

# UC Berkeley

## Places

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## GSA Center for Urban Development and Livability

The U.S. General Services Administration is known best, perhaps, for managing buildings and providing services for federal agencies. Increasingly, however, communities are recognizing the significant impact GSA has on urban areas, particularly downtowns, and involving the agency as a partner in local revitalization strategies.

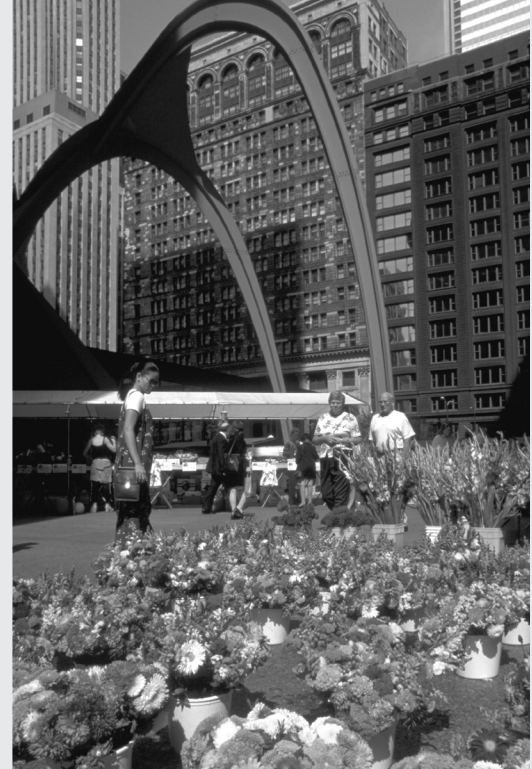
GSA is the largest urban-oriented real estate organization in the country. It owns or leases more than 300 million square feet of space in more than 1,600 communities, providing space for some one million federal workers. More than 90 percent of that inventory is located in urban areas and more than 400 federal buildings are historically significant. GSA spends more than \$5 billion annually on real estate, maintenance and security services, and each year the agency makes approximately 3,000 leasing and locational decisions.

With this tremendous investment at stake, and with so many people affected by its decisions, GSA is committed to helping the communities where federal facilities are located become more livable and vibrant.

GSA recently created the Center for Urban Development and Livability to help change the way the federal government does business. The center, established in May 1999, helps GSA direct its real estate activity in ways that support local efforts to bolster smart growth, economic vitality and cultural vibrancy.

The center's network of field officers works with local governments and community groups to integrate federal resources into the fabric and life of communities, and to ensure those investments support local development. The center is re-evaluating various federal development, design and leasing policies, and it serves as an information resource for other federal agencies, urban interest groups, local governments and communities.

When major projects, such as building a new federal courthouse or expanding a customs and immigration station, are being considered, the center engages



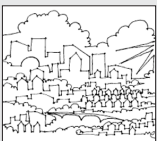
everyone involved in the decisionmaking process in a dialogue, sometimes for the first time ever. This results in a better understanding of how to enhance the government operations while supporting the development and livability of the community.

The center is always finding new ways for GSA to be a good neighbor—such as creating green space near federal buildings, supporting local business development in plazas and retail space, sharing resources or participating in local business improvement districts. The center is building on a tradition of creating places for people to engage one another, rather than spaces for people to enter and then leave.

The task is not easy, though. Sometimes, federal agencies find it more desirable to abandon downtowns for the convenience of suburbia, citing concerns like crime and security, transit access and parking. The center works to remind both agencies and communities alike that the federal government's overarching goal—affirmed by several Presidential executive orders—is to support the economic stability and revitalization of cities and regions.

We look forward to the work ahead. We know from experience that the federal government and local communities can form productive partnerships that strengthen our urban centers—partnerships that are truly the foundation of sustainable development and livable places.

Hillary Levitt Altman is Director of the Center for Urban Development and Livability, U.S. General Services Administration.



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