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Cara Houser named new Downtown Berkeley Association CEO

Berkeley, CA — The Downtown Berkeley Association Board of Directors announced today that **Cara Houser** has been offered, and has accepted, the position of CEO for the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA). The DBA manages the business improvement district for Downtown Berkeley and acts as a leader for the business and nonprofit community in the City of Berkeley. Cara will start at the DBA on August 3, transitioning for two months with **John Caner** who is retiring at the end of September after almost 17 years as CEO for the DBA.

“The search committee and board were unanimous in selecting Cara Houser as our next CEO,” said **DBA Board President Tom Parrish**. “Not only does Cara bring a wealth of local experience and relationships to the DBA, but with her strong leadership and communications skills, she emerged as the clear choice amongst a very strong field of candidates. We are delighted to have Cara leading our Downtown into its next stage of growth and vitality, advancing our strategic plan and goals and sustaining a welcoming and prosperous Downtown community. We are also thankful to John Caner for his nearly 17 years of service to the DBA and the Downtown community.”

“This is an especially exciting time for Downtown Berkeley, with a surge of new innovation, arts, retail, and housing investment,” said **incoming CEO Cara Houser**. “I’m honored to join the DBA and work with our dedicated community, partners, businesses, team, and board. I’m inspired by the impact the DBA has made and energized by its potential to build on this momentum and create an even more vibrant, welcoming, joyful, and prosperous Downtown.”

Mayor Adena Ishii states, “Cara brings great experience in economic vitality, community development, and commercial real estate, which is valuable for this position. I am looking forward to advancing our collaboration to elevate Downtown Berkeley by activating public spaces, welcoming new businesses, and creating a safe environment that can be enjoyed by all Berkeleyans and visitors alike!”

District 4 Councilmember Igor Tregub also comments, “While Cara has big shoes to fill with John’s departure, she brings a new set of skills and leadership to continue activating and enlivening our Downtown community. Our team is excited to partner with her on projects big and small, whether developing innovative new programs to bring folks to the heart of our city or paying attention to details that make for a clean, welcoming, and attractive destination.”

About Cara Houser

Cara Houser is a seasoned real estate and community development executive with over 20 years of experience advancing complex development projects, strategic partnerships, and urban vitality in Berkeley and across the Bay Area. She has led projects from acquisition through entitlement, design, construction, and operations, having helped create 3,000 homes and more than \$1.5 billion in value while building trusted relationships with civic leaders, businesses, investors, and community partners. Throughout her career, she has combined broad vision, strong execution, and a collaborative leadership style to create partnerships that strengthen communities and deliver meaningful, lasting impact.

Recognized as an award-winning author, speaker, and facilitator, Cara cultivates engagement, excellence, and thriving teams and organizations. A UC Berkeley alum and longtime East Bay resident, Cara brings deep local roots, strong stakeholder engagement expertise, and a commitment to vibrant, innovative, and welcoming places that support and inspire the communities they serve.

About the DBA

The [Downtown Berkeley Association \(DBA\)](#) is a 501(c)(6) membership nonprofit representing hundreds of property owners, merchants, nonprofits, and other businesses in Downtown Berkeley. The mission of the DBA is to provide the leadership and enhanced services to create and sustain a clean, safe, welcoming, and prosperous Downtown. The DBA is largely funded by, and manages, the Downtown Berkeley Property-based Business Improvement District (DBPBID), governed by the [DBPBID Management Plan](#). In May 2026 the DBPBID was renewed for another 10 years, by a weighted vote of 81.5% of property owners, who pay a supplemental property tax assessment (determined by square footage, usage, and zone) to fund the DBA PBID operations.

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