



6 February 2006

Mayor Bates & Berkeley City Council
Re: Landmarks Preservation Ordinance Revisions

Honorable Mayor & Councilmembers:

The Northside Neighborhood Association wishes to relay its concerns regarding the Mayor's proposed revisions to the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance (LPO). We believe that such revisions, if implemented, could undermine the historic character of our neighborhoods and compromise their livability.

Quoting the City of Berkeley's General Plan, "Berkeley has within its borders a remarkably appealing and diverse wealth of buildings and landscapes aptly reflecting the city's rich and significant history. Most of its buildings were constructed between 1875 and 1940: a fact that has everything to do with Berkeley's essential physical character today. Notably, the expression here of the Bay Region's response to the Arts and Crafts Movement, inspired around the turn of the century largely by the city's natural setting, has given Berkeley a particular architectural distinction."

Enacted only a few years ago, the Urban Design and Preservation Element of the General Plan states the City of Berkeley's official preservation policies. These include Policy UD-2: Regulation of Significant Properties, which resolves to "Increase the extent of regulatory protection that applies to structures, sites, and areas that are historically or culturally significant," including Structure of Merit. Yet the Mayor now proposes to render the Structure of Merit category purely symbolic. As a historic neighborhood with many potential Structures of Merit, we consider removal of protections to be ill advised.

Similarly, the proposal to allow Requests for Determination to go through the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) without sufficient time for public involvement is a recipe for the quick and quiet elimination of historic resources, which we strongly oppose.

Finally, the proposed new position of Preservation Officer could potentially override the authority of the LPC, a citizens' commission (including architectural experts and experts in other relevant fields) whose charge is to protect Berkeley's historic heritage and the character of its neighborhoods. A hired staff person would answer not to the citizens of Berkeley but to his/her superiors within the Planning department. What are the chances that this staff person would be sympathetic to neighborhoods' concerns?

In conclusion, the Mayor's proposed revisions to the LPO run contrary to the policies of the General Plan. We urge you to uphold the policies stated in the Urban Design and Preservation Element of the General Plan.

Sincerely,

Carl Friberg
Steering Committee Member

Daniella Thompson
Moderator, Northside-NA