To the Planning Commission  
Re: the West Berkeley Project  

Commissioners:

Adams & Chittenden Scientific Glass is a manufacturer located at 2741 8th Street in West Berkeley. We make all kinds of industrial and artistic glass parts and “tools”. We have a very broad customer base that includes the world’s largest biotech firms all the way down the economic scale to breweries, research labs and artists. We also service residents with repairs of glassware.

We started up in West Berkeley in 1993 with only the support of our families. Fortunately for us the West Berkeley Plan was soon to be in effect and we did not have to compete for space with the dotcom boom that was very capital-rich at the time. The boom was followed quickly by a bust, but we were not part of that economy. Economic diversity is a very good thing.

At a recent Planning Commission meeting Michael Kaplan referred to “inoculating manufacturers”. I understood his point to be that the city could “capture” a latent manufacturer when they were in the developmental stage. That is precisely us. We are what that looks like, and we did it within the framework of the West Berkeley Plan. We do not expect to receive grants or investment capital to help us purchase a shop, which we would love to do, and incidentally, would inoculate us from the vagaries in changing zoning.

Our current 4,000 sq. ft. facility has been adequate and flexible, and our intention is to grow. In fact, we are growing and are currently in the process of hiring during this time of intense unemployment. We would like to remain in Berkeley and if our history is any indication, we have a very important niche to fill. Two meetings ago you heard the spontaneous testimony from Aerosol Dynamics, one of our first customers and the only R&D lab to present anything at these discussions. Dr. Hering made the point that they rely on the network of services available to them here in West Berkeley to support their research and help build their prototypes. This R&D lab did not feel that their use needs the protections that traditional manufacturers require.

These protections are what enabled us to start-up and stay in West Berkeley. We cannot compete with developers or highly capitalized businesses, though we support efforts to encourage them to locate here. We expect to benefit from this effort.
The analogy that comes to mind is the similar scenario that is playing out with our farmlands. Everyone understands that it is important to have farmlands close by. And it must be obvious that farmers cannot compete with developers economically. We feel that a similar scenario is playing out with manufacturers. As a society we should make it a point to encourage and protect this capacity to build things, as it represents a very real value and advantage to our local economy.

I’ve prepared a map of “our” West Berkeley, showing the web of interconnections between us and our customers and suppliers in this small part of city, 4% of the city by staff’s estimation. We are a small business of 7 local people doing interesting, unique, and important work. Imagine what this map would look like if it included another 300 West Berkeley businesses. Also imagine what this map would look like if we extended it out to include the rest of the city; we do a lot of work for the University, LBL, and others. Now image the map that would include the “Green Corridor” of eight East Bay cities. I would love to prepare and see this map myself as we are quite engaged in a lot of this development (e.g. Amyris is a very big client developing biofuels), but it is hard to find the time while running a small business. I’m dismayed that the Berkeley professional staff wrote to the commission on 10/28/09 that “… Berkeley has no inventory of “protected” vs other kinds of space, we cannot directly answer this question.” There seems to be a remarkable lack of facts in this debate.

Commissioners: it is your responsibility to maintain and protect a diverse “ecology” through zoning. This kind of protection is important in many aspects of our society; witness our national financial meltdown. We are asking that you maintain protected uses in the small part of the city that is West Berkeley for people that work with their hands.

Thank you for your considerations.
George Chittenden
Adams and Chittenden Scientific Glass