



Thursday, April 23, 2009

Mayor Tom Bates,
Berkeley Councilmembers
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

RE: Ashby Arts Project - SUPPORT

Dear Mayor Bates and Councilmembers,

For over 50 years, Greenbelt Alliance has protected the Bay Area's open spaces in part by promoting smart infill development in our existing cities and towns. Our Compact Development Team (CDT) endorses and advocates for livable, transit-accessible communities with a wide range of housing options for families of all sizes and income levels. The Compact Development Team evaluated the Ashby Arts project, proposed by CityCentric Investments, using an established set of endorsement criteria. We have endorsed the project because of its stellar location and transit access, commitment to green building, and because the project will breath life into an underutilized section of San Pablo Avenue. We urge the City Council's support of this project. Providing new homes, jobs, and shops along transit corridors is one of our best tools in limiting greenhouse gas emissions and combating climate change.

CityCentric Investments proposes two separate schemes for the Ashby Arts project. The development will either consist of 83 market-rate and 15 affordable homes, consistent with Berkeley's inclusionary housing ordinance, or it will be entirely affordable, featuring 98 below-market-rate homes for seniors. We are aware of the difficulty of obtaining financing for market-rate projects during the current economic downturn and applaud CityCentric's decision to explore an all-affordable scheme that ensures this vacant lot begins serving the neighborhood as soon as possible, regardless of external economic factors. Either scenario would be a gain for the neighborhood, providing "eyes on the street," neighborhood-serving retail, and a vibrant and pleasant pedestrian plaza.

The project's proximity to transit and services means that future residents will be able to walk, bike, or take transit to work and when running errands, limiting the amount of miles they drive. AC Transit buses, including the 72 rapid bus line, provide frequent service along both San Pablo and Ashby Avenues, reaching many of our region's largest employment centers and BART. Furthermore, the Emery-Go-Round shuttle connects this area to a plethora of shops, entertainment venues, and other amenities. The site is within walking distance to restaurants, Walgreen's, the new Berkeley Bowl, a health clinic, and a senior center. Particularly for seniors, a less mobile segment of our population, this location is ideal. Building compact homes in transit-rich and amenity-rich areas helps decrease Berkeley's carbon footprint, and creates a healthier, more livable city. Furthermore, by providing a reasonable amount of parking, 1 space per unit under the market rate scheme or 25 total spaces under the all-affordable scheme, CityCentric is eliminating the incentives that encourage unnecessary vehicle travel.

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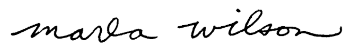
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The developer has also committed to strict green building practices. As proposed, the project will attain either a LEED Silver or Gold rating. Building our homes and offices in a more efficient manner reduces the unnecessary expenditure of energy. We strongly encourage CityCentric to attain a LEED Gold rating, since it will help ensure that the construction and operation of this building has the lowest possible effect on the environment.

In shaping the Ashby Arts proposal, CityCentric conducted an impressive community outreach campaign. Holding living room meetings with neighboring residents, the developer has listened to community concerns and adjusted this project accordingly. The building is reduced to three stories where it meets the neighborhood, reducing its aesthetic impact. CityCentric has also worked closely with the owner of a neighboring property to design a landscape treatment along her property line that incorporates deciduous trees and decorative fencing so that more sunlight will reach her property during the winter months. This type of dedicated public outreach helps ensure the project will be an amenity for the entire neighborhood, and provides a model for other developers to follow.

In closing, Greenbelt Alliance understands that this project has been appealed, and urges the City Council to remain steadfast in its support of the Ashby Arts development. The San Pablo Corridor is the perfect place for Berkeley to grow—near jobs, services, and other destinations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "marla wilson".

Marla Wilson
Sustainable Development Associate

CC: Aaron Sage