

AUG 18 2009

LAND USE PLANNING

2600 Shattuck Avenue

Shattuck Avenue between Dwight Way and Adeline presents a rare opportunity for the City to develop a handsome, mixed use boulevard. As one of the primary entries to downtown Berkeley this part of Shattuck should be treated as an extension of the downtown and we should look for design solutions that will set high standards for quality and visual amenities. We only need to look at the morose new neighborhoods created in Emeryville to understand what this street could become if the we do not demand handsome design solutions.

I find the proposed project at 2600 Shattuck as not showing any potential to set a quality standard that should occur on this site. The large cubes on a platform do not provide any sense of scale and do nothing to enhance the street or the skyline. The floating cubes emphasize the brutality of the concept and the proportions of the upper facades to the base are too similar. There is a base, there is a shrunken main body and there is no top to the building.

There are a variety of successful designs of large buildings in Berkeley, some old and some new. Look at the Fine Arts Building up the street. It provides beautiful articulation of the façade with a wonderful skyline and handsome details. The new buildings at Shattuck and Delaware use bays to create a wonderful rhythm along the street front. Acton Court uses materials similar to those in this proposal but again the bays give depth and establish a vibrant façade. Downtown there are several very large older buildings that have relatively flat facades but the details create handsome results. Even the storage facility at Shattuck and Adeline provides nicely proportioned façades, openings and details. The proposed project provides none of those design features.

I have some question as to if there is value in keeping the existing building. The new design certainly does nothing to compliment the existing building façade and the existing façade, by itself, is not distinguished enough to create an exciting street front. The scale of the street front is hugely important to the success of a block long building. I have no doubt that a handsome building could be built on top of the existing building but not in the genre of this proposal.

Some specific comments:

- The flat facades with the flimsy detailing of battens on Hardy Board are inadequate to the task of providing a handsomely detailed street front. This is not Ashby Avenue or San Pablo where the State does not allow overhangs in the public right of way. This location demands a façade with rhythm, depth and handsome detailing. A box with cutouts and inadequate detail does not do that.
- Colors: A chocolate façade without significant details will disappear from the street front in a fog or at dusk. There are more than enough examples of this in Berkeley and Emeryville.

- More Colors: Do what you want on the inside of the complex but the dabs of yellow and red and orange add no dignity to the street.
- The open strip between the base and upper buildings weakens the façade and emphasizes the brutality of the design.
- The second floor units facing the streets will be looking into a 4 ft + high wall so that residents who are seated will only have a view of the sky.
- It is a shame to keep the existing 20' high concrete wall along the west side. Can't a major new building on a large site provide a decent landscaped transition to the adjacent residential neighborhood?
- The ground floor lobbies are grim. The lack of any comfortable sense of entry may be typical of many recent Berkeley buildings but that doesn't make it right.

Where to go from here:

- We need to know if Landmarks is going to take any action on this building, if they want to see the existing façade retained and if they have any issues with the design of the new buildings.
- We need to hear from ZAB on the requested 15'-8" height increase over the 50' allowed in the district.
- Tweaking these facades will not create a design that would be acceptable in Berkeley, on this main boulevard or in this neighborhood. I do not want to see anything closely resembling the proposed street front design come back to Design Review. Berkeley deserves better than this.

Bob Allen