It's Called People's Park for a Reason.

"As long as the world shall last there will be wrongs, and if no man objected and no man rebelled, those wrongs would last forever."

Clarence Darrow

Who We Are

The People's Park Historic District Advocacy Group brings together historians, preservationists, student groups, and concerned citizens to document and preserve the district comprising People's Park and the historic properties which encircle it.

People's Park was community land before 1967, when the University of California acquired it through a dubious use of eminent domain, and then abandoned it to become a neighborhood blight. Citizens restored the block in 1969, creating an open-space park which was sorely needed then, and is even more so now. It is the only park in the most densely populated area of Berkeley and is certainly the city's most famous landmark. It is the only park protected not only as a designated historic landmark, but as a "quintessential public forum" by the late Judge Henry Ramsey's (still operative) court order.

We propose making the irreplaceable open space of People's Park the centerpiece of an historic district dedicated to enhancing the public's understanding of the Southside area's powerful role in the social, political, and cultural development of the city of Berkeley. We propose this through education, events, public projects, walking tours, lectures, and more.

For more information or to add your support, contact us at
peoplesparkhxdist@gmail.com.

The People's Park Historic District Advocacy Group

Born fifty years ago amid conflict and turmoil, People's Park is today the center of a new controversy – but with a difference: this time it is not due to the spontaneous actions of a motley crowd of students and activists, but to the conscious and disingenuous actions – or rather, non-actions – of the venerable University of California.

Despite its fame as a memorial to Berkeley's role in the pivotal events of the 1960s, and its status as a registered historical landmark since the early 1980s, the park struggles to maintain event schedules and community gardens under the willful neglect and ad hoc mismanagement of its nominal owner, UC Berkeley. Water is shut off, garbage collection neglected, restrooms locked during concert days, and park improvements torn out. UC Berkeley works diligently to undermine support for the park through a campaign of misinformation and deterioration.

Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Center Park, only a mile away, provides a striking contrast. Owned by the city and maintained by Berkeley's Parks and Recreation Department, it is trim, clean, and inviting, commonly enjoyed by families and other groups. The single difference between the two parks is maintenance and management – and, of course, ownership.

"First they ignore you,
then they ridicule you,
then they fight you,
then you win."

Mahatma Ghandi

Apart from its own status as a designated historic landmark, People's Park is the centerpiece of a richly historic district, surrounded by as many as sixteen other landmarked properties, each noted for local, state, and national significance. Collectively, these sites represent the beginnings and development of both the University of California and the City of Berkeley. Individually, they stand as monuments to the genius and vision of a host of celebrated architects and city planners, all of whom have had major influence on the urban landscape not only of Berkeley, but the Greater Bay Area and beyond.

Despite the obvious significance of the entire district, many of its parts remain little known and even less appreciated. This booklet includes a brief outline of our proposal to rectify that situation, but in the meantime its very heart – People's Park – is in danger of total destruction.

By what principle should this historic landmark be obliterated and forgotten?

"A people without knowledge of their history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots."

Marcus Garvey

A Few of the Designated Landmarks Contained in the People's Park Historic District

All Photos by Daniella Thompson

1. First Church of Christ, Scientist • 2619 Dwight Way • Architect Bernard Maybeck • 1910

2. Nave of First Church of Christ, Scientist

3. Anna Head School (Miss Head's Preparatory School for Girls) • 2538 Channing Way Architects Soule Edgar Fisher (1892) • Walter H. Ratcliff Jr. (1911–1927)

4. Anna Head School Quad

5. American Baptist School of the West • 2606 Dwight Way • Architects Julia Morgan, Walter H. Ratcliff Jr. et al (1918–1964)

6. Baptist Divinity School Portal

7. Stella King Building • 2502 Dwight Way • Architect Albert Dodge Coplin • 1901

8. George Edwards House • 2530 Dwight Way • A. H. Broad Designer/Builder • 1886

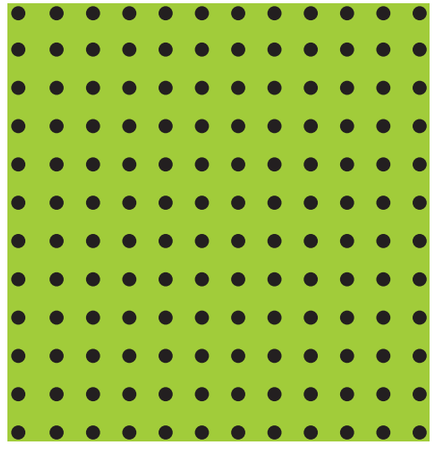
9. Alexander C. Stuart House • 2524 Dwight Way • Architects Pissis & Moore • 1891

10. Casa Bonita Apartments • 2605 Haste Street • Architect John Albert Marshall II • 1928

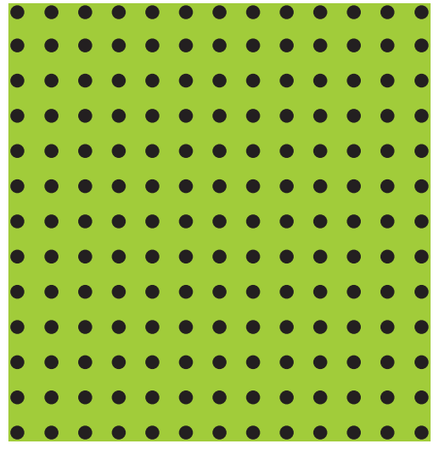
11. Four landmarks on Regent Street: Lucinda Reames House #1 • Architect A. Dodge Coplin, 1902 • Lucinda Reames House #2 • A. Dodge Coplin, 1903 • William Wilkinson House • A. Dodge Coplin, 1903 • Mary J. Berg House • Builder William Garfield May, 1901

12. Ellen Blood House • 2508 Regent Street • Architect R. Gray Frise • 1891

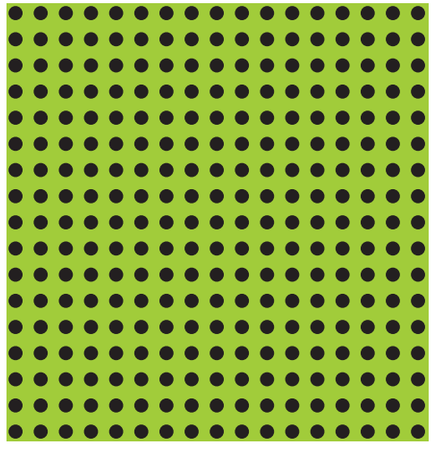
Population Densities per Acre of Public Park Space*



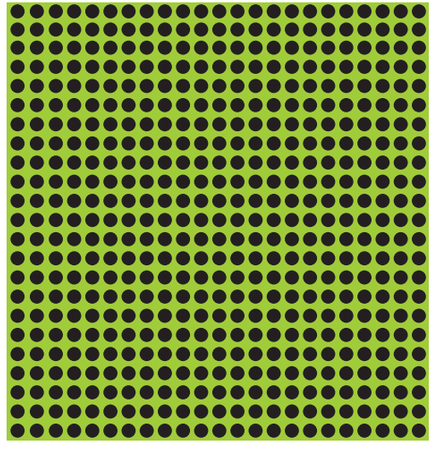
Sacramento
Population: 508,000
Pop. Density: 4,900/Mi²
Parks: 3,200 Acres
Parks Density: 158/Acre



Oakland
Population: 430,000
Pop. Density: 7,005/Mi²
Parks: 2,500 Acres
Parks Density: 172/Acre



San Jose
Population: 1,009,000
Pop. Density: 5,816/Mi²
Parks: 3,480 Acres
Parks Density: 289/Acre



Berkeley
Population: 121,643
Pop. Density: 11,614/Mi²
Parks: 230 Acres
Parks Density: 528/Acre

The university's need for student housing is undeniable and legitimate, as is the crisis-level housing shortage throughout Berkeley and the entire Bay Area. However, the university itself has exacerbated the situation by overenrollment, from 32,000 in 2005 to 43,000 in 2019, with further increases planned. While People's Park is a convenient target for development, UC's plans ignore not only the park's history and landmark status, but also Berkeley's long-standing lack of open public space, a deficiency noted as long ago as 1915 by city planner Walter Hegemann, who observed that Oakland had (at the time) only about one-tenth of the park area it should have by accepted American standards, and Berkeley had only about one-sixth of Oakland's acreage. Obviously, the city's population-to-parks ratio has improved over the last hundred years. But, as the graphic at left illustrates, it is still far short of optimal, even by the standards of a century ago.

The elimination of People's Park would be a significant and irreversible step – in the wrong direction.

"For lifelong city dwellers, sky, open space, and green expanse are as oxygen to a drowning man."

Tom Boldman

*For those who are inclined to count the dots in the graphics above it should be noted that, for the sake of visual symmetry and round numbers, they are intended only as close approximations.

UCB's Proposed Design for the Site of People's Park

There is no question that the various contributors to the university's plan do excellent work. Taken by itself, the proposed design is attractive and accommodating – or would be if it were not ignoring certain inconvenient realities, the most salient of which may be that *this spot is taken.*

Presentations of the plan that are intended for public consumption are liberally sprinkled with such phrases as "inclusive," "community," "welcoming,""lush planting," and "sylvan glade," Not unexpectedly, this is the warm and fuzzy – and disingenuous – language of pr and advertising copywriters. But the words "history," "legacy," and "commemorative" also appear sporadically, a vague suggestion that preservation of the park's history will be incorporated in some way. In plain language, this means that People's Park will cease to exist except in the words of a few randomly placed plaques.

What is undeniable is that the open green space remaining in this design may still be open, and may still be green, but it is emphatically *not* public.

"Protest beyond the law is not a departure from democracy; it is absolutely essential to it."

Howard Zinn

Aerial View of People's Park Looking Southeast from Haste Street Toward Dwight Way & Bowditch

Same View Overlaid with Artist's Rendering of the University of California's Planned Development

Due to lack of visual reference, the artist's rendering can only approximate the surface features of the various structures. However, it reproduces the angle of the sun in the original photograph, so all shadows shown are reasonably accurate.

It isn't as if the university has no options; it has identified nine sites it owns for development, many of which are neither parks nor landmarks. Some are already graded for construction, unlike People's Park, which spreads across an underground creek and would require culverting and disruptive relocation.

The university itself has often affirmed the importance of open space and landmarks, yet their current plan would destroy both a much needed 2.8 acres and a widely revered site of historical significance. They also acknowledge that they have multiple – and clearly more reasonable – alternative sites suitable for development.

Why then does the university target People's Park? It's difficult to believe there is not an element of spite in this choice, given the history between the two entities. But our purpose here is to object, not to speculate. We don't pretend that UCB's needs and plans for the development of student housing are easy or uncomplicated. But one thing seems simple enough:

Berkeley **needs** the potential of People's Park. UCB merely **wants** it.

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