

Jacob, Melinda

Subject: FW: DRC of 1652 University Avenue Project

From: Diane Ross-Leech <dianeleech@comcast.net>

Sent: Tuesday, August 15, 2023 3:15 PM

To: Burns, Anne M <ABurns@berkeleyca.gov>

Cc: Diane Ross-Leech <dianeleech@comcast.net>

Subject: DRC of 1652 University Avenue Project

WARNING: This is not a City of Berkeley email. Do not click links or attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Ms. Burns:

I have reviewed the DRC report for 1652 University Avenue and have the following comments:

- The east side set back of 5' for the proposed building is inadequate to protect the health and longevity of the heritage oak tree located at Fox Commons.
- The south side of the building should be stepped down to three stories to allow for adequate sunlight and neighborhood scale for the existing residential homes.
- Balconies proposed overhanging the heritage oak tree should be eliminated or greatly reduced so as not to impact the natural light needed for the trees health.
- Planters are proposed for the base of the building along University and Jefferson Street. I imagine these planters will be filled with garbage and dead plants after the building is occupied, like many new buildings that have "landscaping" requirements only to see dead trees and dead plants long after the building is completed. How will this requirement be enforced?
- There is no car parking provided as part of the project. Bicycle parking is provided. We support the City's goals to promote public transit and car-free transit. To help enforce this goal we request that residential parking permits not be permitted for residents in this building. The neighborhood its already over taxed by parking for the St. Joesph the Worker Church, the Shu Ren School and the many construction workers who park every week day from 7am to 4pm.
- Clear and frosted glass is proposed for various features of the building. We request that all glass be "bird-safe" so as to prevent bird collisions.

My neighbors and my family living along the 1600 block of Addison Street (between California and McGee) are wary of the proposed construction at 1652 University (5 stories) as well as the 1598 University (8 stories) due to the horrendous experience and disruption to our lives from the ongoing saga at 1698 University. The 1698 University project has been unending with delays, violations, noise, construction dust, construction equipment, and street shut downs. We hope that this proposed project does not repeat this pattern and the City strictly enforces its authority over its codes and regulations.

Sincerely,

Diane Ross-Leech
1644 Addison Street



Meredith Sabini
Dream Researcher & Writer

15 Aug 2023

To: Design Review Re: DRCP2022-0010 1675 University Ave

Greetings. I own 1670 University, one of 3 bldgs in Fox Commons, Berkeley historic landmark #211, immediately adjacent to 1652. These are my concerns re the proposed demo and construction there.

I. IMPACT ON A LANDMARK

Landmarking offers some protections but there are ways Fox Commons will be negatively impacted by this proposed work. Any 5-story structure that fills the entire parcel running parallel to Fox Commons will block air circulation as well as sunlight on the south and west sides, for both bldgs and trees. All 3 of our bldgs would be hemmed in, resulting in a claustrophobic atmosphere that few people would want to work in. I have no objection to a bldg of modest proportions, but the one proposed is too large, too tall, and too close to our landmark. We would also lose the beautiful brick exteriors that contain our landmark.

II. NO OFFICE USE POSSIBLE DURING CONSTRUCTION

How long will demo and construction take? For the several years involved, our 3 bldgs could not be used during normal working hours due to the noise, dust, etc. 1670 is the site for my professional work as a teacher, author, and psychologist. Everything I need and use is here. Where would I and my business go?? Other tenants here would leave.

III. ALREADY NO PARKING SITES

The 5 tenants at Fox Commons have already suffered 4 years of having no parking for themselves or their clientele (due to construction at 1698 and 1680-82-84; crews arrive early and take up available spaces). The proposal at 1652 eliminates the parking once provided for those tenants. If only a small proportion of residents in the 1698 bldg and the proposed one at 1652 have cars (say, 20-30 residents), where will these go?

IV. ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The 3 Fox brothers bldgs were the first to be built in this area, as homes for their family members. Subsequent construction could have showcased these so their architectural heritage was preserved. This has not happened. The proposal for 1652 would be just one more modern block structure that overshadows a landmark. On Sunday August 27, Fox Commons will be on the BAHA tour of Fox structures in Berkeley; there is considerable interest in the Fox history and I get frequent requests.

CONTEXT

When I purchased 1670 in 1996, my first act was to submit Fox Commons for landmarking. I was born a few blocks from here to a multigenerational Amish family, and had my heart set on these bldgs for years; they appealed to my cultural background. I have been diligent in tending their handmade beauty. As founder/director of a unique educational/cultural/research center, the Dream Institute of Northern California, I planned to bequeath 1670 to my collegial heirs so this work could carry on. I also considered converting 1670 back into a residence for my own elder years. But who would want to live or work in Fox Commons if it is claustrophobic?

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Berkeley is moving from being a modest town to being a metropolis, as is appropriate for a city of such importance and distinction. I would like to see Fox Commons be part of that distinction. I have spent the last 26 years carefully maintaining this landmark. It is a source of enormous sadness, sorrow, and even despair as I envision the repercussions that will be inflicted if a 5-story structure goes up next door. So I respectfully submit this plea that you on the Design Review carefully consider the relevant issues and take the larger context and impacts into account.

Thank you very much.

Meredith Sabini

My comments on Thurs.
will be very brief!

Jacob, Melinda

Subject: FW: Building on University and Jefferson

-----Original Message-----

From: Kathie Hardy <kathie.hardy@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, August 15, 2023 4:17 AM

To: Burns, Anne M <ABurns@berkeleyca.gov>

Subject: Building on University and Jefferson

WARNING: This is not a City of Berkeley email. Do not click links or attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

We were very disappointed to discover that we never directly received a notification and that posted notices were removed. It is also disappointing that the time between notice and comment deadline is woefully, if not illegally, short. We have several concerns but are returning from abroad and will not even be able to see the designs, let alone understand them and be ready to comment on them in writing other than email. We will be at the meeting. The issues are: parking in an old, already crowded neighborhood where people may not even have a driveway and there is not, as yet, a robust public transportation system; possible effect on our home and garden, both physical and financial and security for the many older people in the area who may feel captive in their homes at night if they must walk alone from cars parked at a distance We will be prepared to elaborate on these items on Thursday.

Kathie Hardy & Alan Spinks

Thank you for your attention. And if you would be so kind as to let us know that you received this email.

Sent from my iPhone

We are concerned neighbors in the 1600 block of Addison Street, responding to the notice of a Design Review Committee meeting this Thursday evening to discuss a proposed building project at 1652 University Avenue.

First of all, we are concerned that the neighbors were not notified well in advance of this meeting, to give us adequate time to formulate a proper response to the proposal. We only learned of the meeting through posted notices shared with us by another concerned neighbor – according to her, posted notices disappeared by the next day. Secondly, the agenda for Thursday’s meeting on the City of Berkeley website states the deadline for written comments is 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, and not at noon on Tuesday as stated on the posted notice. Unfortunately, this misinformation and inadequate advance notice compromises our review of the material and ability to participate in the design review process.

The Addison Street side of the block is entirely residential, and this building project will seriously impact the properties adjacent to it. We have already endured a years-long building project at 1698 University Avenue, the other end of the block, which has been seriously mismanaged, with many, often major building violations causing years of deconstruction and rebuilding. Notoriously, the root systems of three heritage-designated redwood trees which were not to be disturbed were excavated at the beginning of construction, causing the trees to be condemned and taken down. The city only demanded a small fine and replacement of one of those trees.

As a result, we are hyper-vigilant about protecting the heritage-designated live oak tree on the property adjacent to 1652 University Avenue (Fox Commons, 1676 University Ave.). We are concerned that the current designs for the project will seriously compromise this tree. If this building is constructed as proposed, the tree will not receive adequate sunlight to maintain itself in good health. Furthermore, its structural integrity will be compromised: the balconies on the east side of the proposed building will cross the dripline of the tree, affecting the tree canopy. We suggest that these balconies be removed from the design and the height of the building cut back to three floors on the southeast side, to allow adequate sunlight to reach the tree. The current architectural renderings show clearly that the dripline of the tree will be compromised by the extent of the building, and we know from direct experience of the loss of three magnificent redwoods at 1698 University Avenue that the roots (which often extend beyond the dripline) can be undermined when the foundation for a neighboring building is being excavated. It is hard to imagine a treeless Fox Commons, which currently is completely enveloped on its south side by the enormous canopy of this magnificent coastal live oak. (**See attached photographs.**) To allow adequate sunlight to reach

the tree, we suggest a further setback of the building away from the tree, and that the height of the building be cut back to three floors on the southeast side.



South view of the oak tree.



West view of the oak tree.

Overall, the proposed building is out of scale with the neighboring buildings, all of which are one- to two-story buildings. The building as proposed is too tall for the historic landmark status of Fox Commons, the adjacent property to the east. Furthermore, in a primarily residential context, the south side of the building should be lower and set back further, to be in scale with its immediate neighbors. While five stories in the front of the building facing University Avenue may work well at the corner of the block, reducing the height of the south side of the building to three stories will help preserve the landmarked oak tree and produce a building more in keeping with the scale of the surrounding neighborhood. Additionally, to preserve the privacy of the neighboring properties, there should be no balconies overlooking the backyards of these properties. Even a small increase of an additional 10 feet (to a total of 25 feet) in green space on the south side of the building would provide more usable open space for occupants and allow privacy, air circulation, and light suitable for the neighborhood. Enlargement of the south/southeast garden space would also contribute to the usable open space requirement. To this end, we do not support a waiver of the usable open space requirement from 5,200 square feet to the proposed 2,950 square feet.

In summary, we would like to see a further setback of 10 feet on the south side of the building, adequate setback on the east side of the building to support the health of the oak tree, lowering the height of the building on the south side to three stories, and elimination of the balconies overhanging the oak tree. We think this narrow 7,480 square foot lot is too small to support the proposed five-story building as currently designed.

Thank you.

James Whitta and Jon Harada
1639 Addison St.
Berkeley, CA 94703