

A Great Neighborhood

Broadway-Valdez Specific Plan: Policy Platform



The City of Oakland is planning for a new retail district in the Broadway-Valdez area. Here are policies that will ensure it is a complete and environmentally sustainable neighborhood.



Viable retail for Oakland's bottom line

Oakland needs retail stores providing a variety of goods and services for local residents to both provide sales tax that the City needs as well as to make the Broadway-Valdez district a hub that meets nearly all of the local residents' immediate shopping needs. A successful retail district will include both major retail and neighborhood-serving, "Mom and Pop" independent shops.



We suggest that the City of Oakland view this effort not just as an opportunity to build retail, but also as an opportunity to cultivate a more complete community. New stores in the neighborhood will decrease the time that local residents spend in the car, driving to other retail destinations outside the city.



Homes we can all afford

With good urban design, we can accommodate a healthy mix of shops and homes in the Broadway-Valdez district. The area would greatly benefit from at least 1,800 new homes, the amount that the specific plan consultant team has deemed feasible in the short term. Of these 1,800 homes, at least 300 to 500 should be affordable to low-income Oakland residents. Affordable homes should be distributed throughout the plan area.



Asian Pacific Environmental Network



Valdez Plaza Residents



All Oaklanders, including seniors, families, people with special needs, and those who work in the area, should benefit from growth and development. Moreover, people who work here should be able to find homes nearby, improving quality of life, reducing bothersome traffic congestion, and benefiting the environment and the local economy.



Oakland's Broadway can become the City's main street by balancing retail with homes.

Feasible parking policies

We all want to ensure that shoppers have convenient access to Broadway retail amenities. Rather than using valuable land for unsightly, oversized parking garages, we want to maximize the ability to build things that benefit people and create value, like shops, homes, and offices. At \$30,000 to \$50,000 per space, excessive parking would be a financial drain for the City and for developers.

The City of Oakland should set an upper limit on the total number of parking spaces for the area. This number should be based on actual parking use in similar districts that also have good public transportation, and should be ramped down in each successive phase of development as increased density creates more viable transportation options in the district. The City should also price parking spaces to ensure parking availability and to fund improvements to the area, like new benches, street and sidewalk cleaning, and landscaping.

This is an approach that has fueled a dramatic turnaround for other California districts such as downtown Redwood City and Old Pasadena. Oakland cannot fulfill its ambitious Climate Action Plan unless the City uses land use planning to cultivate more walkable, bikable communities that reduce unnecessary driving.

Quality jobs for Oakland residents

The plan should put Oakland back to work with quality union jobs that pay family-supporting wages with benefits. The City of Oakland should target the construction, planning, and architecture work resulting from this plan toward local firms and Oakland residents, including nonprofit affordable housing developers. Retail and office tenants should be strongly encouraged to hire Oakland workers. To sustain good jobs, the plan should also connect local workers with state-approved job apprenticeship programs.

Walkable streets with compact homes

We want walkable streets, with trees, benches, bus shelters, wide sidewalks, plazas, and linkages to Lake Merritt and Glen Echo Creek. Compact development uses land efficiently, meeting Oakland's housing needs in a way that places a minimal burden on City services and infrastructure. The use of concrete for walking surfaces should be kept to a minimum to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, improve walking comfort, and address permeable surface requirements. Buildings should be set back from the sidewalk as needed to make room for tables, benches, trees, and other street furniture.

Traffic calming and wider sidewalks will create an environment more attractive to retailers and shoppers alike. New residents and visitors will add "eyes and ears" to the street, a cost-effective and proven approach to curbing crime in a time where budget shortfalls pose an ongoing threat to public safety.

Green building and infrastructure

Green infrastructure that has proven successful in other cities should be included in any new development proposal. Permeable pavement, bicycle lanes, and bioswales alongside roads, to collect rainwater and prevent runoff, are all examples of infrastructure that has a lower impact on the natural environment without greatly increasing the cost of development. Another key component of green infrastructure is green building standards (LEED), which should be a requirement for all new development. LEED standards also may qualify new developments for state and federal funding.



Greener ways to get around

As a transit-first city, all new development in Oakland should embrace public transportation and support its viability. While stores will need parking to succeed, the focus should be on supporting alternative modes of transportation to reduce Oakland's carbon footprint. The new B shuttle, which is free to ride and which runs along Broadway from Jack London Square to Grand Avenue, could be expanded to serve the new homes, jobs, and shops along Broadway.

Bicycle and pedestrian paths should be included in the initial design that connects the development to Lake Merritt, Piedmont Avenue, and downtown, allowing easy access to these nearby areas. Bike lanes that are 6' 6" wide, the new design standard, should tie into destinations and connect to other bike lanes at both ends of the plan area. There should be adequate, distributed bike parking throughout the plan area. In some cases, car parking spots should be swapped out for bicycles and scooter parking. A bike station, similar to the ones at Fruitvale Transit Village and at the Downtown Berkeley BART station, could be located near BART and serve the larger community as well as shoppers, linked to the rest of the city through the network of bike lanes.

Adaptive reuse of existing buildings

Reusing existing structures and building stock is extremely preferable to razing and rebuilding, from an environmental standpoint and is sometimes more cost-effective. From a placemaking perspective, adaptive reuse also helps to preserve a sense of character and history that makes an area appealing and can boost its attraction as a place where people want to spend time, which will in turn support new retail. There are several distinct buildings within the study area that merit consideration for reuse.

It also helps if there is diversity in urban design so that specific buildings are identifiable on the skyline. The district should feature a recognizable landmark building, in height and design, which signifies this area as a destination. The extra height allowed on this building would make more land available for open space. Tall buildings should be properly spaced to avoid shadowing and open up air currents and view corridors.