

From: [Moni G](#)
To: [Horner, Justin](#); [Planning Commission](#)
Subject: Comments on Planning Commission's Recommendations on the SPSP
Date: Tuesday, June 9, 2026 3:09:04 PM

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.

To the Planning Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Planning Commission's recommendations on the San Pablo Specific Plan. As a West Berkeley resident who lives near and bikes, shops, walks and drives along this corridor, I welcome a robust exchange between city planners and city residents, visitors and corridor users.

1. San Pablo Specific Plan should not replace the West Berkeley Plan

Staff recommends replacing the language of the West Berkeley Plan where they overlap; however; the SPSP does not encompass the entirety of West Berkeley, nor the protections which the West Berkeley Plan provides, includes environmental protections for West Berkeley residents against coal transport and protections for artists and industry. Retiring the West Berkeley Plan entirely undermines the health and safety of West Berkeley residents, a historically disadvantaged community that already faces pollution from highways and local industry.

2. Zoning for housing must be done strategically; at nodes

I am including my comment from the last meeting here: Upzoning of San Pablo Avenue must be done in a targeted fashion, focusing on nodes rather than applied broadly. If applied to large swaths of the corridor it becomes a blunt instrument to achieve more housing and will ultimately do more harm than good. The fact of the matter is upzoning raises land values, driving up rents for small businesses and residents who face runaway rental prices from landlords eager to financial benefit from upzoning. This not only drives out low- and moderate income residents and small businesses, it also makes it much more expensive to build housing that can be priced or rented out at affordable rates. For the same reason, upzoning on San Pablo Avenue should be capped at 5 stories, similar to the new(ish) Jones Street apartments.

3. Sidewalk setbacks must conform to the Berkeley's 2020 Pedestrian Plan

It is great news that the City Council is supportive of policies aimed at widening sidewalks to create safer, more comfortable, and active pedestrian environments. The quality of life and safety of our residents is of great importance to this city, which has seen many traffic injuries of late.

As in my previous comments, please require sidewalk depths that are consistent with Berkeley's Pedestrian Plan.

4 . Sidewalk setbacks are separate from public open spaces and should not be an "either or" option.

Thank you for considering past comments on incorporating POPOS. However, sidewalks are not a replacement for public open spaces and should not be offered as an "either/or" option for developers. Sidewalk requirements should be consistent with the City of Berkeley's own 2020 Pedestrian Plan requirements.

5. The recommendations of the Planning Commission are extensive; Please allow more time for West Berkeley to understand them and provide feedback.

From: [Dale](#)
To: [Planning Commission](#)
Subject: Tract map #8760: 1155-1163 Hearst Ave
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 9:09:22 AM

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 Joshua,

I can't tell from the flier I received only yesterday, June 20, if the 6 units being considered for conversion are rent controlled or not, but if they are, I strongly object. To maintain diversity and affordable housing, the city must protect its dwindling supply of rent controlled units.

Please let me know if these 6 units are currently under rent control.

Thank you,
Dale, concerned Berkeley citizen

From: accounts@ps2441.com
To: [Planning Commission](#)
Subject: Inquiry re transportation for planned development along College Ave.
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 9:11:37 AM

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.

Hello,

I understand that with regard to new development the City has to comply with specific state mandated requirements for off street parking. I would like to review the City's analysis of the state requirements and how the proposed corridors development complies.

Thank you,
Jacqueline DeSouza
(510) 882-8808

From: [Moni G](#)
To: [Horner, Justin](#); [Planning Commission](#)
Subject: Re: Comments on Planning Commission's Recommendations on the SPSP
Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 9:11:49 AM

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Please accept these updated comments for inclusion in published documents:

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As in my previous comments, please require sidewalk depths that are consistent with Berkeley's Pedestrian Plan. I am including my comment here:

As stated in the Plan, sidewalks along San Pablo are 13 feet and less, which is narrower compared to the width guidance set in the City's 2020 Pedestrian Plan. This plan recommends sidewalk widths of 16'-24' for main streets and mixed use boulevards. At the same time, proposed zoning (combined with state density bonuses) would allow 10–11-story buildings along much of the corridor. Given the volume, speed, and noise of traffic on San Pablo, it's

difficult to imagine a corridor becoming vibrant or walkable if pedestrians are confined to a narrow strip sandwiched between tall walls on one side and fast-moving vehicles/buses on the other. The substantial sidewalk easements therefore feel critical to community health and livability. Ten-story buildings will hopefully add a substantial car-light population that needs space to walk, talk, shop locally, run errands on foot, move by bike, park their bikes.. etc. Optional 1–2-foot easements in the current plan, framed as incentives rather than expectations have at most lukewarm support and are insufficient relative to the scale of building heights and the goal of improving vitality and pedestrian accessibility in the Plan area.

4 . Sidewalk setbacks are separate from public open spaces and should not be an "either or" option.

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5. Please preserve first floor zoning for small businesses.

Outside a handful of major intersections, the plan would allow ground-floor residential uses rather than requiring commercial or active uses. With such a dramatic increase in height and residential density, it seems counterintuitive to allow the number of neighborhood-serving businesses to stagnate—or even decrease. From a pedestrian perspective, active ground floors matter.

6. The recommendations of the Planning Commission are extensive; Please allow more time for West Berkeley to understand them and provide feedback.

As pedestrians and cyclists, we've seen repeatedly that decision-makers are far more willing to invest in safe micromobility where there is visible street life—shops, restaurants, services, and places to linger. That means we need to advocate for land-use policies that help San Pablo become an inviting, human-scale corridor. Much of the City Council discussion, however, has focused narrowly on "maximizing the number of units," with resistance to upper-floor setbacks, sunlight access, and minimum open-space requirements. The vision is of towering apartment buildings on both sides, narrow sidewalks, and a mini-highway in the middle, mirrors the problems articulated in the San Pablo Avenue Specific plan and runs directly counter to its vision.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Moni Gangopadhyay

On Tue, Jun 2, 2026 at 12:00 PM Moni G <moni@moniforberkeley.org> wrote:

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From: [Asmara Beraki](#)
To: [Planning Commission](#); [Horner, Justin](#)
Subject: Public Comment: Ashby BART West Lot ODS – Proposed South Berkeley Commons Amendments (July 1 Meeting)
Date: Tuesday, June 23, 2026 4:44:35 PM
Attachments: [South Berkeley Commons Amendments.pdf](#)

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 Commissioners and Secretary Horner,

Please accept and include the attached text as **Primary Correspondence** for the upcoming July 1, 2026, Planning Commission meeting regarding the implementation of the Objective Design Standards (ODS) for the Ashby BART transit-oriented housing development.

The attached document details a comprehensive, density-neutral community alternative titled the **South Berkeley Commons Amendments**.

Given the severe macroeconomic softening and structural inventory imbalances in Berkeley's market-rate sector—where newer developments are facing an elevated vacancy rate near 8.0% and flat-to-negative rental growth—building more speculative luxury units presents a distinct financial risk. Prioritizing a 65% permanently affordable equity model secures instant absorption, while our progressive Anti-Speculation pricing rule ensures that the remaining market-rate units must adapt to real local consumer demand rather than being held vacant to artificially preserve luxury or “market-rate” pricing.

Summary of Key Modifications in the Proposed Amendments:

- **Section 1 (Land Use & Housing Equity):** Codifies a legally binding 25,000-square-foot active ground-floor community footprint, explicitly securing space for a neighborhood health clinic, local arts hub, and a permanent home for the Berkeley Flea Market. It introduces a strict historical right-of-return tenant preference program and an Anti-Speculation Price-Correction Provision to ensure market-rate units cannot be held intentionally vacant.
- **Section 2 (Public Realm & Open Space):** Establishes a mandatory 25,000-square-foot permeable green space atrium inside a U-shaped layout, featuring a multi-use promenade loop, active intergenerational recreation spaces, a local urban foodscape managed by a dedicated landscapist, and an integrated safety/emergency access road.
- **Section 3 (Building Design & Character):** Authorizes density-neutral massing adjustments, allowing for 10-to-12 story vertical point-access mass-timber towers to successfully preserve the target 600+ unit capacity while protecting the 50,000 square feet of public commons.
- **Section 4 (Conceptual Financing Stack):** Outlines a braided capital framework leveraging local, state (AHSC), and federal (USDOT) infrastructure and equity grants to absorb upfront construction premiums.

I formally request that the Planning Commission integrate these standards into the final ODS text to hold development partners legally accountable to their public benefit promises.

Thank you for your time and your dedication to preserving the cultural, economic, and

physical architecture of South Berkeley.

Sincerely,

Asmara Beraki Marek

South Berkeley Resident, City of Berkeley

Proposed Amendments to the Ashby BART West Lot Objective Design Standards (ODS)

Part I: Amendments to Section 1 (Land Use & Housing Equity)

1.1.1 [Amended] Ground Floor Civic, Cultural, and Health Resource Allocation

Mandate: To fulfill the public benefit standards of the South Berkeley Commons, the developer must allocate a minimum of **25,000 square feet** of active ground-floor interior space for community-facing infrastructure. This space must be structurally configured to feature outward-jutting architectural segments that maximize overhead sunlight penetration and visual transparency from the public commons.

Umbrella Categories & Requirements:

- **Neighborhood Health and Wellness Anchor:** Dedicated square footage within this allocation must be permanently reserved for a community health clinic and neighborhood wellness/meditation spaces.
- **Creative Arts and Youth Incubation Hub:** Space must be designated for low-cost, rotating local artist studios, exhibition galleries, and an acoustically isolated community music program/recording studio with public equipment.
- **Civic Assembly and Media Rooms:** Flexible indoor spaces must be provided to accommodate community meetings, local dining events, and educational screening programs.
- **Economic Sovereignty and Cooperative Retail:** Space must be reserved for volunteer-serviced neighborhood co-op groceries, local craft shops, and dedicated, centralized on-site storage to house tables and equipment for the Berkeley Flea Market and farmers' markets.

1.1.3 Housing Equity & Historic Repatriation

Mandate: In alignment with historical remediation goals for the South Berkeley area, no more than 35% of the total residential units built across the West Lot shall be allocated to market-rate housing. A minimum of 65% of the total residential units shall be deed-restricted as permanently affordable housing, inclusive of local artists' housing.

Umbrella Requirements:

- **Historical Footprint Preference:** In recognition of the historical eminent domain displacements of Black and Japanese residents, the city shall apply its Right to Return policy to create a top-tier tenant preference. Priority allocation for all affordable housing and creative studio spaces must be legally reserved for documented families displaced by original station construction and regional infrastructure clearings.
- **East Lot Designation:** If developed, the quieter, more residential East Lot footprint shall be largely dedicated to this African American/Black repatriation housing to ownership program.
- **Anti-Speculation and Mandated Market-Rate Price Correction:** To prevent artificial housing supply suppression and ensure immediate neighborhood integration, residential units allocated to market-rate leasing shall not be permitted to sit prolonged and vacant. If a market-rate unit remains vacant and unleased for a consecutive period exceeding 90 days post-issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy (or 90 days following a previous tenant's vacancy), the operator must automatically reduce the advertised monthly rent by a minimum of 10%. Continued vacancy shall trigger an additional 5% mandatory reduction every 30 days thereafter until the unit achieves full occupancy. This provision shall operate in immediate tandem with Berkeley Municipal Code Chapter 7.54 (The Empty Homes Tax). Units held vacant due to refusal to meet real consumer market demand shall be subject to maximum city vacancy penalties without eligibility for standard landlord exclusion periods.

Part II: Amendments to Section 2 (Public Realm, Open Space & Foodscapes)

2.1.4 [Amended] Public Realm Urban Foodscapes and Ecology

Mandate: In public areas optimized for direct solar access and insulated from transit exhaust, the streetscape must integrate an active, productive "Local Foodscape" to reconstruct the urban canopy historically destroyed in South Berkeley.

Umbrella Requirements:

- **Dedicated Foodscape Management:** The development plan must fund and contract a dedicated, professional landscape architect/landscapist specializing in agroecology to permanently design, plant, and maintain the foodscape infrastructure.
- **Agricultural Infrastructure:** The public realm must feature a minimum of 3,000 square feet of active raised-bed community gardens combined with edible, fruit-bearing street trees.
- **Ecosystem Preservation:** All design overlays must protect and retain the existing mature local redwood trees natively in place.

2.5 [Amended] The South Berkeley Commons Civic Atrium & Active Recreation Space

Mandate: The interior area framed by the mandated U-shaped building footprint must be preserved as a contiguous, open-air, vehicle-free public square comprising a minimum of **25,000 square feet of unpaved, permeable green space**.

Umbrella Categories & Requirements:

- **Integrated Safety Access Infrastructure:** The interior green space must incorporate a structurally integrated, limited-use access road designed to accommodate emergency, fire, and safety vehicles. This pathway must be wide enough for emergency response teams and visually blended into the surrounding landscape using reinforced, permeable surfaces to maintain the square's primary pedestrian-first character.
- **The Triangular Looping Promenade:** A continuous, 12-foot-wide multi-use pathway must encircle the entire triangular footprint of the project site, creating an uninterrupted, traffic-free loop for walking, power walking, bicycling, roller-skating, and rollerblading.
- **Intergenerational Active Recreation Zone:** The commons must integrate a dedicated athletic rental hub, a multi-age child play area featuring a natural sandbox, an accessible low-impact exercise and stretching area for seniors, and a universally accessible public climbing and bouldering wall.

- **Grassroots Arts and Performance Anchor:** The public square must incorporate a tiered, below-grade outdoor amphitheatre for community concerts and cinema nights (positioned to mitigate residential noise), paired directly with a minimum of 40 linear feet of sanctioned, rotating community graffiti art walls.
- **Civic Transit Amenities:** The above-ground BART entrance plaza must feature a central water fountain to promote psychological calm, adjacent well-maintained public restrooms, and a safely managed parking area to support transit and neighborhood access.

Part III: Amendments to Section 3 (Building Design & Architectural Character)

3.1.1 Maximum Building Length & Courtyard Orientations

Mandate: Monolithic, double-loaded corridor residential building footprints (the "box model") are expressly prohibited on the West Lot site. Building massing must utilize an open U-shaped or point-access block configuration that frames the public commons.

Umbrella Requirements:

- **Exterior Access Walkways:** To maximize natural light illumination and dual-aspect air cross-ventilation, residential units must be accessed via open-air exterior walkways facing the inner courtyard side of the structure.
- **Density-Neutral Massing Adjustments:** To maintain a 600+ target housing unit capacity while preserving the 25,000 square foot courtyard, developers are authorized to increase vertical heights to a maximum of 10 to 12 stories within narrow vertical point-access segments, provided that the lower 3 stories are stepped back as a podium base. A wide massing break facing Ashby Street must be incorporated to accommodate the safety access road.

3.2.2 Anti-Monolithic Visual Character and South Berkeley Identity

Mandate: Architectural designs that rely on a generic, undifferentiated flat corporate aesthetic that lacks neighborhood context are expressly prohibited. The visual character of all facades must actively reflect the specific cultural, artistic, and historic identity of the South Berkeley/Adeline corridor.

Umbrella Requirements:

- **Visual Rhythm and Variation:** Building exteriors must utilize varying rooflines, deeply recessed windows (minimum 4-inch punch), projecting balconies, bay windows, and heavy vertical massing breaks to mimic the organic, fine-grained variety of the surrounding historic neighborhood.

3.3.2 Material Performance, Quality, and Ecological Sustainability

Mandate: To prevent a placeless aesthetic, the use of exterior insulation and finish systems (EIFS), standard flat stucco "plant-ons," and untextured vinyl or plastic sidings are strictly prohibited on all visible facades.

Umbrella Requirements:

- **Character-Rich Materials:** A minimum of 40% of the cumulative building facades must utilize high-quality, deeply textured materials that possess inherent warmth and permanence, such as real brick, natural stone, heavy timber, or terra cotta ceramics.
- **Environmental Sustainability & Public Rooftops:** The development must maximize low-carbon cement mixes and sustainably harvested mass timber/ cross-laminated timber (CLT) elements. Structures must incorporate a publicly accessible rooftop garden, a community viewing deck, and a rooftop cafe/ restaurant serviced directly by an exterior glass public elevator.

3.3.3 Public Art and Historical Monuments

Mandate: Public art shall be distributed sitewide to reflect neighborhood history.

Umbrella Requirements:

- **Mable Howard Promissory Note Civic Anchor:** The development must establish a central, prominent focal location—either at the nexus of the courtyard plaza or integrated into the corner amphitheatre—for the permanent installation of the **Mable Howard Promissory Note Sculpture**, complete with dedicated lighting, seating, and interpretive historical plaque infrastructure.

Part IV: Conceptual Capital Allocation & Financing Roadmap

Feasibility & Macroeconomic Justification

While a multi-story podium base supporting 10-to-12-story vertical towers requires a higher upfront capital investment than a standard box building, this design establishes a self-sustaining regional destination.

Furthermore, local macroeconomic data indicates that Berkeley’s market-rate housing segment has significantly softened. Residential vacancy rates for newly constructed downtown developments are hovering near an elevated 8.0%, resulting in a supply glut that has forced developers to cut asking rents and offer heavy leasing concessions to fill units. Elevated interest rates and cooling market-rate absorption have already stalled or paused roughly 17 major commercial pipeline projects across the city.

Leaning into an expanded **65% permanently affordable equity model** is inherently a safer, more financially stable economic bet for the City and BART. Affordable housing in Berkeley maintains a near 0% structural vacancy rate with near-infinite demand. By pairing this stable housing base with **25,000 square feet of active civic and health infrastructure**, the project creates a resilient, recession-proof regional anchor. Visitors from across the Bay Area will utilize transit off-peak specifically to access the health clinic, the permanent Flea Market plaza, and the arts hub, generating a reliable, long-term ridership revenue stream for BART that the current design standard cannot replicate.

To fund the upfront infrastructure premiums, the project will leverage a "braided" capital stack of local, state, and federal equity funds:

Funding Layer	Target Amenity / Infrastructure Element	Primary Financing Source
Housing Equity & Repatriation	65% permanently affordable residential units and historic right-of-return housing blocks.	Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), City Housing Trust Funds, and state affordable housing bonds.

<p>Civic Atrium & Active Recreation</p>	<p>25,000 sq ft permeable plaza, looping promenade, safety access road, and intergenerational play zones.</p>	<p>California HCD Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) Grant program.</p>
<p>Environmental Sustainability</p>	<p>Mass timber structural elements, cross-laminated timber (CLT), and carbon-reducing material premiums.</p>	<p>California Wood Innovation Grants and federal green building tax credits.</p>
<p>Health & Neighborhood Safety</p>	<p>Neighborhood health clinic anchor and emergency medical access infrastructure.</p>	<p>Federal HRSA Health Center Capital Grants and regional public health facility funds.</p>
<p>Cultural & Grassroots Arts</p>	<p>Mable Howard sculpture plaza, recording studios, art galleries, and community graffiti walls.</p>	<p>National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town grants, paired with private philanthropic endowments (e.g., San Francisco Foundation/ Hewlett).</p>