

# PARKING PARADIGM

## *A new structure connects people and parking in the heart of downtown Berkeley, Calif.*

By Cali Yang

**T**he Center Street Parking Garage in Berkeley, Calif., serves visitors of the bustling downtown as well as the Berkeley arts and theater district. The 250,000 square-foot, eight-level garage sits on an existing site previously occupied by a four-story parking structure built in the late 1950s. Easily accessible by mass transit, bicyclists, pedestrians, and drivers, the new \$40 million structure provides 720 spaces for cars and 350 spaces for bikes in eight levels. It was constructed for \$40 million.

### **Design and Aesthetics**

The garage features an art exhibit space, cafe, bike valet, public restroom facilities, state-of-the-art security system, and a dynamic parking count system with red and green indicator lights that show available spaces. The public restrooms contain stainless-steel fixtures, tiled floors, and open entrances with graphic display. The garage also houses a bike-share network and includes a BART bike station with a bicycle-equipment repair shop and 55 secured bicycle parking spaces.

Graphic color schemes throughout the facility provide easy visibility for wayfinding to and from the vertical circulation elements and orientation to either end of the building. Vivid red and green signage elements signify the two entrances into the garage and help patrons navigate throughout the structure. Large arrows painted on the floor denote safe pathways for pedestrians. Differently colored wall graphics at every floor indicate the direction to the arts district and Center Street. A state-of-the-art navigation system helps patrons find available spaces more quickly.

Additional graphic elements, such as recycling signage, oversized restroom signs, electric-vehicle (EV) charging, and tire inflation station spaces, provide easy identification.

The exterior facade consists of folded perforated metal panels, creating a wave-like form on both the Addison Street and Center Street facades. The metal panels are in more than 20 size variations, and each one is numbered and bolted into place in an accordion-like fashion. The elevation is capped by a continuous metal-panel-clad canopy that protects the stair and visually terminates the facade. A covered cantilevered walkway at the second level is clad in an accent-colored perforated metal that articulates up the exterior on a dramatic twisting staircase. The staircases provide an open, safe, and secure way for visitors to access the downtown area. The exterior design is highlighted by accent lighting that is programmable and allows a dynamic variety of colors for visual effect at night. The chic exterior design is an eye-catching sculpture and enhances the vitality of Berkeley.



## Functionality

The City of Berkeley commissioned a comprehensive multi-project street and open space improvement plan (SOSIP), which is intended to increase pedestrian activity throughout the downtown area. Reducing the number of street parking spaces widens sidewalk space and increases foot traffic. Due to seismic and functionality issues, the city decided to build a new replacement garage on the site of the existing 420-space structure, which was constructed in 1958 and closed in 2016. The new garage was created with the SOSIP in mind—bringing together a community vision of an engaging and vibrant downtown.

The new structure also features ground-level retail space, cafe with open sidewalk, and landscaped pathways that offer seating areas for patrons. A free public bicycle valet is also available to visitors to the area, which encourages use of alternative transportation. Approximately 10 percent of Berkeley residents commute by bicycle, and creating a rider-friendly facility was extremely important to the city. The garage is conveniently located within half a block of the Downtown Berkeley BART station, so it is easy to drop off a bike and hop on the BART train.

Berkeley Community College is located across the street from the garage and provides a convenient option for students to use the valet and 24-hour bicycle facility in the building. On the Center Street side, a coffee shop is located at the ground level with



an extra-wide sidewalk for customers to gather and socialize. There is also a landscape parklet area with benches for patrons and pedestrians.

The garage features a flexible lane at each entrance to allow traffic to switch directions based on the time of day and traffic flow to avoid backups caused by events in the theater and arts district. The garage is designed in a double helix configuration to provide maximum parking capacity while maintaining a high level of service for roof-level patrons exiting the structure. The double helix ramp allows drivers to circulate two parking levels with each 360-degree trip, thus expediting exit and ostensibly converting this eight-level structure into two intertwined four-level structures. Cross-over ramps and extensive dynamic signage are incorporated to provide flexible wayfinding options for users.



The garage is equipped with a state-of-the-art guidance system featuring red and green lights and cameras monitoring traffic flow at the garage intersections. Wayfinding systems provide interior and exterior parking stall counts of available spaces by level and direction proximity indicators leading patrons toward the open spaces. Other special and unique amenities include a tire-inflation station for cars and bicycles, preferred parking for fuel-efficient vehicles, and a car-share program. Emergency phones are located throughout the building and connect directly to the police department.

### Collaboration and Community

The new parking structure supports the economic, institutional, and artistic vitality of Downtown Berkeley. It is centrally located in the heart of downtown with convenient access to Berkeley City College and the arts district with theater and music venues. Rates for the new garage are significantly lower than surrounding street parking, which encourages patrons to park in the structure and allows visitors to spend more time in the area.

Providing an increase of 63 percent in parking availability, the new garage has brought new vibrancy to the community and encourages visitors to park and walk to their destinations. The art gallery on the ground floor on the Addison Street frontage features rotating art displays, which are selected and approved by the Berkeley Civic Arts Commission.

International Parking Design worked closely with the city, community members, BART, regional bicycle

## “WHAT THEY’RE SAYING”

*“The new Center Street Garage is an exciting addition to the Downtown Berkeley arts and mixed-use district. As our downtown develops, arts patrons and downtown visitors are welcoming this striking and convenient supply of parking.”*

—Denise Pinkston, vice chairperson,  
Zoning Adjustments Board, City of Berkeley.

*“Unexpected in more ways than one, Berkeley’s Center Street Garage is the rare example of an unloved building type done in a way that’s a visual treat. If it nudges a few cities or public agencies to demand higher standards from the next round of parking structures, all the better.”*

—John King, urban design  
critic, *San Francisco Chronicle*.

*“The idea is to make downtown more pedestrian friendly.”*

—Farid Javandel, transportation  
manager, City of Berkeley

*“We love that the new Center Street Garage has such a striking design! From commuters, merchants, and residents, we’ve been hearing that it is the best-looking building in downtown Berkeley. It’s bright and spacious, built with an open-air concept. The compliments just keep pouring in!”*

—Danette Perry, CAPP, parking  
services manager, City of Berkeley.

*“The greenest parking garage in California. Downtown Berkeley is moving forward.”*

—Jesse Arreguin, mayor,  
City of Berkeley.



BILLY HUSTACE PHOTOGRAPHY

coalition, and other project team members. Weekly coordination meetings were held during design and construction, when various issues were discussed and resolved. The structure was constructed by local area contractors, resulting in shorter commutes and reduced environmental effects.

**Sustainability**

The garage contains a multitude of sustainable features, including 500 solar panels on the roof, electric-vehicle charging stations, recycled materials, rainwater catchment, and stormwater treatment vegetation. Rainwater flows through 8,000-gallon cisterns that irrigate landscaping and planters adjacent to the garage. Energy-efficient sensor-controlled lighting, recycling receptacles, water-conserving restroom fixtures, and paints with low volatile organic compounds are also incorporated. The garage elevators are equipped with LED lighting and door-drive motors that can enter standby mode when not in use. The garage is expected to receive Parksmart Gold certification. Natural ventilation, building systems commissioning, and an energy-efficient mechanical system with HVAC controls are other sustainable features incorporated throughout the garage. The roof structural system can accommodate the addition of future

solar panels over the entire rooftop level, and the conduits are run to a microgrid distribution network at the ground level for electricity distribution to other essential city facilities in the area. [P](#)



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