

November 17, 2015

Mayor Tom Bates and Members of the Berkeley City Council
New City Hall
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

RE: Remand 2631-2637 Appeal to ZAB to Protect Affordable Housing

To the Berkeley City Council,

We, former tenants of 2631 Durant Ave, are deeply concerned that approval of this project as written will set a dangerous new precedent allowing for the demolition of rent controlled units.

The Demolition Ordinance states that units cannot be demolished unless a finding states that the elimination of the units will not cause detriment to housing needs. Yet this is exactly what would happen. While 56 units would replace the original 18, it does not go far enough in providing the affordable housing that currently exists. The 18 units were rented out at 65% of the median price for the area, but in the new project, only 4 units will be below market rate. Therefore, the replacement of 14 units from affordable to market rate will have a detriment on housing needs, especially for students who struggle to find affordable housing in the Southside area as rents continue to skyrocket. Even with voluntarily reserving 20 units under rent control, the starting rent will be too high for the average student to afford, creating further strains on people's finances.

Such a decision to approve the demolition of rent controlled units without having a one for one replacement of below market rate units to mitigate the removal of those units could have profound impacts on the safety and affordability of other units. If a property owner knows they can substantially increase their profits by allowing a rent controlled unit to deteriorate beyond fixing, and replacing it with market rate housing, then what is deterring them from doing that? This could compromise the safety of tenants who rent the units today, and make the units unaffordable for tomorrow's tenants. We cannot allow such a precedent of incentivizing the deterioration and neglect of rent control units to take place.

We support development on Southside close to campus, but doing it at the expense of rent controlled units at below market rate is not the solution if we are to address the housing affordability crisis. Because of this, we urge the City Council to remand the decision so a determination can be made to include a one for one replacement of the 18 units into permanent below market rate housing in order to mitigate the impacts of demolishing the rent controlled units.

Sincerely,

Haley Broder
Former Tenant

Nicole Yeghiazarian
Former Tenant