

Correspondence

Received before Noon

Wednesday, April 29, 2026

Berkeley Design Advocates



8 April 2026

Mr. Jordan Klein
Director of Planning and Development
1947 Center Street, 3rd Floor
Berkeley CA 94704

Ms Emily Marthinsen
Chair, Planning Commission
1947 Center Street
Berkeley CA 94704

RE: BDA Comments concerning Corridors Zoning Update

Dear Director Klein and Chair Martinsen:

Berkeley Design Advocates (BDA) has consistently supported increased density along the city's commercial corridors and its boulevards. We are pleased to present our suggestions to advance the current discussions regarding College Avenue, north Shattuck and Solano Avenue land use changes.

BDA appreciates the intensive staff work, public comment and Planning Commission vetting the Corridors Zoning Update process has prompted. BDA considers the general direction of the planning studies to be productive and reasonable; we also acknowledge that increases in height should be related to the width of the street, and that as density increases, we must also consider the design of the streets and sidewalks that support it.

Policies on Height and Density

At the most recent Planning Commission meetings, most commissioners were considering:

- 7-story height limit for North Shattuck
- 6-story height limit for Solano
- 4-story height limit for College Avenue

BDA supports these template height limits.

Policy Outcomes and Public Expectations

BDA understands and appreciates the need to build more housing throughout the city and to provide housing along our commercial corridors that can and should be designed to reinforce the business and social opportunities these streets have historically provided. We acknowledge and appreciate public concerns that these corridors continue to provide a "human scale" design that delivers and reinforces these successful gathering places, and delivers street life, a social fabric, economic vitality and safety.

BDA recommends that the planning guidelines developed in the Corridors Zoning Update process develop metrics to deliver these viable spaces.

Sidewalk Function

We are concerned that sidewalks in many of these corridors are inadequate in capacity and function to serve potential new development. We believe that combinations of increased set-backs and some curb changes can resolve these issues in some, but not all, of the corridors.

Of the three corridors, College Avenue is clearly the most problematic. The current sidewalks are extremely narrow (eight feet or less), there is already high activity, and the parcel size makes ground floor sidewalk set-backs difficult as the depth of the parcels (often around 60 to 70 feet) could become unworkable. As a result, we believe that there is an objective reason to limit the density increase on College Avenue to selected parcels.

However, on Solano and north Shattuck, we do not observe the same underlying issues. Both streets are wide, and the parcel depths generally more than 90 feet, with some parcels about 100 feet deep. We encourage you to incorporate a minimum sidewalk width into Objective Design Standards. Sidewalks can be widened by requiring additional setback at the ground level, pulling back the ground floor retail spaces (cantilever) by up to two feet while allowing the housing above to occupy the full site and more, in the form of bays or other overhangs into the right of way.

Supporting Local Businesses

As to the concern that large residential developments will displace existing merchants, we believe the impacts will vary by location. College Avenue between Stuart and Woolsey provides a type of retail space that is unlikely to be replicated in new development on this street considering the street width and small parcel depths. The current constraints (physical and legal) lead to shallow, smaller retail spaces with highly articulated ground floor facades that create College Avenue's lively street environment.

On north Shattuck Avenue and along part of Solano Avenue, street width and deeper parcel dimensions can lead to successful joint retail and housing outcomes with careful guidance and design. This is especially true on north Shattuck where the most treasured businesses have ownership and control of their parcels, and in the remaining parcels many of the storefronts are poorly designed and result in poor retail experiences. Solano Avenue has a finer grain of architecture, but with thoughtful guidance and incentives we believe successful outcomes can be achieved.

Meaningful regulation can encourage and enable successful corridors and street life with provisions such as:

1. Reducing or eliminating rear setbacks in the north Shattuck and Solano corridors in return for increasing the sidewalk setbacks by at least five feet (and allowing a two-foot additional cantilever between the ground floor and upper levels). BDA would not object to reasonable rear setbacks on floors above 20 feet.
2. Requiring articulation of retail façades to avoid flat monoliths of dark glass often seen in new development.

3. Requiring PG&E to accept underground transformers, rather than creating blank façades in the middle of retail blocks.
4. Requiring meaningful infrastructure inside ground floor retail spaces to make it achievable for small businesses to build them out.

The new developments and street treatments on University Avenue, just east of Shattuck, beautifully illustrate the potential for development that creates a lively retail environment. We note that the retail spaces leased quickly, relative to other recent developments that made less investment in the ground floor experience.

Technical Infrastructure Requirements

We believe the city should explicitly identify the following design outcomes for these corridors:

- **Functional Infrastructure** – Sidewalks should be adequate to provide for expected foot traffic. Most sidewalks in Berkeley’s commercial corridors are far too narrow.
- **Enhanced Infrastructure** – The effective public right-of-way must accommodate necessary street furniture, improved pedestrian-scale lighting, green infrastructure, and – where appropriate – outdoor seating to support retail activity, all without pinching the required sidewalk widths. The city’s Downtown Area Plan identified many of these needs and could be used as guidance for the three corridors.
- **Ground Floor Retail Standards** – The design of the ground floor is of critical importance. Minimum floor-to-ceiling heights of not less than 14 feet should be required to enable active and successful retail. In addition, retail spaces should at time of COO include necessary utility, water, drainage and venting (warm shells) to reduce the cost of tenant improvements, and should also incorporate design characteristics of typical successful Berkeley commercial areas. This should include provisions to allow for larger retail spaces to be divisible into smaller (and easier to rent, and more interesting to street design) spaces.

Retail Density

Ground floor retail regulatory requirements may exceed what the market can reasonably absorb. BDA acknowledges that on some corridors ground floor retail on virtually every building may be appropriate, while on other corridors it only results in vacant storefronts.

Based on our understanding of the existing and future retail markets in the three commercial corridors, we suggest that full continuous ground floor retail be required on north Shattuck between Rose and Hearst, and along the College Avenue corridor in Elmwood. For Solano Avenue, it is reasonable that continuous retail frontage be required from Ensenada to The Alameda, and west of Ensenada live-work or front-stoops could be appropriate design responses to limited retail opportunities.

Other Corridors

The planning and design guidance that BDA recommends for the College, north Shattuck and Solano corridors are generally applicable to the city's other corridors. College, north Shattuck and Solano are all walkable, designed for people, with automobile access a lesser priority. This is a paradigm the city should consider in other corridors, with an acknowledgement of market demand and the need to cluster retail in successful retail nodes.

We also note that while we appreciate the city considering changes to the three affected corridors, we believe that University Avenue zoning is incompatible with successful urban and community outcomes. Once the Corridors Zoning Update is completed, the city should reconsider University Avenue height and bulk restrictions.

Conclusion

We understand that change is hard and change is frightening. That is not a reason to do nothing; it is a reason to listen and create guidelines, programs and projects that respond to these concerns. It is also a reason for the city to "sweat the details" to ensure that as change occurs there are reasonable mechanisms to provide for the quality and successful look, feel, and function of these commercial corridors. We appreciate the efforts by the city staff and the Planning Commission to deliver a successful Corridors Zoning Update and hope that BDA's comments and suggestions add to the discourse and lead to citywide benefits.

Sincerely,



Anthony Bruzzone
President

Berkeley Design Advocates (BDA) is a membership organization of Berkeley design professionals. We look forward to providing additional supportive and appropriate comments to the Planning Commission and City Council as the Corridor Zoning Update process advances. This BDA position was discussed, debated and approved by the BDA membership on April 8, 2026.

cc: Anne Hersch, Land Use Planning Manager
Secretary, Planning Commission ✓

Correspondence

From: steve tracy <tracy.steve@att.net>
Sent: Monday, April 27, 2026 12:15 PM
To: Planning Commission
Subject: Please keep current zoning so developers build affordable CA bonus housing

Follow Up Flag: Flag for follow up
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WARNING: This is not a City of Berkeley email. Do not click links or attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Commissioners,

Do well to keep current zoning, no upzoning so developers will need to include affordable housing to get to the building sweet spot of 7 - 8 stories. Witness 2109 Virginia St project went up to 8 stories approved using 100% density bonus (neighborhood appeal denied Feb 2026 at council) under current code of 3 stories. Anything taller is grossly out of scale with the unique neighborhoods and more likely to displace the local small businesses.

Further witness CA SB79 applies 6 stories tall to 60% of the N. Shattuck corridor! That is within the radius of half a mile from downtown BART. That is all of District 4 from BART all the way to Cedar. Upzoning is redundant with SB 79 as of July 1, 2026. Please motivate developers in your plan to include CA density bonus affordable housing within the scale and character of the 3 unique Berkeley neighborhoods.

Steve Tracy
Euclid Ave, Berkeley

Correspondence

From: Paul Chapman <pchapman5@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 26, 2026 5:52 PM
To: Planning Commission
Cc: Humbert, Mark; Humbert, Mark; Panzer, Eric
Subject: Comment for the Planning Commission Meeting on May 6, 2026

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WARNING: This is not a City of Berkeley email. Do not click links or attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Berkeley Planning Commission,

As a resident of the Elmwood district, I have followed closely the discussions regarding housing and the Corridor Zoning Update and have attended several meetings with dozens of my neighbors. I understand that the Planning Commission will be presenting an update of the CZU at the May 6 meeting, and I wish to register my concerns and my support for the alternative proposed by District 8 Councilmember Mark Humbert.

Understanding that due to many factors, including decades when little new housing was built in Berkeley, new housing laws and regulations, and a state mandate to build new housing, there is a need to address zoning for housing in the City. The initial CZU plan considered by the Planning Commission and City Council and their consultant appeared to present a “one size fits all” approach in the three corridors identified and threatened to radically change the four blocks of College Avenue under consideration. There is a strong consensus among local residents that we must save our Berkeley commercial shops and that means the proposal to increase the zoning heights on College Avenue must be rejected.

Having communicated with Councilmember Mark Humbert, I ask that the Planning Commission and the Berkeley City Council approve the “tailored zoning approach” for the Elmwood that would limit potential corridor building to three “opportunity sites”: 7-11, Wells Fargo, and potentially the Post Office, and protect four blocks of shops by retaining the current 2-story zoning. I also ask the Commission and Council to approve a maximum height limit of 4 stories for the opportunity sites (2-story plus a 2-story bonus if required conditions are met). Understanding there has been discussion of a formula linking street width to building height, I ask the Commission to approve the minimum recommended ratio for College Avenue in light of it being a very narrow street with a great deal of traffic. Councilmember Mark Humbert has also proposed the PITCH plan to add substantial housing potential on Telegraph and at Claremont and Ashby, and I request that you further study this concept.

Thank you for working to develop appropriate plans to increase housing in Berkeley while respecting the critical need to save the unique environment of the College Avenue commercial zone.

Sincerely,

Paul Chapman

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Berkeley CA 94705
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510-520-6657 (cell)
510-843-1810 (office)

Correspondence

From: KirkMcCarthy <kirk@kirkmccarthy.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 26, 2026 8:46 AM
To: Planning Commission
Subject: Upzoning of the North Berkeley Corridor

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WARNING: This is not a City of Berkeley email. Do not click links or attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

My name is Kirk McCarthy. I am the president of the NSA business district (speaking for the entire board of the merchants district) and also the president of the ACCI Co-op — a 120-artist democracy that has been a working model of the creative community in this city for 68 years.

I want to be plain speaking about what is at stake concerning zoning.

This district is not a location. It is a living room.

When we install a parklet, put up extra lighting for the holidays, or put in a bulb out, we are not doing traffic management. We are sending a signal: this space belongs to you. Come out. Slow down. Stay. The street is not a transit corridor between destinations. It is itself a destination — the specific kind of public space where people of genuinely different backgrounds, different incomes, different lives, come into each others physical presence and discover, simply by being there together, that they share something.

You cannot fully dehumanize someone you are physically present with. Presence itself is a form of accountability. Our streets do that work. Our historic buildings, our human-scaled storefronts, our corridors that have developed character over decades — these create the conditions for that presence. They are not amenities. They are the infrastructure of community.

An eight-story building does not just change the skyline. It changes the street. Part of what makes this district irreplaceable is that it does not look like everywhere else. The historic buildings, the varied facades, the human scale — these are not nostalgia. They are functional. They tell the person walking by: this place has a story. People have been here. This was built by someone who cared about what it looked like from the sidewalk.

There is no architectural solution to what an eight-story block does to a street. It creates shadow. It creates wind. It signals, in the language of built form, that the street is not the point — the floors above it are. The living room becomes a lobby.

Local businesses are not interchangeable units.

It takes years for a business to establish itself — to build the recognition, the habits, the relationships that keep customers coming back. Those patterns are fragile. Disrupt them and you do not simply relocate a business. You destroy the accumulated social capital that made it work. The merchant who knows your name. The coffee shop where the neighborhood actually meets. These things cannot be reconstructed on a faster timeline than the one that built them.

Once broken, these patterns do not reassemble automatically. They are lost.

What we are asking for is not resistance to change. It is fidelity to what makes this district worth developing at all.

Developers want to build here because this district has value. The historic character, the walkability, the creative community, the living room quality of the streets — this is what the value is made of. A development plan that destroys those qualities in order to capture their value is not development. It is extraction.

The ACCI Co-op is a model worth considering. One hundred and twenty artists, sustaining a creative community in an expensive urban landscape, through genuine democratic participation and shared ownership. That is what this district has produced.

We want people out of their towers and onto streets that welcome them.

We want presence. We want the friction of genuine encounters. We want to be the living room, not the lobby.

We are asking this council to consider what scale serves that vision — and what scale makes it impossible.

Thank you.

Kirk McCarthy(

Correspondence

From: Max V. Staller <max.staller@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 9:12 PM
To: Planning Commission
Subject: Written comment about Shattuck zoning

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Hi

I would like to please submit a written comment regarding the zoning density on north Shattuck Ave.

I moved to North Berkeley 5 years ago where I now live with my spouse and our three young children. It is a vibrant and wonderful neighborhood. I walk down Shattuck every day on my way to work. I take my eldest daughter to the farmers market every Thursday. She goes to after care at the JCC. We frequently visit the shops and restaurants. I think we go to the Cheeseboard three or four times a week. I get my haircut at The Shop. I buy my coffee at Peet's on Walnut or at Caffeinated on Vine. I buy my soap at the Filling Station. Whenever I need a nice gift, I have options. We buy celebration treats at Cupcakin. Every Friday night we have dinner at one of the Shattuck restaurants. This neighborhood is so walkable that I drive a car once a week or less. When we host visitors from out of town, the main event is to walk up and down Shattuck and show them this vibrant community.

Berkeley is a fabulous place to live with a young family. In my five years, I only found one aspect of Berkeley that I wish I could change: I wish more people could live here and experience its wonders.

I think increasing the zoning density on North Shattuck would add to the vitality of North Berkeley. More people and families would help support the local businesses. More residents would mean more people walking down the street. More people would make North Shattuck more walkable and enrich our community. In sum I support all the proposals to increase the zoning density for all of north Shattuck, but I favor the maximum density proposed.

Cheers,

Max

Correspondence

From: Joaquin Carbonell <jcarbiv@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 24, 2026 12:59 PM
To: Planning Commission
Subject: North Shattuck Corridors Planning

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Hi Planning Commission,

I understand that the zoning plan for the North Shattuck corridor will be discussed at the upcoming May 6th meeting. In the event that I can't make it for the in-person public comment session, I wanted to express my support for zoning for even taller buildings than those proposed in Alternative #2 and minimal setback and massing requirements.

The North Shattuck corridor has great bus routes, businesses, and infrastructure to support more homes. Berkeley has made progress in creating a more permissive environment for housing development to alleviate the pressure on housing prices, but we have a long way to go to make Berkeley the affordable, inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and equitable place that it aspires to be.

Enabling more housing and more businesses on North Shattuck will make a neighborhood that I love even better.

Warm regards,

Joaquín R. Carbonell IV
Council District 1 resident