

January 10, 2009

Dear Berkeley City Zoning Adjustments Board:

We write regarding the proposed development at 1200 Ashby Avenue. We live at 1194 Carrison Street, the house directly across the street from the site; we have lived in our home for 10 years, and we both tentatively support many aspects of the proposed project and also have grave concerns about the impact of the project on Carrison street, a quiet residential street that first attracted us to this south Berkeley neighborhood.

Obviously, a well designed residential and commercial project will help support the neighborhood; living across from the now vacant lot, we know first hand about the stolen cars, drug deals, and prostitution that have been attracted to that corner, and we are pleased to think of the positive impact Ashby Arts might have on that negative element in our neighborhood.

But we can't understand why certain aspects of the design that promise to impact traffic and parking (in particular) on Carrison Street have not been taken more seriously by ZAB. We would note we have an 8 year old child and so along with concerns about parking and traffic more generally, we also have concerns about her safety when our quiet street is turned into a major thoroughfare for potentially 200-300 new residents of Ashby Arts. We appreciate the changes the developers have made to try and mitigate the impact on Carrison Street, but there are a number of issues that would improve those plans from our perspective:

1) Why has the city deemed there can be no curb cut entrance off San Pablo (north)—when for years, the gas stations used the curb cuts that are still there?
Having entrance and exit options from San Pablo (and Ashby) would be the easiest way to make sure that Carrison Street is not consumed by traffic from the likely 200 + new residents in the development, not to mention the commercial traffic.

2) Given the current plans, **we would hope that only a right turn out of the development onto Carrison to San Pablo should be allowed, mitigating the traffic onto Carrison, and only cars from San Pablo (north) should be allowed to turn into the development from Carrison**. Indeed, Carrison already serves as a short cut for many cars from San Pablo to Ashby (east). The proposed development residents—increased because of the density bonus allowances-- will triple (at least) the cars on Carrison, making it a thoroughfare and completely changing the character of our neighborhood. We have been surprised that the City—though requesting some changes in this area-- has not been more protective of the huge traffic impact this extremely large project will have on our street.

3) We have no doubt that the 1200 Ashby commercial customers will do most of their parking on Carrison Street, as it does not seem that easy to enter into the commercial parking, and the number of spots may or may not be enough depending on the kind of commercial businesses that end up on the site; there is little parking on San Pablo or Ashby, so Carrison will obviously become the default parking lot for this site. We note that a food service/restaurant seems likely given the permit requests in the proposal; this would mean that night time parking and traffic would also be an issue for our street. We also note that there are not enough required residential spaces in the current proposal. **We suggest that residential parking be accessible from all entrances/exits of the project, to mitigate the Carrison street use, and we continue to urge that San Pablo Avenue not be off limits for entrance/exit to the site; the proposal should have at least the required number of parking spaces (117).**

4) We suspect we will have major problems parking anywhere near our home once the development is complete, and that our guests will never find a spot near our house. **We would certainly hope that the City would implement a residential permit parking system on our block, permits that would not be available to residents of Ashby Arts.**

5) **We are hopeful that the project will still be scaled down from its current size.** While bringing in much needed development to our area, the sheer number of units proposed promises to radically change the nature of our neighborhood, tripling (at least) the density in our neighborhood.

Because of our work schedules, we have found it difficult to attend a number of the recent ZAB meetings on this project , but we are concerned, particularly as we are one of the houses most likely to me most affected by this project. We hope ZAB will find a way to really listen to our concerns about the density changes to our neighborhood, the parking and traffic issues, and recognize that Carrison Street has been a little quiet gem in South Berkeley, one that should not be totally sacrificed in the name of a project that could still be modified. We are in support of the general move to put a residential development into this space, and there are many aspects to the 1200 Ashby project that are laudable; we simply hope that the City can also appreciate our concerns about the project as well, in order to create a “win win” situation for both the innovative developers as well as the home owners and tax payers like us who live on Carrison Street.

Sincerely,

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