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6536 TELEGRAPH AVE, STE A201
OAKLAND, CA 94609
510.594.0794 OFFICE
510.594.2594 FAX
WWW.PREMIUMPD.COM

CITY OF BERKELEY
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Berkeley City Council
Attn: City Clerks Department
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

October 13, 2003

Regarding: Appeal of Landmarks Designation for 3075 Telegraph Avenue.

Dear Members of the Berkeley City Council:

We wish to appeal the Landmarks Preservation Committee's decision to designate the Concrete Grid Forms Company building located at 3075 Telegraph Avenue as a historical landmark.

Our property was most recently the home of Milt's Coin Operated Laundry and a Liquor Store. The main building was destroyed in a fire in January 2002 and was declared a total loss. The owners were obviously devastated by the financial implications from the fire. But, they have decided to rebuild something much better for the location. This decision was not one that came lightly. As a retired couple whose sole income was generated by the property, many in their situation would have taken one of the numerous offers from large developers in the city and sold. However, they have owned the property for over 30 years and felt that it was important enough to do what they could to keep it in the family.

About a year ago we began our journey to redevelop the site. Recognizing their financial situation and the potential timeline. We decided to build a modest sized project. In reality, it is probably one of the smallest buildings in the planning stage for its size. Overall, the neighborhood has been very pleased with our plans. Our support has been drawn due to the project's size and scale and our inclusion of the neighborhood in the plans. In addition, the project will bring an additional six thousand square feet of retail, ten 2-story lofts, and 23 parking spaces to the neighborhood. We are also including 2 inclusionary units within our project. Furthermore, we are meeting or exceeding all of the city's guidelines.

So far, we have had a relatively reasonable experience going through process. We received Design Review's recommendation in mid July. But, then subsequently found out that a deteriorating concrete structure on the site was actually going to be considered by the Landmark Preservation Committee as a landmark. Over the years that building has been used as a massage parlor, offices for the retail and most recently storage. Not only is it aesthetically unappealing, but it also has a terrible layout. In addition, it is basically falling apart. So, it was to our great shock to learn that it was historically important and potentially up for a landmark.

I have to admit that I have learned a whole lot about this building's history and found it interesting. I am sure that you will receive the documentation that Carrie Olson gathered on the site and also find its history quite intriguing. But, I think landmarking such a building undermines the whole concept of a landmark. I believe that the vast majority of the residents in Berkeley would want their landmarks to reach a pretty high bar for designation. I am not appealing to you the factual correctness of the history of the building and its occupants. But, I believe that this is not such an important building that it warrants a designation and furthermore will hinder our plans to build something that the community is so behind.

I understand that it is the LPC's role is to act in a vacuum - only taking into consideration the structure's inherent value. But, even with that restriction it seems very questionable as to why they feel that is so important. Though, I would encourage some major reform in the landmarking process (especially after reading the East Bay Express Front Page Story on Berkeley's Hysterical Landmarks 9/17/03) their decision was obviously already made. Now, it is your turn to make your decision.

Unlike the LPC, the City Council has a responsibility to take all the facts into consideration and make a judgment. You need to look at the overall context and also take a hard look at whether you really think that this building should stay around forever. I doubt that anyone would want to view it 50 years from now or next week for that matter. In speaking to the owner, during the past 30 years nobody has ever asked for a tour.

We hope that you will reverse the LPC's decision and allow us to move forward with the project. We have already incurred great expense and delay and hope that your decision will be favorable for us to continue with our project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Sorokin', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sam Sorokin
Partner