

**Late Correspondence
(Received at the
September 17, 2025
Planning Commission
Meeting)**

Justin Horner
Berkeley Planning Commission
1947 Center Street, Third Floor
Berkeley, CA 94704



Dear Mr. Horner,

I am writing in strong opposition to any zoning changes on College Avenue, including Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 as recently proposed.

As part of my opposition to the Berkeley Corridors Zoning Update Alternatives, are the following five points.

Point 1

Utilities for apartments negatively impacting ground-floor retail

The required program elements of large apartment buildings, including utility boxes, electrical vaults, water standpipes, make it impossible to maintain the continual ground floor retail spaces for which College Avenue is known. Destruction of the continual retail frontage will permanently negatively impact the business environment, pedestrian atmosphere, and long-term retail business tax base, as future owners will be incentivized to focus on apartments not retail.

Point 2

Groundfloor Retail is a must

The City is currently looking at two options in the current upzoning proposals: One without mandated ground-floor retail; another with. It is necessary to make certain that ground-floor retail is mandated. Otherwise, the street frontage and much of the neighborhood will be taken up with private apartment lobbies, bike locker, utility boxes, ventilation screens, and other blank walls. As a community, we want ground floor retail.

Point 3

Displacement of Businesses

Upzoning will raise land values and rents, incentivizing redevelopment that will push out long-term mostly family run landlords, as well as pushing out small retail businesses. These local landlords will be replaced by corporate ownership and large real estate investment trusts (REITs) and investors such as Black Rock. The shops and retail, where ground floor retail remains available, will be replaced by chains and more generic stores such as Chipotle or Forever 21.

Point 4

Neighborhood character

Many Berkeley neighborhoods have historic, human-scale architecture; taller buildings may alter sunlight, views, and the sense of place. The height of the 6 to 8 story buildings on the 60-foot wide College Avenue, will mean shadows cast on the sidewalks for much of the day, negatively impacting the retail environment and experience. Additionally, tall apartment buildings will impact the shade and shadows on, as well as the privacy of, adjacent residential properties on adjacent streets including Benvenue St., Cherry St., and Elmwood Avenue.

Point 5

Infrastructure strain

Taller, denser developments increase demand on already stressed utilities, transit, schools, and emergency services, which Berkeley has limited capacity to expand quickly. Additionally, in the proposed College Avenue zone is the current firehouse, which should not be sold or redeveloped as apartments.

Point 6

Erosion of Trust via Community Workshop

The meetings held with the local community did not allow for meaningful dialogue or input. Instead, the community corralled into forced scenarios of placing colored dots and Post-It notes on boards that had pre-determined topics and answer grouping. This predetermined funnelled process was not actual community input, and seemed to be mostly interested in checking off a step toward a predetermined increase in zoning density and height limits.

I urge the Planning Commission, and ultimately the City Council, to reject the College Avenue Corridor up zoning plans.

Peter Montgomery
2824 Cherry Street
Berkeley, CA 9705

David Salk
Focal Point Opticians
2638 Ashby Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94705



To: City of Berkeley Planning Commission

Sept 17, 2025

Dear Planning Commission Members;

I am writing to you to express my deepest concerns for the proposed upzoning in the Elmwood Commercial District. I am resident of this District for 36 years, (Prince St.) and have owned and operated my optical practice, Focal Point for almost 50 years. I am the President of the Elmwood Theater Foundation which has worked tirelessly to save our beloved theater from development and preserve the character of the Elmwood. I also have served as President of the Elmwood Merchants Association for a number of years and been an active Board member, as well as serving on the Elmwood Assessment board. I have given thousands of hours to this community, and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to do so. I love this neighborhood, and have, therefore, felt an obligation to contribute to it, and preserve its "character".

"Character"....that's an important word for all of us these days. Many leaders seem to lack it. Decisions are often made for economics only. These decisions reflect our character, as individuals and as a community. We must make choices that reflect our best character as citizens, while preserving the character of our neighborhoods.

I support affordable housing for our cities. Inflation, real estate speculation, and other economic factors have made it extremely difficult for the average income citizen to afford decent housing, and put food on the table, pay for utilities. The income disparity in our work has made it incredibly hard for many to make ends meet.

We all face these challenges, as do our small businesses. I know well what it means to own a small business, and provide jobs for my employees, and health care benefits. It is a fulltime job and much more. Even after 50- years, I still work 5 and ½ to 6 days/week to insure that Focal Point is economically sound. Running a small business is not for the meek. It requires determination, a good business plan, and sound City planning to make it happen.

This is why I am so troubled by the push to upzone the Elmwood. The Elmwood is already dealing with density issues. Merchants and employees have a hard time getting to work and parking. Ashby is a tow away zone from 4-6 Monday through Friday, and those who get towed vow never to come back to shop here. If we increase the density of the Elmwood, rather than focusing our efforts in Downtown and the BART stations, we will be creating a massive hardship on the business community that

has provided the “character” of our beloved Elmwood District. If upzoning is passed, there will no doubt, be developers who will take advantage of the new zoning, and many small businesses could be displaced or lost altogether. And what will replace them?

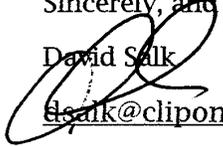
Will those new businesses have the same “character” that we all think of in the Elmwood. As the President of the Elmwood Theater Foundation, I was fortunate to work with a team of community leaders AND City officials that were all united by the vision of saving the Theater. We have overcome huge obstacles to keep the Elmwood open, and we have. Will the Theater survive a period of big construction projects? I don’t know, but I worry about it. Will the numerous small businesses on College Ave. who have given so much to the community, like Basic Bird and 14 Karats, whose owners have been staunch community leaders, serving as President of the Elmwood Merchants, CENA board and more.

This proposed plan is not good for the Elmwood community. Upzoning belongs in Downtown, or near the University, or near Transit Centers (BART). This little HISTORIC 2 block shopping district is worthy of preservation. Look at our cities, and the housing projects that have been built. Look at the architecture, and the lack of “character”. Is this what we want the Elmwood to look like? Yes, times change, and we must be flexible in how we address modern issues. But where we can make a stand, and preserve a little bit of Berkeley’s historic “character”, we should embrace the opportunity. This is a moment to do just that, and show our “character.”

Please make the right choice and preserve this historic district, and put high density housing where it belongs.

Sincerely, and with respect.

David Salk


dsalk@clipon.com