

## Downtown Oakland Specific Plan Youth Input

### Process

Young people are often left out of the planning process or engaged in only token ways, and Planning staff is determined to correct this mistake. A plan for Downtown Oakland should account for the needs of young people now and in the future, as well as for the needs of the adults who today's youth will have become by the time the plan is fully implemented. To meaningfully engage youth, the Plan Downtown team has taken a multi-pronged approach:

- **City of Oakland Youth Advisory Commission.** Plan Downtown staff has met on multiple occasions with commissioners, middle and high school aged, during their regular meeting. Staff gave an overview of the planning process, and then facilitated a discussion about how they use Downtown and what would make Downtown a more valuable and welcoming space for youth. Commissioners were also asked for their input into how local government can best continue to engage youth in planning processes.
- **MetWest and Skyline High School Y-PLAN Program.** The City has been lucky to partner with UC Berkeley Center for Cities and Schools' Y-PLAN (Youth-Plan, Learn, Act Now!) program. This program has worked with four classes of 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school students (Sustainable Systems, Alternative Energy, Humanities, and Advisory classes) to apply the Y-PLAN process to planning the future of Downtown. The Plan Downtown team acted as their client and UC Berkeley students as their mentors. The students presented recommendations at City Hall and provided policy briefs on issues such as social equity and greenhouse gas reduction. Additionally, a mini Y-PLAN was held with Kindergarten and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from Chabot Elementary.



- **Youth Summit.** Approximately 80 young people and youth advocates came together on March 16, 2016 at City Hall to discuss youth ideas and needs for Downtown. Co-led by Planning and Y-PLAN staff, the Youth Summit worked with youth-serving organizations Downtown and around Oakland to bring a range of students from different backgrounds and neighborhoods a chance to hear from one another and share their recommendations with the City.
- **Youth Service Provider Focus Group.** Plan Downtown staff held a focus group and invited about sixty youth-serving organizations from around Oakland. The purpose was to learn about their organizational needs from the Downtown and their perspective on their youth clients' needs, as well as to encourage them to invite their students into the planning process.

Additional work with youth will continue on into the future of the Downtown Specific Plan process, bolstered by the work of the equity strategy team.

## Feedback

Across the board, young people have repeatedly said that they all see Downtown as a place for rich people, and not for young people or even people from Oakland, especially from East Oakland. They experience all the retail as unaffordable for them, with the exception of a few “hidden” food spots, and focused on boutiques, restaurants and bars that serve people who aren’t from Oakland (either they work Downtown, or they’ve newly moved Downtown). They go to other cities to shop and hang out in retail settings. Young people do not feel welcome Downtown; they almost all have experienced having security guards, ambassadors and businesses yell at them, kick them out of public spaces (even Oakland School for the Arts students who were playing dodgeball in Frank H. Ogawa Plaza during PE with adult supervision), or at least stare at them as if they don’t belong or are up to something criminal. They tend to feel comfortable in restaurants and other places where the patrons look like them. Some youth expressed concern that the City will not pay attention to youth voices even if they do participate.



The adult youth advocates confirmed all these comments about youth not being welcomed by the community Downtown, including how young people – particularly young men of color – are singled out for oversight and harassment (even sometimes as children at home in their own condominium complexes). They also pointed to places where youth are welcomed, such as a few shops and cafes where the business owners provide safe havens for youth.

The bright spot is that there are some places where youth feel welcome: the ice rink, Snow Park, the park by Oakland School for the Arts, and to some extent Jack London Square. A few youth said they do feel welcome, hang out in the center of Downtown near the stores, and have family, friends and programs Downtown. They also have many recommendations for improvements to the Downtown.

In terms of youth engagement, youth participants think that government needs to be persistent and engage them in actual projects (like murals and music, for example) rather than just asking them to contribute ideas. They recommended using the Warriors to interact with the community, facilitating paid internships in development and planning, and going to the schools to do workshops there instead of asking students to go somewhere else. They recommended youth programs that interact with the community, involving youth at a younger age, building mentorships and alliances with mentors, and having a teen work at City hall.

Additional recommendations for the Downtown Specific Plan are:

- **Activities:** sports, parks, cultural events, games for kids, street festivals, art fair
- **Affordability:** E 12<sup>th</sup> St., tax & redistribute money from corporations, keep youth, students and families in mind regarding affordability, homes for everyone, affordable food for everyone

- **Retail:** mall, cheaper cafes, affordable stores, multi-cultural food trucks & festivals, shopping mall with stores of local designers
- **Culture:** homeless assistance, less police/police violence, safety, cleanliness (particularly in parks around lake, and in public restrooms), people of all races, stop gentrification, Black Panther monument
- **Engagement:** youth-led programs, youth on decision-making bodies that make substantial decisions, civil corps, mayor approval of youth, internships with the city and local business, take advantage of Warriors, famous Oaklanders
- **Education/Career:** internships (paid, including with the City), college prep, tutoring, businesses that employ youth, sex education, increase youth awareness of services, organizations and education
- **Services:** tutoring, mentoring, child care, legal services, services for young adults 18-26, medical care, dental care, youth support group, art center, safety patrol, 24-hour BART, drug rehab, require liquor stores to sell affordable and healthy food
- **Amenities:** youth bike share, youth center and event space, free wifi, free busing, skate park, elderly centers, homeless shelters, exercise stations around the lake, community-based urban gardens, spaces that attract people of different ethnic groups, art centers, all-ages spaces like malls and movie theaters, better lighting (sensor-controlled LED streetlamps), bike lanes, green space, parking, parklets, drinkable water; family friendly streets and staircases; fun play structures for all ages, public/edible gardens, attractive and fun trash cans, light-up crosswalks, creative seating, art/music studios, athletic gyms, gender-neutral bathrooms
- **Environment:** reduce pollution, encourage walking and public transportation, car-free pedestrian boulevards, solar panels and charging stations, more green, rooftop gardens, wildlife with trees and plants for kids and animals, a pond with fish; require separated compost, recycling and trash bins; pneumatic waste systems for restaurants, switch AC Transit to hydrogen fuel cell buses; solar electric bike share, require smart thermostats and white roofs; permeable pavers, bioswales, use recycled water for landscaping

