

Correspondence

From: Ginsburg, Kayla
Sent: Monday, August 25, 2025 3:15 PM
To: Planning Commission
Subject: Help inform Berkeley tenants and landlords through social media
Attachments: Berkeley Rent Board Social Media Launch Toolkit.pdf

Dear Jamie and Alisa,

We are excited to share that the Berkeley Rent Board has launched official social media accounts and we could use the Planning Commission's help to get the word out there! **We are using [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Bluesky](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Youtube](#) to:**

- Empower more Berkeley tenants and landlords to know and exercise their rights and responsibilities.
- Support landlords in staying compliant with the Rent Ordinance.
- Connect both tenants and landlords to free Rent Board resources like housing counseling, mediations, and more.

Will you help us spread the word? I've attached our toolkit with pre-made posts and text for your convenience, but in short you can:

- **Follow our accounts and share one of our posts** (like [this one about rent control coverage](#) or [this one about our services!](#)).
- **Include a short blurb in your next newsletter or email** blast with links to our social media accounts (text in attached toolkit).
- **Spread this resource to your networks** and community members who care about housing stability and housing rights (e.g. a listserv or Facebook group!).

Thank you for your help in furthering our goal to reach members of the Berkeley community who are not yet aware of their rights, responsibilities, and the free Rent Board resources available to them.

Feel free to reply with any questions!

Best,

Kayla



Kayla Ginsburg (*she/her*)
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Correspondence

From: Planning Dept. Mailbox
Sent: Tuesday, August 5, 2025 1:06 PM
To: Planning Commission
Subject: FW: Affordable Housing

Hi Planning commission staff, passing along recently received public comment.

Jim Bondi, Associate Management Analyst
City of Berkeley, Department of Planning & Development
1947 Center St., 5th Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704
<https://berkeleyca.gov/>

From: Planning Dept. Mailbox
Sent: Tuesday, August 5, 2025 1:05 PM
To: 'Kaden Nguyen' <kadennguyen076@gmail.com>
Subject: RE: Affordable Housing

Hi Kaden,

Thanks for your comments. I will forward this email to the staff who work with the City Planning Commission, which might be best suited to consider and recommend the kinds of policies you advocate.

You are also always welcome to communicate about this (or any) policy issue with the Berkeley City Council. Emails sent to council@berkeleyca.gov are assembled by the City Clerk and published as part of the packet for the next scheduled City Council meeting.

Best,

Jim Bondi, Associate Management Analyst
City of Berkeley, Department of Planning & Development
1947 Center St., 5th Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704
<https://berkeleyca.gov/>

From: Kaden Nguyen <kadennguyen076@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, August 5, 2025 12:43 PM
To: Planning Dept. Mailbox <Planning@berkeleyca.gov>
Subject: Affordable Housing

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 the Berkeley Planning Department,

I strongly support the ongoing efforts to increase affordable housing, but at the same time, I am deeply concerned about the aesthetic direction of these developments. Too often, new affordable housing projects adopt a modernist style that appears disconnected from Berkeley's rich historical architectural heritage.

While Berkeley is not known for architecture, the city still has a large stock of beautiful historic buildings such as the Sather Tower, the art-deco style Berkeley Public Library, the Beaux-Arts style old city hall, and the craftsman and Victorian homes that make up the fabric of the city's neighborhoods. Too often, many of these buildings have been demolished to be replaced by bland and uniform modern-style apartment buildings. Recently, the city council reversed the landmark status on two historic buildings in order to build more housing. I am not a NIMBY, I just wish these new developments were more aesthetically pleasing.

Affordable housing does not need to be architecturally bland. History shows that it is possible for it to be beautiful. However, our permitting process makes this difficult. The numerous unnecessary fees from the building permitting process divert funds away from thoughtful design elements like ornamentation and façade details, discouraging developers from pursuing classical styles. While some argue that classical architecture is impractical today due to its craftsmanship demands, this overlooks its history. Victorian homes were built from the 1850-90s, right during the Industrial Revolution. During this period, some decorations and ornaments, such as columns and wall-moldings were mass-produced in factories. Mass-production allowed the construction of these buildings to be fast, efficient, and affordable.

Some were even kit homes, which were assembled on site with pre-cut factory-made parts. Some of the craftsman-style homes in the city are kit homes. While it is true that some homes had their details handmade, this was only mostly true for the large mansions, since the wealthy could afford superior craftsmanship over the middle class. Kit home construction was actually very popular in the first half of the twentieth century and many of these homes survive today. Mass production allowed the middle class to afford more designs to decorate their homes. Moreover, carpenters did not work alone, they sometimes had machines and mechanical tools that helped them create and replicate designs. Since the manufacturing and design technologies are much more advanced than they were in the 1800s, the design and construction of beautiful classically-designed buildings is actually faster than it was in the 1800s.



Take for example the cast iron buildings of Pentaluma in Sonoma County. These buildings are ornate and beautiful. However, the details on cast-iron buildings of this period are actually mass-produced. A foundry in San Francisco produced the details of the facade and the prefabricated details were shipped to Pentaluma to be assembled onto the building. New technological advancements, like molds, allowed for the mass-production of interchangeable parts, such as columns and panels that could be used in many buildings. This made these buildings faster to build and more affordable. Catalogues during this period advertised different mass-produced cast-iron designs and clients could order them through mail to decorate the walls of their buildings. The details were affordable, since they were mass-produced and pre-fabricated. Many buildings in the Soho neighborhood of New York City contain beautiful mass-produced cast-iron facades. This is an example of how beauty was successfully mass-produced in the past and that not all beautiful buildings have to be hand-made.

Many homes in Berkeley's historic neighborhoods sell for well above a million dollars. A study in the Netherlands confirms that homes with classical design command higher prices than their modern counterparts. This is because classically-designed buildings are harder to find than modern ones, and classically designed buildings are seen as more attractive by the public. The scarcity of classically-designed buildings isn't unavoidable—it's simply driven by restrictive regulations by city governments. When looser zoning laws allowed for the greater construction of classically designed buildings, the study found that prices dropped and stabilized. Similarly, relaxing design-related codes today could possibly help make beauty more attainable and bring affordability to historic neighborhoods.

The study -<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1540-6229.12137>

There have been examples throughout history where affordable housing can be beautiful. Vienna's post-WWI "Gemeindebau" provided beautiful and affordable housing complexes that were complete with courtyards and prioritized access for seniors and people with disabilities. Another example is the U.S. Housing Corporation. The U.S. Housing Corporation was a government agency created during WW1 to combat the housing crisis in communities, due to a rapid influx of industrial workers for the war effort. The agency oversaw the construction of 80 new communities in just 2 years. These communities were thoughtfully designed complete with parks, shops, and schools and the homes were designed to be aesthetically pleasing. While most of the homes built by the government were single-family, instead of the apartment complexes that we so desperately need today, this proves that affordable housing can be beautiful. The Mare Island neighborhood in Vallejo is one of the developments that still stand today.

Classical buildings also lend themselves to adaptive reuse, making them sustainable and having longer lifespans. Modernist buildings, on the other hand, are often demolished due to public dislike, wasting materials and environmental resources.

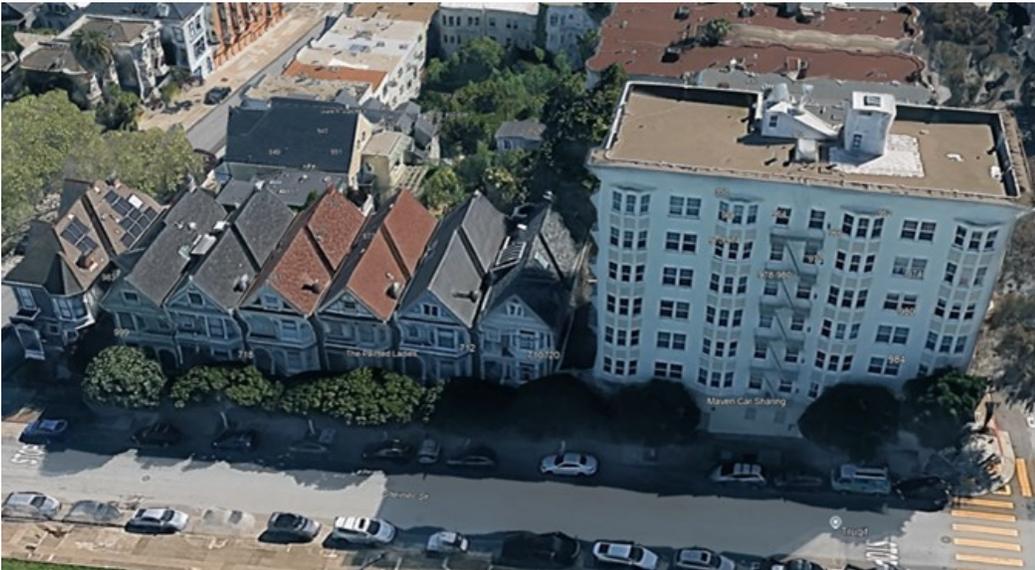
Many new developments often clash with their surrounding built environment, fueling NIMBYism and hindering acceptance. While it is true that buildings that attract criticism at first can become beloved landmarks in the future, such as the Trans-America Pyramid in San Francisco, it is because these buildings are unique and charming in their own way. The new apartment blocks are simply too bland and uniform. Classical architecture fosters cohesion and strengthens neighborhood character. Buildings that complement neighborhood architecture can ease NIMBYism.



Pedestrian-friendly design also matters. In neighborhoods like downtown, beautiful historic buildings create an inviting environment for pedestrians. Replacing this with bland and generic modernist buildings would diminish that spirit.

After the 1906 earthquake, San Francisco relaxed building codes up to 50% to commence reconstruction. Many of those classically inspired buildings still stand today. Why is the same urgency not happening today when the city struggles with housing and homelessness and when gentrification continues to displace minority communities? I'm not saying that we should add another layer of strictness by requiring every new building to be classical, or make every new building an architectural masterwork, I'm saying more relaxed building codes would make it more economical and cheaper to build more beautiful buildings, as there are less

fees and complex processes with the project. Buildings built in the post-earthquake era of San Francisco still paid homage to the rich Victorian past of the city. New buildings in Berkeley should pay homage to the heritage of the city too.



Take a look at the Art-Deco style apartment tower next to the Painted Ladies on the right from the Google Earth photo. While it is taller and not as detailed as the surrounding homes, it still blends in well with the surrounding environment. It incorporates bay windows into its design, allowing it to fit in with the surrounding homes. This is an example of how buildings can complement the neighborhood's character. I also think that we should be more generous with height limits to allow classically-designed buildings to be taller, since they complement the surrounding area, while adding density to the neighborhood.

One policy deserves reconsideration: the requirement for two staircases in all apartment buildings. While safety is a priority, this regulation limits units on narrow lots and inflates costs. This also reduces the available floor area in apartment buildings. In the 1970s, Seattle allowed single-staircase designs in buildings under six stories. Now, it is one of the few cities where you can find apartment buildings on small lots and many new apartment buildings have been constructed in the growing city. We should pass the same reform here, in Berkeley too. This would allow many new types of housing to be constructed and would be a huge step in streamlining the permit process. As for safety, we should focus more on fire prevention strategies like using fire-resistant materials, rather than relying solely on evacuation architecture.

To encourage aesthetically thoughtful development, the city should consider offering grants or tax credits to developers who embrace classical styles that respect the built environment.

Berkeley deserves affordable housing that complements its legacy—not buildings that compete with it. While some fear that more affordable housing might disrupt the city's character, this is also an opportunity to beautify and enhance the character of the city. I urge you to consider reforms that incentivize beauty, flexibility, and historical continuity as we shape the future of our neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

Kaden