

ULTRA : Urbanists for a Livable Temescal Rockridge Area

May 16, 2007

RE: 5253 College Ave. 014-1240-004-00

Dear Planning Commissioners:

ULTRA supports planning staff's recommendation to deny the appeal before you today and uphold the zoning administrator's original determination to approve the project as proposed along with the CUP and variance as originally submitted.

The proposal for 5253 College Ave. not only meets the zoning requirements; it demonstrates a design and scale that is completely appropriate to this low-medium density commercial district. The quality of the architecture for this vernacular is highly commendable and will contribute to the urban fabric of the neighborhood.

ULTRA believes that the allowable density of 12 units (instead of the 6 proposed) would better serve our regional needs to provide urban infill housing. However, we are encouraged to know that the 6 units may potentially be structured as 3 rental and 3 owned. This will contribute to diversifying the housing stock in a neighborhood that continues to see increasing median house costs and a steep increase in condo conversions, despite the current market.

If we continue to build housing along commercial corridors, we will increase the use of public transit that is particularly accessible at this location. Given the number of proposed developments in the North Oakland area (another multi-unit project is currently proposed along Broadway one block away) we recommend developing a comprehensive Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Program, including a dedicated city staff person to implement and oversee it might address the growing concern over parking and traffic impacts.

As you know, "TDM" is the term used for a whole systems approach to traffic reduction and parking that takes into consideration everything from supply and demand of parking (pricing, where it is, whether it is shared), all the different ways people get places, why

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they go there, how long they stay, how that changes throughout the day, valuing and enhancing all modes of transportation.

ULTRA also thinks the applicant should be allowed to implement the well-designed open space configuration on the rooftop as shown in the revised drawings, which helps mitigate the building's impact on residences along Desmond Street. The use of the ground floor space at the rear of the building as a commercial space is also appropriate as it will enable less intense use of the backyard area.

Although in this case an area zoned for low-density, single-family use abuts this property at a slightly lower topographical elevation, the proposed project is not in a high-density zone. In those cases, the City may want to designate a medium density or buffer zone between two more disparate zones. Also in this case, as a property owner, the appellant may have or may not have been aware of the zoning differences between the two areas at the time of purchase.

It is our understanding that the applicant/architect has made several attempts to meet with concerned residents and has addressed the specific concerns around open space, landscaping, lighting, fencing, etc. and meets all the required setbacks and zoning regulations.

ULTRA believes that by implementing the goals of Oakland's General Plan, the City will begin to take responsibility, as a city, to contribute toward developing a sustainable and equitable region.

Although we recognize that this building has undeniable, immediate impact on near-by residents, we trust that this commission as well as the planning staff recognizes, in addition to the legal rights, the greater good that this project will help realize.

Thank you for your every consideration,

ULTRA Core Members:

Hiroko M. Kurihara, John Gatewood, Joan Lichterman, Joyce Roy, Suzanne L'Heureux, Christopher Waters, Thomas Dolan