

BETTER BERKELEY TIMES

NEWS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

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IN THIS ISSUE

Changing of the Guard
Page 2

Community Priorities
Page 2

Sick and Tired
Page 3

Acting Responsibly
Page 4

Anyone Give a S*?**
Page 4

Town vs. Gown
Page 5

The Auditor's Job
Page 5

Reader Comments
Page 6

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As of September 8, more than 70 percent of Berkeley's population had been vaccinated. After much controversy, debate, and fanfare, students have returned to school. UC Berkeley has reopened to in-person learning and students roam downtown. Traffic has increased, and finding parking is more difficult. People are masking up and bustling about. Things feel "busier", but are they "better"?

In our third issue of the *Better Berkeley Times*, we share the experiences of everyday Berkeleyans expressing the collective pain of the last 16 months. From business owners to students, from housing providers to homeowners, we've seen, overheard, and spoken about the current Berkeley experience.

One thing is for sure: nothing feels as it once did. Scattered amongst window fronts in downtown Berkeley are signs of empty storefronts. For lease signs beckon to those that dare open a new business in these difficult times. And those who managed to stay in place are working double-time to stay afloat.

All eyes are on City Council as they return to work on September 14. The City Manager has proposed another 60-day extension of the proclaimed state of emergency. Combined with the new (re)masking requirements and proof of vaccination for restaurants, gyms, and events with over 1,000 patrons, it's no wonder some people are feeling depressed and defeated.

As we navigate our way through the next phase of this new way of existing, we will continue to report on Berkeley's pandemic comeback!

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Many of these newsletter topics come from you, the reader. Whether overheard in a coffee shop or culled from a letter to City Council, we're listening to what's on the Berkeley voters' mind.

Berkeley has always been a haven for those wanting to effect change. Countless numbers of community members speak out in hopes that elected officials might listen. While community input is important, the most impactful statement you can make is when you vote a candidate in – or out – of office. If a politician's primary interest is to serve the community, then they are wholly dependent on that community to re-elect them when the time comes. November 2022 will be Berkeley's next opportunity to make a statement. Four City Council positions will be up for election. Do you know who your city councilmember is, and would you re-elect him or her if the election were today?

DISTRICT 1 * RASHI KESARWANI

DISTRICT 4 * KATE HARRISON

DISTRICT 7 * RIGEL ROBINSON

DISTRICT 8 * LORI DROSTE



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Every two years, City Council spends approximately \$30,000 to hire an outside research firm to conduct a community survey. It's centered around a Berkeley voter's taste for possible ballot measure subjects, but also includes questions about the city's perceived effectiveness as well as how the community ranks its overall "community concerns."

We reviewed the last five surveys and asked the question, "What issues do Berkeley citizens want their elected officials to address?" (ranked in order of importance).



1. Improve education & schools
2. Manage city budget
3. Create jobs & economic development
4. Reduce crime
5. Address homelessness



1. Provide affordable housing
2. Provide homeless services
3. Improve n'borhood & community safety
4. Improve shelters for natural disasters
5. Improve parks & playgrounds



1. Improve education & schools
2. Create jobs & economic development
3. Build affordable housing
4. Reduce crime
5. Address homelessness



1. Build affordable housing
2. Address homelessness
3. Improve education & schools
4. Improve city infrastructure
5. Reduce crime



1. Respond to public health emergencies
2. Provide affordable housing & homeless services
3. Address climate change & sustainability
4. Improve fire safety & emergency medical response
5. Improve wildfire prevention



SICK AND TIRED OF BEING SICK AND TIRED

It's no secret: Berkeley residents are frustrated, and from the sounds of it, they aren't going to take it anymore. After years of supporting increased parcel taxes and approving bond measures for the "prevention of homelessness," many have lost faith in their elected officials' ability to decrease the impact of homelessness on the city.

Increased chatter on social media platforms and community email groups shows a growing disdain for the increased number of tents and garbage associated with the encampments. Many neighbors insist that over the years they have done their best to be as compassionate and understanding as possible for those who have trouble staying housed. **They understand there are many barriers to finding housing, including affordability, safety, and accessibility, but question who gets to determine any Berkeley resident's quality of life.**

A resident group calling themselves "Operation Squeaky Wheel" has launched a communications effort to demand city officials enforce laws that currently exist and make good on promises made to the voter. They ask that city officials "provide true compassion for all residents and businesses, including the unhoused."

In their pleas for other community members to join them they say, "We don't believe it is compassionate to allow the current situation to continue as is. It is a lose-lose scenario for every single Berkeley resident." The group has been successful in getting

a myriad of Berkeley residents to voice their concerns to elected officials. By means of a strategic communications timeline, every week a volunteer sends an email to the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager. Designed to showcase a variety of experiences, business owners and residents alike share their stories of diminished quality of life. They maintain the increased spike in unhoused encampments has resulted in more open-air drug use, aggravated assault, and street conditions that risk public health and welfare.

Given that a considerable amount of money has been set aside from recent parcel taxes and bond measures, many voters are incredulous that the city's homeless population has increased. The city recently opened the West Berkeley Horizon Transitional Shelter. With room for 50 homeless residents, at time of publication only 30 were regularly staying at the shelter. The opening of the shelter came with much fanfare and a lot of volunteer hours prepping for the new inhabitants. It also came with a promise by the city to enforce the 2018 sidewalk ordinance.

OVERHEARD

“

HAS IT OCCURRED TO ANYONE THAT MAYBE IT'S THE COYOTES WHO HAVE BEEN STEALING CATALYTIC CONVERTERS? THEY HEAR 'CAT' AND THEY'RE OFF TO THE RACES!" ~NINA J.

HA
HA

”

JOIN OPERATION SQUEAKY WHEEL
operationsqueakywheel@gmail.com



ACTING RESPONSIBLY

Berkeley is not alone in its share of encampments, increased unhoused individuals, and struggles with quality of life for its residents. Major cities across the U.S., including Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles, New York City, and Las Vegas, are all struggling to find viable solutions.

In Seattle, business owners and residents attempted to take their growing dissatisfaction to the polls. The "Compassion Seattle Ballot Measure" **sought to force the city to fund and act upon an array of services and shelters for Seattle's unhoused** amidst growing "homeless fatigue." As an amendment to the City Charter, it made the city responsible for providing 2,000 units of shelter and associated services to individuals by January 2022. Once the services and shelters were put in place the city would have been required to keep the city's parks, playgrounds, sports fields, public spaces, and sidewalks and streets clear of encampments.

Homeless advocates eschewed the ballot measure, saying it provided reason for the criminalization of homelessness. But residents, business leaders, and the Public Defenders Association said it was necessary to change the trajectory of the current climate. Like the taxpayers of Berkeley, Seattle's business and homeowner tax base have seen little to no success in spending money on proposed "solutions." On September 3 a Superior Court Judge struck down the ballot initiative saying it would potentially "supersede the legal powers of the state, regional leaders, and Seattle City Council.

But advocates of the ballot measures had pointed to the landmark 2019 *Martin v. Boise* legal case, which held that cities cannot enforce anti-camping ordinances if they do not have enough homeless shelter beds available for their homeless population. The decision was based on the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. This begs the question, could Berkeley be next with its own ballot measure?

WHAT IS THE "HOMELESS INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX?"

Developers, government bureaucrats, and activist nonprofits that have turned homelessness into a profit center and whom benefit from the continued state of the unhoused.



Does Anyone Give a S***?

With increased homelessness has come a push to provide sanitary options. Councilmembers and others provide Porta Potties and hand-washing stations. When tents took over the intersection at Adeline and MLK, private donations were collected and Porta Potties appeared.

Over time it appears some Porta Potties have gone through a "re-modeling" (see picture below) and now include curbside views of empty lots. Upkeep by the city of the toilets is minimal and people have resorted to using the handwashing stations as bathing facilities. So really, how sanitary is *that*?



Courtesy of Berkeley Resident

TOWN VS. GOWN

The City of Berkeley's love/hate relationship with UC Berkeley took a big turn in a recent settlement agreement. The agreement was a result of the city being party to two lawsuits, one which opposed the university's planned intercollegiate beach volleyball facility at the Clark Kerr Campus, and the other in response to the university's more than 33 percent increase in student population. The City of Berkeley engaged in the lawsuits because of both the financial and environmental impact of the university's growth. More students on campus mean increased costs for city services such as fire, police, and waste management.

The city and UC Regents agreed to:

- UC will pay \$4.1m in 2021 and an increased 3 percent per year for the next 15 years.
- The city will dismiss (with prejudice) its lawsuits against the Upper Hearst Project and the Clark Kerr Covenants.
- The city will not file against the university's Long-Range Development Plan nor the Anchor House or People's Park projects.



AN AUDITOR'S JOB

The City Auditor is an elected position in Berkeley. Our current auditor is Jenny Wong, who reports to the City Council. According to the auditor's website, the mission of the department is to "promote transparency and accountability in Berkeley government." This is achieved through independent evaluations of city programs and activities. The Fiscal Year 2022 Audit Plan reflects the office's steadfast commitment to continuous improvement by enhancing the value, products, staffing, communications, and overall impact of the Berkeley City Auditor's Office on behalf of Berkeley residents, businesses, and visitors."

Worth noting is that city auditors work independently, investigating areas of city government that they assess may be questionable. Berkeley's auditor is up for election in November of 2022.

FY22 AUDIT

PLANNED ENGAGEMENTS OF THE THE BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

Financial Condition - Will examine the city's financial well-being and compare results to those in other similar cities.

Rent Stabilization Board - Will examine the Rent Board's finances and operations, something that has never been done in its 41-year history.

Homelessness - Will shed light on the city's investment and role in addressing issues related to homelessness.

Employee Retention - Deferred from FY20 due to the pandemic, will examine factors that affect employee retention.

Ongoing Engagements - Will continue analysis of police department budget.

Source: City Auditor Fiscal Year 2022 Audit Plan



READER COMMENTS

"Thank you for being a voice of reason in Berkeley!"
Anne R.

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"Thanks for the newsletter. Much needed." *Lorenzo A.*

.....

"The citizenry itself follow like blind sheep voting to tax themselves again and again with nothing concrete to show for it. Your newsletter sheds light on the issues those in power want to avoid and no one seems to want to talk about." *John C.*

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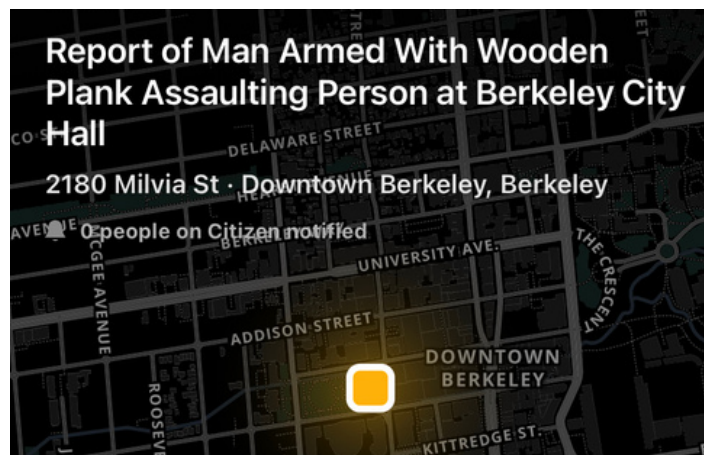
"As a Berkeley homeowner since the 1980s, I share the concerns expressed in your recent newsletter about the future implications of deteriorating infrastructure, fiscal extravagance, and homelessness." *David W.*

.....

"Cease and desist sending your right wing 'newsletter' to my home, or I will request assistance through the USPS." *Nancy P.*

DANGEROUS STREETS

If you're a user of the crime reporting app Citizen, and you've noticed an uptick in reports of assault, robbery, and brandishing of weapons, you are not alone. Residents on social media platforms such as Twitter and Nextdoor.com openly worry about the their safety and the safety of their loved ones. A recent notification shows that even City Hall and its inhabitants are not immune to potential physical and emotional assault.



ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT BERKELEY'S FUTURE?

Join **US!** www.betterberkeleytimes.com