

Late Correspondence
Received before noon
Wednesday, June 3, 2026
Planning Commission June 3, 2026

MEMO

TO: City of Berkeley Planning Commission and Staff

FROM: Jeff Vincent

DATE: June 3, 2026

SUBJECT: Thank you

As I announced at our last meeting (May 6, 2026), that would be my last meeting as a Planning Commissioner. That marks 9 years on the Planning Commission...which is hard to believe. I never meant for it to be that long but it just kept getting more fun. What a meeting to end on! I'm proud of where we landed on the corridor rezoning recommendation, and I look forward to seeing what City Council decides to do with it.

I will see you all again...around town and also at occasional commission meetings. But I wanted to thank you all for the work you do and for what I've learned from you. In no particular order:

Commissioner Twu: Thank you for always zeroing in on a key detail and quite often offering a rather elegant solution to what we are wrestling with. I really appreciate that. I also love your drawings and other graphics that help us all visualize what is and and what could be.

Commissioner Kahn: Thank you for your deep thoughtfulness on each item, particularly those related to design and how something built will feel from a human perspective. I remember seeing you run ZAB years ago and learning a lot from the way in which you addressed the public as Chair and conveyed a commendable level of articulation in the trade-offs being discussed and debated,...and that quite often there is no clear-cut answer but rather differences in opinion to sort out. You always emphasized (then and now) that the intent was to give integrity to the process and to land somewhere where all parties could ideally find some workable solution to move forward.

Commissioner Wang: Thank you for having the vision and confidence to join the Planning Commission and be a fresh face representing younger professionals trying to make it amidst our high-cost area. I really appreciate your ability to ask really great questions and clearly voice your preferences or opinions on items. I commend you on that, and I encourage you to keep doing it!

Commissioner Oatfield: Thank you for always raising core issues that you would like to see baked into items and reminding us of important shared values that we have, despite the way our current larger system operates. You frequently brought us back to key issues around housing for all, housing affordability, and fairness. I appreciate that.

Commissioner Owens: Thanks for bringing an ultra-detailed and empirical perspective to the Planning Commission through your outside work, your writing, and analysis that you have

peppered throughout with each meeting. You show us “what the data say”... instead of forcing us to rely on guessing or emotion. This is next-level sophistication and dedication. As a Berkeley resident, I thank you for that and I hope you will continue doing it.

Commissioner Hauser: Thank you for your firm dedication to providing more housing in Berkeley. I’ve also appreciated your insights on how small businesses can thrive amidst change, drawing on your day-job experience. But I especially appreciate your calm, cool manner of assertively debunking some vocal points that might push back on progressive local policy that prioritizes housing and quality of life for both new and long-time residents. Keep it up!

Commissioner Merker: I’ve learned so much from your perspective on items before us. With things like objective design standards, I’ve always been suspicious of them and find them so difficult to look at the numbers and then think about how that actually is seen/perceived/felt by a human in the built-in environment. I really appreciate the level of thought and the level of experience that you’ve brought to this. And perhaps most importantly, I’m so grateful to your repeated mantra of “be bold, do more....make grand plans.”

Commissioner Marthinson: Such a delight to work with you! You bring such wisdom on both substance and process. I truly am grateful for how you would always remind us that we should get outside the box of how we think about a “family” in relation to zoning/planning for housing options. You repeatedly reminded us that the way in which people self organize² as “fmailies” is evolving...and we should support that with planning decisions for today and for tomorrow. The future will be different and that future needs housing options across Berkeley.

To the Staff: I wanna say a big THANK YOU for all the work that you do for the City of Berkeley, prepping for these meetings, getting items ready, taking what sometimes are varied comments from the Planning Commission, and trying to put them together into a set of alternatives or a path forward for us at the next meeting. I know this work is rarely easy, and you have many competing pressures in terms of direction from Council or community sentiment. I greatly appreciate your professionalism, dedication, and thoughtfulness in doing so; I’ve really enjoyed working with you all. There’s been many great staff over the years... but most recently, of course: Justin Horner, Jordan Klein, Alisa Shen, and Alene Pearson have been incredibly helpful and I just am really grateful to be your colleague...and look forward to engaging in the future (on the other side of the mic). Keep up the great work and know your are appreciated.

Lastly, I want to thank the two City Council members who appointed me to the Planning Commission: **Lori Droste** and **Terry Taplin**. I’m honored that you put your trust in me and truly thank you for this opportunity to serve. You both gave me tremendous freedom.

I would end by encouraging the Planning Commission to be bold and brave; send thoughtful, but ambitious, recommendations to City Council that put *all* of the Berkeley first. This is our role.

Jeff Vincent
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Comments on the San Pablo Avenue Plan from a District 1 Business Owner and Community Investor (Acme Bread Company)

From Becca Sullivan <beccacme@gmail.com>

Date Thu 6/4/2026 7:42 AM

To planningpc@berkeleyca.gov <planningpc@berkeleyca.gov>; jhorner@berkeleyca.gov <jhorner@berkeleyca.gov>

Cc Steven Sullivan <stevacme@aol.com>; meryl siegal <beautifulsanpablo@gmail.com>; Rachel Sullivan <rachel@acmebread.com>; Kesarwani, Rashi <RKesarwani@berkeleyca.gov>; Gerstein, Beth <BGerstein@berkeleyca.gov>

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Dear Justin, Emily, Savian, Blaine, Jeff, Vincent, Darrell, Christina and others,

My family and the remarkable team that makes Acme Bread possible—many of whom have worked alongside us for twenty to thirty years—have spent decades investing their time, energy, and hearts into serving this community.

Over the past several years, Acme Bread has invested a substantial portion of the company's accumulated resources into creating our new location at 1640 San Pablo Avenue, which is now nearing completion. We made that investment because we believe deeply in the future of this corridor and in Berkeley itself.

Before sharing my concerns, I would like to extend a warm invitation to members of the Council and Planning Commission to visit the project. I believe seeing the space in person may help inform discussions about what new development can contribute to a neighborhood beyond simply adding square footage.

Throughout the planning and construction process, we made a conscious decision not to maximize density or extract the greatest possible rental income from the site. Instead, we chose to prioritize beauty, greenery, gathering spaces, neighborhood character, and long-term community value alongside economic viability. I hope some of you will take the opportunity to visit the project. It represents our belief that growth, housing, public gathering spaces, landscaping, and neighborhood character can coexist successfully.

I appreciate the tremendous challenge the Council faces in balancing the need for housing, economic vitality, transportation, environmental sustainability, and neighborhood character. These goals are not always easy to reconcile, and I am grateful for the time and effort that goes into that work.

Like many others in our neighborhood, I was surprised to learn of the many planning restrictions and requirements that were removed from the San Pablo Avenue Plan in its most recent version.

Many of us had become optimistic that the City would work to protect existing residents and small businesses while accommodating much-needed housing and investment. However, the recent

changes leave me concerned that we may be moving away from some of the thoughtful planning principles that originally gave many residents and business owners confidence in the process.

I recognize that Berkeley has a responsibility to contribute to addressing the region's housing shortage, and I support adding housing along the San Pablo corridor. My hope is simply that we pursue that growth in a way that strengthens the qualities that make people want to live here in the first place.

One concern that I do not think I communicated clearly enough is the impact of eliminating parking requirements from the San Pablo Avenue Plan.

At Acme Bread, we typically have between six and fourteen employees on site at any given time. Our bakery operates 24 hours a day, with bakers arriving at midnight, 1:00 a.m., and 3:00 a.m. At those hours, reliable public transportation is simply not available.

Many of our bakers and production employees commute from communities throughout the region, including Richmond, Concord, Hercules, Vallejo, East Oakland, and other parts of the East Bay and North Bay. Like many working people in the Bay Area, they have worked hard to purchase or rent housing in communities where they can afford to live and rely on their vehicles to get to work.

For employees commuting from these locations—particularly those arriving in the middle of the night—it is simply unrealistic to assume that public transportation can serve as a reliable alternative. These workers are not choosing to drive because they oppose public transit. They drive because it is often the only practical way to reach their jobs safely and consistently during the hours that food production and other essential industries operate.

The majority of our team, including myself, commute from outside Berkeley. While some on the council may live within walking distance of the corridor, many of the people who bake the bread, prepare the food, clean the buildings, maintain infrastructure, and staff local businesses do not.

At both our current location and our future location, the limited on-site parking is reserved for customers. Our employees rely almost entirely on neighborhood street parking. I already feel uneasy about the fact that we compete with existing residents for those spaces. If multiple large residential developments are built without adequate parking or a broader parking strategy, that competition will only intensify.

Downtown Berkeley provides a useful example. The area is able to support dense development, offices, restaurants, retail businesses, and cultural venues in part because public parking garages help absorb parking demand. If Berkeley wishes to encourage rapid development along San Pablo Avenue without requiring parking as part of new construction, there should be a similar plan for shared public parking facilities along the corridor.

Without either residential parking requirements or publicly planned parking infrastructure, vehicles do not disappear. They are pushed into surrounding neighborhoods, where residents, employees, and customers are forced to compete for a limited number of spaces.

Well, many of our customers do live in Berkeley, Albany A huge number visit us from El Cerrito, Richmond, Hercules, Pinole, Walnut Creek, Marin, Sacramento, San Jose, and other communities throughout the Bay Area. These customers often purchase multiple loaves of bread and other products at a time, filling large bags and stocking their freezers at home.

It is not realistic to expect many of these customers—particularly older adults or families making larger purchases—to arrive by bus and return home carrying substantial quantities of groceries and bread. If parking becomes increasingly difficult to find, many will simply choose not to come.

I am also deeply concerned by suggestions that the median and mature street trees along San Pablo Avenue should be removed. The old-growth trees in the median are a major reason why certain sections of the corridor—particularly the blocks between Gilman and the Adult School—retain a sense of beauty, character, and livability that is increasingly rare in urban environments.

Walkable neighborhoods are not created by removing nature. They are created by thoughtfully integrating safe sidewalks, trees, landscaping, local businesses, and human-scale development.

I was also encouraged by earlier versions of the plan that focused greater height and density near major intersections while allowing the middle portions of blocks to remain somewhat lower in scale. That approach struck me as a thoughtful compromise because it allowed for significant housing growth while also recognizing the existing residential neighborhoods that sit immediately behind much of the San Pablo corridor.

Many homes behind San Pablo Avenue currently receive valuable morning sunlight in their backyards and gardens. If large structures are built at maximum height throughout the length of a block without appropriate transitions, setbacks, or step-backs, some of those homes could lose a substantial portion of that sunlight.

I also hope the City carefully considers not only building height, but also building massing, setbacks, and the quality of the public realm that surrounds new development.

Tall buildings can coexist with vibrant, attractive neighborhoods when they are thoughtfully designed and paired with public gathering spaces, landscaping, sunlight, and pedestrian-oriented amenities.

People are naturally drawn to neighborhoods that provide opportunities to gather, rest, and enjoy their surroundings. Wide sidewalks alone do not create that experience. Parks, plazas, courtyards, landscaping, outdoor seating, street trees, and other welcoming public spaces are equally important.

The Embarcadero in San Francisco is a good example of how larger buildings can be balanced by public gathering spaces, plazas, and places for people to linger and enjoy the environment. Berkeley's unique strength, however, has long been its abundance of mature trees, gardens, greenery, and human-scale spaces. As we plan for increased density, I hope we continue to prioritize those qualities.

At 1640 San Pablo, we chose to create a landscaped courtyard, fountain, outdoor seating, lemon trees, passionfruit vines, and other plantings designed to create an inviting public space. We dedicated a significant portion of the property to outdoor gathering areas because we believe neighborhoods need places where people can connect and spend time together.

Many of these landscaping decisions were based on the site's southern exposure and access to sunlight. We already incorporate fruit from our lemon trees and will eventually from the passionfruit vines into our baked goods, creating another connection between the property and the community it serves.

Part of my concern comes from observing recent development projects along the corridor. For example, we watched the Jones development take shape over several years. While it added housing, the ground-floor retail spaces remained vacant for an extended period of time.

Brand-new commercial spaces sitting vacant for years do not contribute to a vibrant neighborhood, no matter how new the building itself may be.

My concern is not that Berkeley is growing. Berkeley needs housing, and San Pablo Avenue is an appropriate place for some of that growth. My concern is that we may focus so heavily on maximizing density that we lose sight of the qualities that make neighborhoods successful in the first place: thriving local businesses, welcoming public spaces, mature trees, accessible transportation, adequate parking, and buildings that contribute positively to the life of the street.

As we plan for growth, I hope we continue to ask not only how many units we build, but also what kind of places we are creating for future generations.

The question is not whether San Pablo Avenue should grow. The question is how we can ensure that growth strengthens the corridor's businesses, neighborhoods, public spaces, and quality of life rather than diminishing them.

Berkeley can build housing, support small businesses, preserve mature trees, create beautiful public spaces, and maintain access for workers and customers. These goals are not mutually exclusive. I believe Berkeley can achieve both growth and beauty, and I hope the final plan reflects that possibility.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your willingness to hear the concerns of the residents and business owners who call this corridor home.

And please let me know when some or all of you might like to come to visit the new bakery location. I truly think that it might help inspire your plan's development.

Sincerely,

Becca Sullivan

Co-Owner, Acme Bread Company
District 1 Business Owner
El Sobrante Resident

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