market data (foot traffic, local versus chain composition, price trends, etc.), storefront improvement grants, pop-up retail opportunities, and connecting entrepreneurs with local resources and funding opportunities. Furthermore, investing in placemaking initiatives that bring people Downtown, such as public art, pedestrian-friendly streetscape enhancements, interactive installations, outdoor seating and parklets, and lighting improvements can significantly enhance Downtown's vibrancy and drive foot traffic to businesses.

Looking ahead, the DBA can expand its economic development efforts by dedicating additional resources and staff to business support, retention, and attraction, supporting public realm improvements that attract visitors Downtown, and encouraging creative uses of ground floor spaces to help revitalize the district.

When asked to vote for their top three physical improvement priorities to achieve this vision, the most popular option (by far) was:

74%

Fill and activate empty storefronts

Objectives:

1. **Support existing businesses and attract new storefront uses that diversify Downtown's offerings.**
2. **Collect, analyze, and communicate relevant and compelling data on the Downtown economy.**
3. **Advance placemaking/public realm investments that support economic vitality.**
4. **Foster a vibrant arts, culture, and nonprofit community in Downtown.**
5. **Work with merchants and property owners to maintain attractive public facing buildings, grounds, and businesses.**

Goal 3: Bring residents and visitors to Downtown to patronize businesses, non-profits, and the arts.

Why it Matters

While the DBA can support or influence many of the external factors that shape the district, one area where it has direct control, and significant opportunity, is in marketing and communications. Effectively communicating Downtown Berkeley's brand identity is essential to highlighting what makes the area unique: its diverse communities, vibrant cultural assets, and eclectic mix of businesses. Strategic marketing not only helps attract visitors, residents, and investment, but also strengthens the community's connection to Downtown and reinforces a sense of place. For an organization like the DBA, which exists to enhance and promote the district, a strong communications strategy including new technology is vital for building public awareness, driving foot traffic, supporting local businesses, and showcasing the positive impact of the organization's programs and services. This includes everything from producing small-scale events and activations that reflect the community's diversity, to engaging stakeholders in meaningful ways that foster collaboration and shared ownership of Downtown's future.

Objectives:

1. Lead to efforts to market Downtown Berkeley's brand identity.
2. Develop promotions that support Downtown businesses and non-profits.
3. Engage and communicate with Downtown stakeholders.
4. Utilize technologies (e.g., social media, video, AI) to engage various audiences.
5. Offer programming and events that appeal to a wide variety of Berkeley community members.

When asked what types of events online survey participants would like to see in Downtown Berkeley, the top responses were:

59%
Music

51%
Food

41%
Cultural Celebrations

Goal 4: Be the leading convener and advocate for Downtown Berkeley.

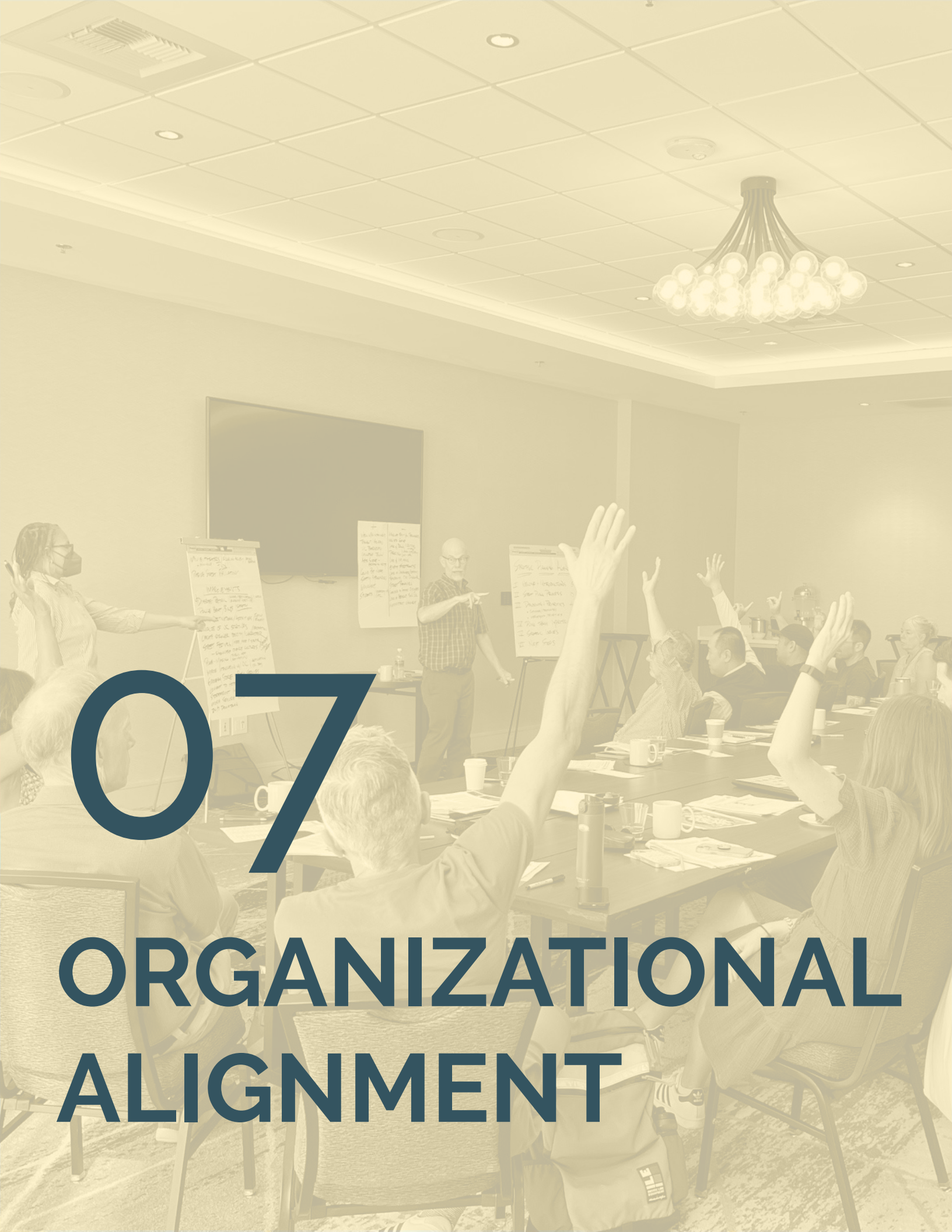
Why it Matters

DBA is already viewed as the leading advocate for Downtown Berkeley, and to address the substantial external challenges Downtown is facing, DBA should continue and enhance this role moving forward, working alongside key partners to solve current, ongoing, and future challenges in innovative, creative, and tangible ways. The DBA can strengthen its influence on initiatives impacting Downtown by continuing to demonstrate and communicate its value proposition, reflecting Downtown's diverse community, and reinforcing partnerships with civic, non-profit, educational, and arts and cultural institutions in and around Downtown.

Objectives:

1. Advocate for local, regional, and state policies that benefit the Downtown economy and quality of life.
2. Strengthen collaboration with key civic, institutional, and nonprofit partners.
3. Work with partners to develop and implement plans and civic investments that align with DBA's vision for Downtown's future.

DBA's advocacy efforts, in partnership with civic, nonprofit, and institutional partners, support the implementation of key stakeholder priorities such as creating a shared vision for Downtown, homelessness response, and public realm infrastructure improvements.



07

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT

Overview

To implement the preceding goals and objectives, the subsequent DBA organizational recommendations will emphasize near-term focus and optimization of resources to stabilize the Downtown environment and enhance the DBA's value proposition to ratepayers and key partner organizations.

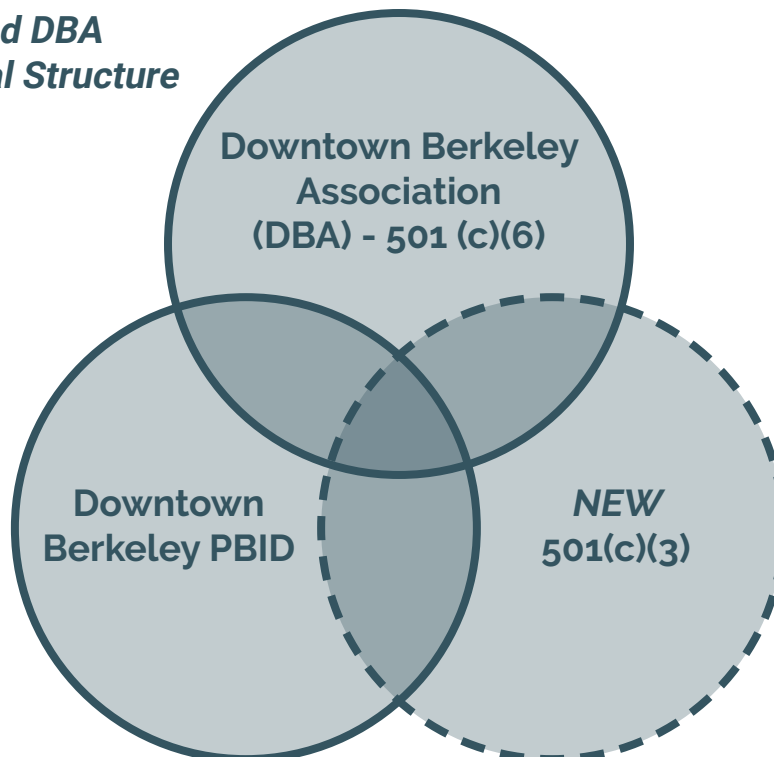
Organizational Structure

Currently, the Downtown Berkeley PBID contracts with the DBA, a governing 501(c)(6) umbrella organization. These two separate entities are currently wrapped into the overarching DBA brand and identity, with the Board and staff exclusively dedicated to the DBA. While the current organizational structure is not uncommon for place management entities, there are several ways DBA's business model can be updated and refined to address current and anticipated challenges in Downtown. A key component will be adding a 501(c)(3) affiliate within the DBA family of organizations, as illustrated by the diagram below.

Approximately 96% of DBA's operating budget currently comes from assessment revenue. While this is not atypical, a growing number of place management organizations have diversified their funding sources beyond assessments to support a wide variety of programs and services. A non-profit 501(c)(3) affiliate is commonly used to collect revenue from grants, sponsorships, or other contributions, and used to fund initiatives such as public space enhancements and placemaking, planning studies, and special projects.

Forming a new non-profit 501(c)(3) under the umbrella of the DBA will enable the organization to diversify funding beyond assessments to support projects that beautify and enhance the public realm. Additionally, the new non-profit could seek funds to support economic development and small business support, placemaking efforts such as public art or improved lighting, initiatives that support a clean and safe Downtown and reduce homelessness, and other special projects that might arise in the future. The 501(c)(3) could be managed with minimal administrative oversight from existing DBA staff. To reduce duplication and encourage continuity, a small governance board could be formed as a sub-set of the existing DBA Board.

Recommended DBA Organizational Structure



Staffing & Governance

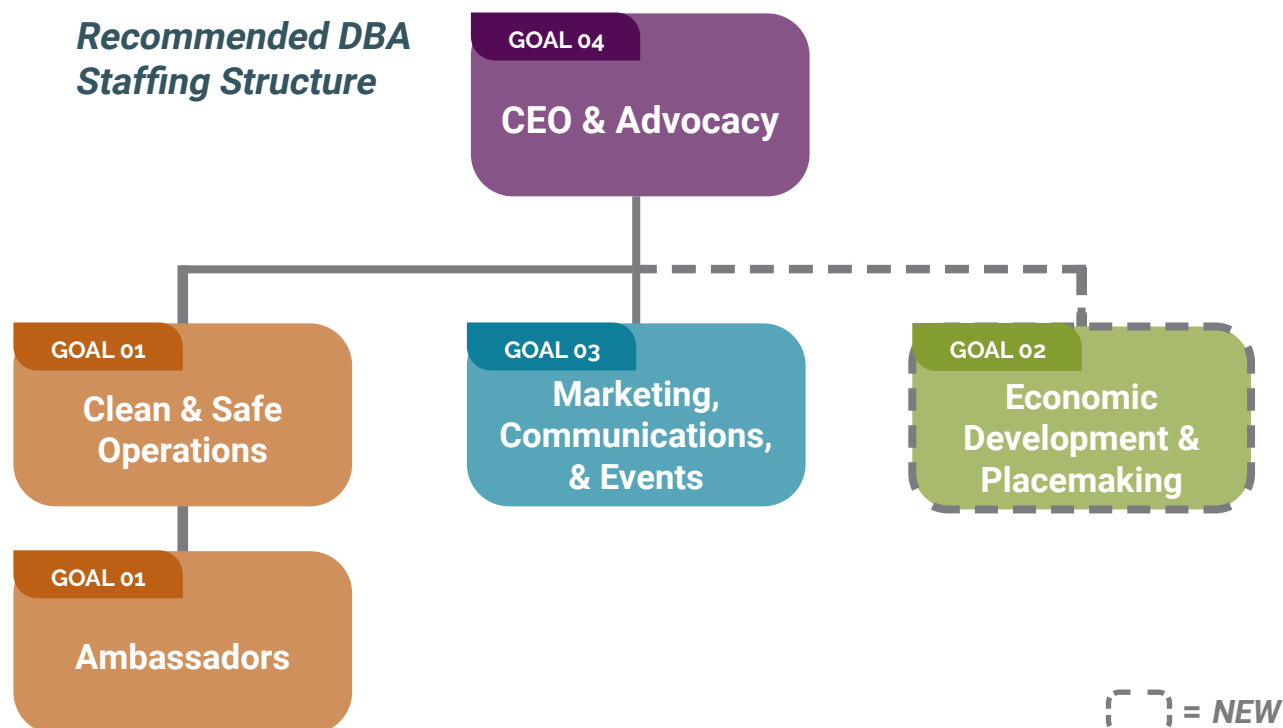
Staffing

To align with the recommendations provided in this Strategic Plan and increase organizational capacity, there are several opportunities to further clarify DBA staff roles and responsibilities moving forward. A key differentiator between the current and proposed DBA staff structure is the shift from a 'Vitality' role that encompasses marketing, communications, events and programming, placemaking, and small business support into two distinct roles, as summarized below. As the DBA organization grows its resources and capacity, support staff can be strategically added in these refined areas as needed. The chart below illustrates recommended adjustments to the DBA organization chart with accompanying descriptions.

The **CEO**, guided by the DBA Board, is the primary point of contact for advocacy and is the lead convener both internally within the DBA organization, and externally with the Downtown Berkeley community and beyond. The CEO oversees Ambassador Operations, Economic Development & Placemaking, and Marketing & Communications. The CEO also is responsible for ongoing communications and relations with DBA board members, and provides ongoing relations and response for commercial property owners.

This role also includes proactively pursuing and maintaining partnerships and collaboration with the City of Berkeley, UC Berkeley and other educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and other partners in and around Downtown, communicating about the DBA and its value proposition to the City and the region, selectively issuing statements on policies and initiatives impacting Downtown, advocating for resources and capital improvements, overseeing administrative contractors (accounting, administration, HR, legal, etc.), and ensuring Plan recommendations are implemented in a timely manner.

The **Operations Manager** first and foremost manages the Ambassador contract currently with Streetplus, the DBA's clean and safe vendor, and oversees all aspects of day-to-day maintenance, cleaning, hospitality, beautification, and outreach activities of the Ambassador team and coordination around safety concerns in the district. This role also includes overseeing installation of new and seasonal streetscape amenities (banners, seasonal decorations, etc.) in Downtown, maintaining an inventory of streetscape amenities the DBA is responsible for, coordinating with the Berkeley Police Department on security concerns in the district, and coordinating with partners on services



for the unhoused population. It is also anticipated the Operations Manager will hire and manage the renewed Safety/Community Engagement Ambassador program.

The **Marketing & Communications Manager** provides dedicated leadership in promoting Downtown Berkeley as a vibrant destination for residents, visitors, and businesses. This role oversees the development and execution of marketing campaigns, promotions, and storytelling efforts that highlight Downtown's unique assets and offerings. This role leads stakeholder communications, manages DBA's social media presence and other new technologies, and supports brand-aligned outreach strategies that foster community engagement with merchants and residents alike. In collaboration with staff and partners, the Marketing & Communications Manager also plays a key role in planning and executing events and programming that drive foot traffic and enhance Downtown's visibility and appeal.

The **Economic Development & Placemaking Manager** creates dedicated focus to this new DBA program area to support businesses and implement placemaking initiatives that bring people Downtown. This role oversees small business retention, support, and attraction, relationship management, maintaining and enhancing educational materials for prospective businesses, commercial brokers, and property owners including micro-level data, and leads placemaking and public realm enhancements that drive foot traffic Downtown. In coordination with the City's Office of Economic Development, this Manager provides ongoing business outreach and engagement, data analysis, and support for arts and cultural nonprofit organizations, with a focus on ground floor retail, restaurant, and services. In addition to developing placemaking opportunities in the public realm (e.g., art, sculpture, design, creative landscaping) this Manager works with merchants and property owners to improve and maintain their public facing facades, storefronts, and common area spaces (e.g., landscaping, murals, clean-up, signage, trash handling, etc.)

DBA Board

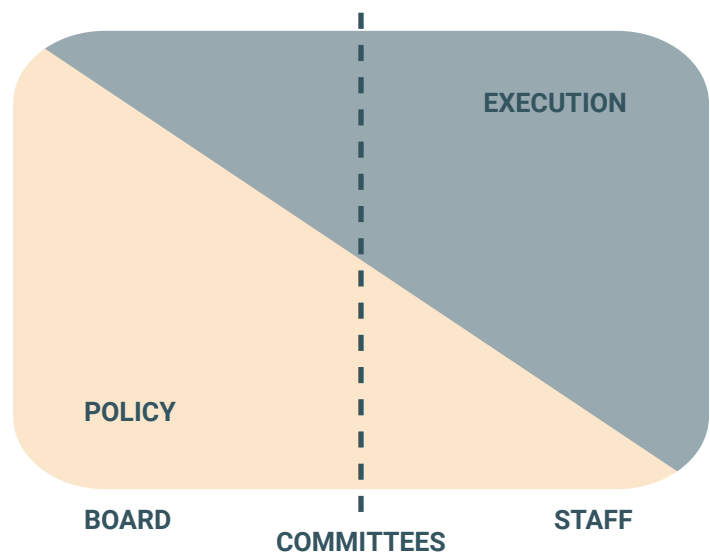
The DBA is governed by a board comprised of up to 22 members representing a variety of property types, businesses and nonprofits, key civic and

institutional partners including the City of Berkeley and UC Berkeley, and non-profits within Downtown Berkeley. As the Downtown Berkeley community continues to evolve, with a growing residential and employee population, it is important that the board adapts to reflect the range of stakeholders that are in the district. As Board seats become available, DBA board and staff should continue to seek viable candidates that diversify the board according to age, race, gender, ability, and stakeholder type.

Committees

To support the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan and other organizational priorities, the DBA can also consider forming committees aligned with the goals of the Strategic Plan. Committees provide a forum for meaningful engagement and allow for a deeper exploration of key issues than is typically possible during full board meetings. While the DBA currently manages three core committees—Executive, Finance, and Governance—there is strong potential to expand this structure to include issue-specific groups that bring in stakeholders with relevant expertise, foster collaboration, and help cultivate the next generation of organizational leadership. Potential committees aligned with Strategic Plan goals are outlined on the following page, while a diagram illustrating DBA staff versus Board versus committee roles is provided below.

Board, Staff, & Committee Responsibilities



- **Clean & Safe Operations:** This committee could offer feedback and guidance to enhance and strengthen DBA's Ambassador program and formalize with other key civic, institutional, and nonprofit partners working on safety and homelessness initiatives in Downtown.
- **Economic Development & Placemaking:** This committee could provide strategic guidance and recommendations to DBA staff and the board related to business support and retention, economic data collection and reporting, outreach to merchants, and public realm enhancements.
- **Marketing, Communications, & Events:** This committee could assist staff and the board in developing marketing, communications and engagement programs, projects and strategies intended to reach, inform, and benefit Downtown stakeholders, and could support events and programming in Downtown in various capacities.
- **Advocacy & Policy:** This committee could provide strategic guidance and recommendations to DBA staff and the board related to policy work and advocacy at the local, regional, or state levels.

Succession Planning

As the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA) prepares for the future following the successful renewal of the Property-Based Improvement District (PBID), the organization will also begin the important process of leadership succession, as the current CEO plans to retire in 2027. To ensure a smooth transition, the DBA will initiate a structured succession planning process that reflects the organization's goals and values. In late 2026, a search committee should be assembled to guide the process, beginning with the development of a job description aligned with the vision and goals outlined in this Strategic Plan. The committee will also shape a thoughtful recruitment strategy, considering whether to pursue candidates regionally or nationally. After a thorough evaluation of applicants, the search committee will present a recommendation to the DBA Board for approval. To support continuity and knowledge transfer, a 30-to-90-day transition period is recommended, allowing the incoming CEO to work closely with the outgoing leadership and ensure a seamless handoff.

Revenue Diversification

Currently, the DBA relies on PBID assessments for approximately 96% of its total revenue. While this funding model has provided a strong foundation for the organization's core operations, diversifying revenue sources is essential to expanding the DBA's capacity to implement the goals and objectives outlined in this strategic plan. By developing new income streams—such as event sponsorships, contracted services, earned income from merchandise and concessions, and potential partnerships with the City—DBA can strengthen its financial resilience, reduce reliance on a single funding source, and increase its ability to invest in innovative programs and long-term initiatives that enhance Downtown Berkeley moving forward. The DBA can either assign each revenue diversification task to an existing team member based on the newly defined staff roles, or consider hiring a part-time or full-time staff member specifically dedicated to resource development.

Grow sponsorship options (e.g. annual meeting and other DBA events)

A key opportunity for DBA to diversify revenue is to enhance sponsorship options for the events and programming the organization produces throughout the year. By developing tiered sponsorship packages tailored to businesses of varying sizes, the DBA can attract a broader range of partners interested in increased visibility and engagement with the Downtown community. Strategic alignment with local and regional businesses and corporations can foster mutually beneficial relationships that enhance event quality while providing sponsors with meaningful exposure. Additionally, formalizing sponsorship benefits, such as branded signage, digital promotion, and on-site activations, can help demonstrate the value of investment and encourage long-term participation.

Contract services (e.g. other districts)

The DBA can further diversify its revenue by selectively contracting its expertise in clean and safe operations, placemaking, or other services to other PBIDs or commercial districts throughout Berkeley. With a proven track record in cultivating a clean and well-maintained environment and public space activation, the DBA is well-equipped to offer

a range of professional services that can be tailored to the unique needs of other districts. By formalizing service agreements, the DBA can generate new revenue streams while contributing to a more vibrant, attractive, and coordinated citywide commercial landscape. This approach not only reinforces the DBA's role as a leader in downtown management but also fosters collaboration and shared success across Berkeley's diverse business communities.

Earned income (e.g. merchandise, event income)

The DBA can further enhance its financial resilience by generating earned income through the sale of merchandise, food, and beverages at events and other strategic touchpoints throughout the year. By offering branded merchandise that reflects the spirit and identity of Downtown Berkeley, as well as curated food and beverage options during events, the DBA can create a new revenue stream while enriching the visitor experience. The DBA can also explore leveraging sponsorship and advertising opportunities on existing public realm assets including IKE Kiosks, banners, and Big Belly panels. These offerings not only support the organization's financial goals but also strengthen brand visibility and foster a deeper sense of community pride. With thoughtful planning and partnerships—such as collaborating with local vendors and artisans—the DBA can ensure these initiatives align with its mission and values while appealing to both residents and visitors.

501(c)(3) (e.g. grants, philanthropic donations)

Creating a 501(c)(3) organization within the DBA brand offers a key opportunity to tap into new and enhanced revenue sources. Key strategies to diversify funding through the 501(c)(3) include:

- Pursue local, state, federal government, and private foundation grants to fund special projects and initiatives
- Identify opportunities for charitable donations to the 501(c)(3) to fund special projects and physical improvements, small business support, events and promotions, or other initiatives, and actively pursue contributions
- Leverage digital platforms to administer online fundraising campaigns, utilize crowdfunding platforms for specific improvements, or explore

using online platforms to collect donations to ensure the process is convenient and accessible

- Add an annual fundraising event that does not compete with the Chamber of Commerce

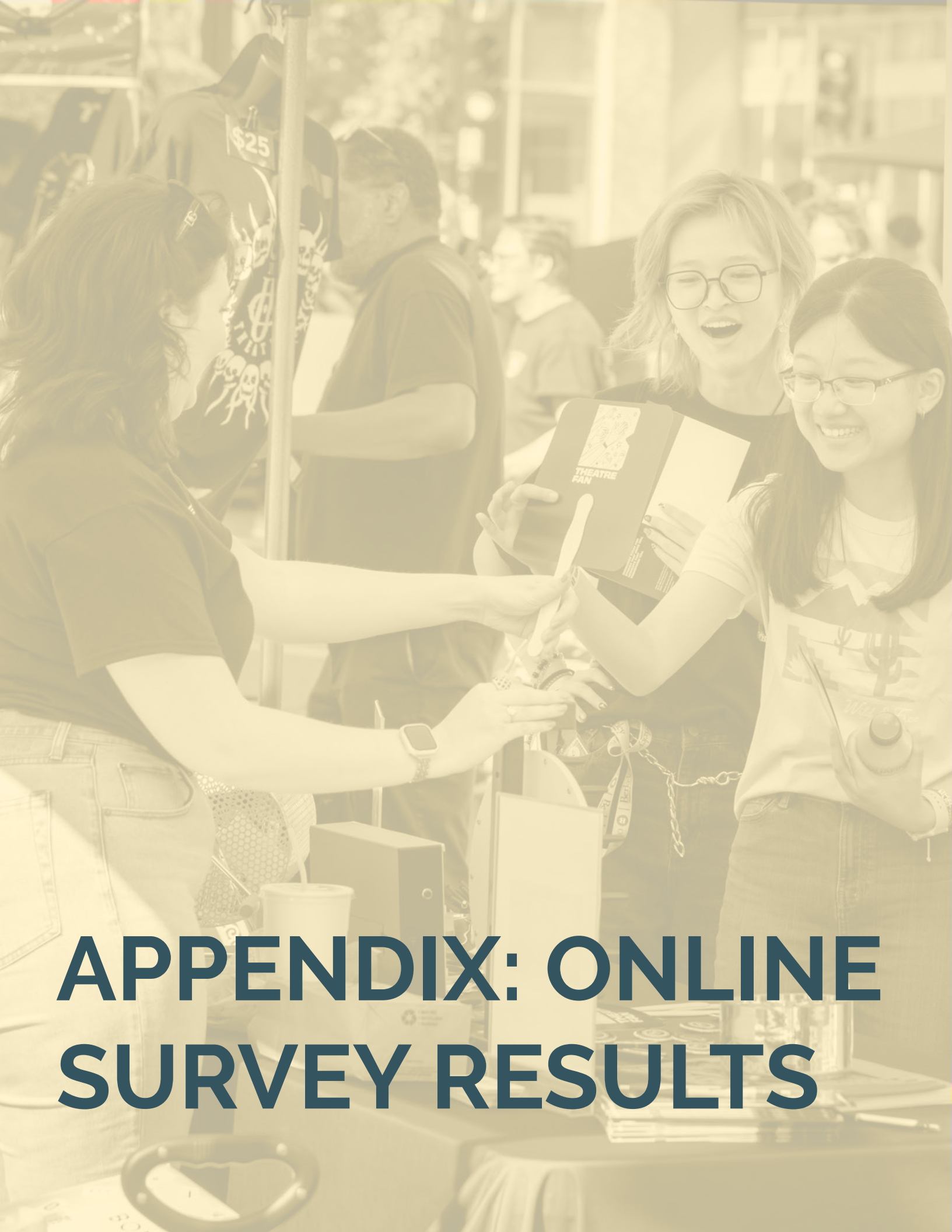
Parking revenue share (e.g. if rates increase)

As the City of Berkeley explores potential adjustments to parking rates, the DBA has an opportunity to establish a parking revenue-sharing agreement that could serve as a valuable source of ongoing funding. By collaborating with the City to allocate a portion of any future parking revenue increases to support enhanced services, the DBA can help ensure that additional funds are reinvested directly into maintaining a clean, safe, and welcoming Downtown environment. This arrangement would create a mutually beneficial partnership—enhancing the overall experience for visitors and supporting economic activity—while providing the DBA with a stable and scalable revenue stream to fund and enhance its core programs and initiatives.

Implications for PBID Renewal

Following DBA Board adoption of this Strategic Plan, a Management District Plan (MDP) will be compiled in compliance with California PBID law. A key component required of the PBID Renewal process, the MDP describes the PBID's rationale and objectives, and any changes to base level services with City of Berkeley, district boundaries, benefit zones, service plan and budget, assessment methodology and adjustments, general benefit, and governance structure.

Following development of the MDP, managing property owner petition and ballot campaigns are key subsequent steps to renewing the PBID. Under California state law, property owners representing more than 50% of the assessments to be paid must sign petitions and return ballots. Property owner support for the PBID and will aid in implementation of Strategic Plan recommendations following completion of the PBID renewal process. To prepare for petition, the MDP and an Engineer's Report will be finalized and supporting materials will be developed. The petition will provide an estimated amount of assessment for each property based upon selected characteristics.



APPENDIX: ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

Downtown Berkeley Association

STRATEGIC PLAN

June 2025