



Michael Leavitt
Leavitt Architecture
512 Union Street
San Francisco, CA 94133

May 18, 2015 (Revised from March 26, 2014)

Ref: 600 South Van Ness Avenue – Mixed-Use Development

Dear Mr. Leavitt,

Thank you for bringing your proposed mixed-use project at 600 South Van Ness Avenue to the San Francisco Housing Action Coalition's (SFHAC) Project Review Committee on January 29, 2014. Upon our review, we believe your project has many merits and will contribute to SFHAC's mission of increasing the supply of well-designed, well-located housing in San Francisco. Please see our letter, which explains how your project meets our guidelines as well as areas in which we would like to see improvement. We have attached a copy of our project review guidelines for your reference.

Project Description:

The project proposes the construction of 27 rental units about ground-floor retail space on what is currently a vacant lot.

Land Use:

SFHAC believes this is an appropriate location for new housing. The site is currently vacant and is surrounded by residential buildings and single-story commercial buildings. The site will be much better served with new housing, especially considering its proximity to the 16th Street BART station and various neighborhood amenities.

Density:

Current zoning has no maximum allowable density on the site. However, the plans for your project propose a density ratio of 124 units/acre, which is at least 1.5 greater than the surrounding buildings. We believe this is appropriate for this location.

Affordability:

At the time of your presentation to our Committee, you indicated you would provide the below-market-rate homes on-site, but have since chosen to pay an approximately \$2-million-dollar *in lieu* fee to the Mayor's Office of Housing. While we generally prefer the on-site housing, we recognize the other options are legal.

Parking and Alternative Transportation:

You plan to include 19 car parking spaces, 27 bicycle parking spaces and zero car share parking spaces. At the time of your presentation, you had only planned to provide 14 bicycle parking spaces. We urged you to provide more. Thank you for increasing the number of bike spaces to one space per home.



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The site is in a transit-rich location, with easy access to the 16th Street BART station two blocks away and multiple bus lines that run along Mission Street and South Van Ness Avenue. For these reasons, we encourage you to reduce the number of parking spaces you plan to provide. Additionally, you could reduce the need for private car parking by adding one or more car share spaces.

Preservation:

There are no structures of significant historic or cultural merit on or next to the site.

Urban Design:

We believe your project will activate the street frontages along South Van Ness Avenue and 17th Street. Providing retail on the ground floor that connects from the street to the rear yard deck area will improve the pedestrian experience and create a welcoming corner.

We support your plans to create open space in the rear interior (SW) corner of the building that connects to the street level lobby and will serve families. In addition, you indicated that you plan to incorporate private roof decks for the building's top floor units.

We would like you to improve the sidewalk level façade along 17th Street. We encourage you to work with the community on creating a design that reflects the character of the neighborhood. If possible, we would like you to work on finding a creative use for the retail space by working closely with the community.

Environmental Features:

You stated at your presentation to our Committee that you are striving to exceed Green Point certification. SFHAC encourages you stay on this track. Some of the environmental features of your project include: solar thermal preheating boilers, locally sourced building materials, ultra low flow plumbing fixtures, drought resistant plant species and a gray water system from the laundry facility for watering. Finally, you have designed the units to be well lit throughout the day, so you can rely on natural lighting, which will help with energy conservation.

Community Input:

At the time of your presentation, you said you had held a lightly attended community meeting. You indicated that the attendees were not concerned about the size or residential workings of the proposed project. But rather, they were concerned about improved the use of the vacant lot and providing neighborhood serving retail services.

Since your presentation, you have conducted further community outreach. We feel you have thoughtfully engaged the neighborhood and responded to any concerns that can be readily accommodated.

Thank you for bringing your project to SFHAC for review. Please keep us abreast of any changes. We are please to support your project as it moves forward. Let us know how we may be of assistance.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "T Colen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tim Colen, Executive Director

CC: SF Planning Commission

SFHAC Project Review Guidelines

Land Use: Housing should be an appropriate use of the site given the context of the adjacent properties and the surrounding neighborhood and should enhance neighborhood livability.

Density: The project should take full advantage of the maximum unit density and/or building envelope, allowable under the zoning rules.

Affordability: The need for affordable housing, including middle income (120-150 of Area Median Income) housing, is a critical problem and SFHAC gives special support to projects that propose creative ways to expand or improve unit affordability beyond the legally mandated requirements.

Parking and Alternative Transportation: SFHAC expects the projects it endorses to include creative strategies to reduce the need for parking, such as ample bicycle storage, provision of space for car-share vehicles on-site or nearby, un-bundling parking cost from residential unit cost, and measures to incentivize transit use. Proximity to transit should result in less need for parking.

In districts with an as-of-right maximum and discretionary approval up to an absolute maximum, SFHAC will support parking exceeding the as-of-right maximum only to the extent the Code criteria for doing so are clearly met. In districts where the minimum parking requirement is one parking space per residential unit (1:1), the SFHAC will not, except in extraordinary circumstances, support a project with parking in excess of that amount.

Preservation: If there are structures of significant historic or cultural merit on the site, their retention and/or incorporation into the project consistent with historic preservation standards is encouraged. If such structures are to be demolished, there should be compelling reasons for doing so.

Urban Design: The project should promote principles of good urban design: Where appropriate, contextual design that is compatible with the adjacent streetscape and existing neighborhood character while at the same time utilizing allowable unit density: pleasant and functional private and/or common open space; pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly site planning; and design treatments that protect and enhance the pedestrian realm, with curb cuts minimized and active ground floor uses provided.

Projects with a substantial number of multiple bedroom units should consider including features that will make the project friendly to families with children.

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Environmental Features: SFHAC is particularly supportive of projects that employ substantial and/or innovative measures that will enhance their sustainability and reduce their carbon footprint.

Community Input: Projects for which the developer has made a good faith effort to communicate to the community and to address legitimate neighborhood concerns, without sacrificing SFHAC's objectives, will receive more SFHAC support.

