Appendix D: West Oakland Walk

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WEST OAKLAND WALK

The West Oakland Walk is an urban design concept intended to leverage existing city assets into a “social circuit” for walking, biking, organic gardening, exercising and socializing, all activities that build sustainable communities.

The West Oakland Walk would knit together the parks and public places of Central and West Oakland by improving a 4.5 mile loop of existing city streets and sidewalks into an urban greenway, running East – West from Lake Merritt at the center of the city to Central Station (16th Street Train Station area) at its western edge (see Figure D-1).

Along this greenway loop are 23 parks, the downtown, many of the city’s most significant historic buildings, four BART stops and seven freeway entrances and exits. The parks, the building and the streets exist now, so there is no idea to take shape. The West Oakland Walk (W.O.W.) is a “found” design that is intended to help transform the way people see and use Oakland by capitalizing on the unification of substantial in-place public and private infrastructure with a single large-scale geometric stroke.

Starting at the western perimeter of the city, the West Oakland Walk travels eastward along 14th Street, across Freeway 980 until it reaches Lakeside Drive, then a short leg up to 19th St. where it continues westward, jogging down to 18th St., back across 980 and onto the final short leg of Wood St. where it reconnects with 14th. Few downtown cores are endowed with the particular combinations of public park space, public service structures and historical legacies as those enjoyed by the city of Oakland, and fewer still have them arranged in patterns that can be so easily linked. The parks have been long established; the civic and institutional buildings have been serving the city for decades; and the streets that connect these assets exist now. In other words, no significant capital investment or private property condemnation and compensation is required for the idea of the West Oakland Walk to take shape. Along its pathway all the elements that make a city great are in place waiting to be laced together through a simple process of giving identity to the route.

The West Oakland Walk would bring inter-related benefits to the city by:

- Reuniting West and Central Oakland across the 980 Freeway divide,
- Reinforcing the Community with an urban design event that celebrates the history and place of each neighborhood it passes through,
- Redefining Oakland to itself and to the rest of the world as a coherent network of Parks, Places and People.

Parks

The Parks Map of the West Oakland Walk (see Figure D-2) identifies the most visible public open spaces that touch the Walk or are within its orbit. These spaces include:

- improved multi-sport athletic fields at the 10-acre Ernie Raimondi Park,
- the swimming pool and tennis courts of the 9.5-acre DeFremer Park,
- the baseball diamonds of the 8.75-acre Lowell Park,

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• the connection to the Bay Trail along the richly landscaped Mandela Parkway linear park,
• the Frank H. Ogawa Plaza at the heart of Oakland’s civic center,
• the numerous recreational and botanical options of the 75-acre Lakeside Park encompassing the historic Lake Merritt and its wildlife sanctuary,
• the children's Fairyland, Splash Park and the Bonsai and garden center Japanese gardens, and
• the majestic trees and putting green of the 4.2-acre Snow Park.

Within the vicinity of the West Oakland Walk are the original five squares of Oakland - Lafayette, Jefferson, Lincoln, Madison, and Harrison (the Chinese Garden Park) - in addition to Peralta Park that connects to the Oakland Estuary Park. This extraordinary collection of open spaces, providing both passive and active recreational activities represent the “green living rooms” of the city of Oakland.

Places

Equally impressive as the list of parks is the registry of public and private buildings (see Figure D-3), many of them designated as historical landmarks including:

• Central Station Terminal,
• the DeFremery House,
• The West Oakland Senior Center,
• Lafayette, Lincoln and Prescott Elementary Schools,
• West Oakland Middle School,
• Preservation Park,
• Oak Center,
• the First Unitarian Church,
• the African American Museum and Library,
• Oakland City Hall,
• the State and Federal Buildings,
• the Rotunda Building,
• the Cathedral Building
• the Central Library,

• the Alameda County Superior Court Building
• the Chinese Presbyterian Church,
• the Oakland Museum of California,
• the Scottish Temple,
• the Camron-Stanford House,
• the Cathedral of Christ the Light,
• the Fox Theatre,
• the Oakland Ice Center,
• the Paramount Theatre, and
• the Grand Lake Theatre.

In addition, there is a host of private structures of significant historical interest, both commercial and residential, that can be found throughout the entire circuit of the West Oakland Walk, along with numerous modern structures of architectural note. These “places” serve a full gamut of political, cultural, educational, business, entertainment and spiritual interests for the community.

People

One dimension not normally accounted for in the establishment of any urban design improvement is the history of the people who come from the contiguous communities. The recognition of notable individuals and groups originating among the communities which the circuit passes would be an integral part of establishing the identity of the West Oakland Walk. Oakland has been the place of origin, education and practice for numerous well-known contributors to all walks of life, and the West Oakland Walk presents an opportunity to celebrate their lives as a record for current and future residents and visitors to Oakland, a record of the human potential of the community.

The maps flag special persons recognizable to both immediate and wider communities, state-wide, national and, in some cases, even global (see Figure D-4 and -5). The method of recognition can vary from traditional brass plaques to GPS triggered biographies delivered on the spot to smart phones.
Angela Davis (1944-): An American political activist, feminist, scholar, and author. A leader of the Communist Party USA and founder of Critical Resistance.


Donna Hanover (1950-): An American journalist, radio and television personality, producer, actress, and First Lady of New York City. Born in Oakland.

Ronald Dellums (1935-): 45th Mayor of Oakland and member of the US House of Representatives from California. Born and raised in Oakland.

Tom Hanks (1956-): An American actor, producer, writer, and director. His films have grossed $8.5 billion. Lived in Oakland and attended Skyline High School.

Barbara Lee (1946-): The US Representative for California’s 13th congressional district; first woman to represent the 13th district. A hero in the anti-war movement.

Elihu M. Harris (1947-): 46th Mayor of Oakland, member of the California State Assembly, and Chancellor of Peralta Community College District.


Paul Cobb: Publisher of The Oakland Post, the largest African-American newspaper in Northern California, founded in 1963.

Paula J. Roberts: Influential African-American woman who led the creation of the Oakland Center Historic District.


Mae Agnes Johnson: First African American inducted into the Oregon Trials Hall of Fame.

Eliza J. Dobbs: First female African American to be elected as a丙州 assembly member, in 1982.


Jerry Brown: An American poet, producer, writer, and director. His films have grossed $8.5 billion. Lived in Oakland and attended Skyline High School.

Billy Jo Almon: An influential African American who founded the Oakland Improvement Club, one of the first organizations to advocate for African American interests.

Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: The first labor organization led by blacks to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor. Launched in 1925.


The Pointer Sisters: An American R&B recording girl group from Oakland that achieved mainstream success during the 1970s and 1980s. Inducted onto the Hollywood Walk of Fame.


Sonny Barger: A founding member of the Oakland Chapter of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club. A prominent figure and author of four books.

Barbara Lee: The US Representative for California’s 13th congressional district; first woman to represent the 13th district. A hero in the anti-war movement.

Events of the Walk

The West Oakland Walk, once defined and improved to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, automobiles, and busses along its entire loop becomes, by definition, a natural circuit for an East-West bus line, for community races of all types (bicycle, electric car, footraces), for parades, for special and annual celebrations, for tours and for farmers’ markets. The connected open spaces offer the opportunity to create a sequence of specialized gardens including: vegetable gardens, flower gardens, exotic plant gardens, indigenous specimens gardens, etc. The various civic buildings along the circuit could become permanent or seasonal locations for high school mentoring, college fairs, job fairs and company recruitment events. In short the West Oakland Walk could become an opportunity event for the youth of the city of Oakland, a recognized multi-nodal meeting place for young people and those who could help them achieve their potential.