



95 Brady Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
415 541 9001  
info@sfhac.org  
www.sfhac.org

August 4, 2014

Mr. Warner Schmaltz, Principal  
Forum Design  
1014 Howard Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103

**Re: Proposed Mixed-Use Project at 490 South Van Ness Avenue**

Dear Mr. Schmaltz,

On behalf of the San Francisco Housing Action Coalition (SFHAC), I am pleased to offer our endorsement of the 490 South Van Ness project. This letter reaffirms our earlier endorsement of this project based on the original presentation to SFHAC in July of 2010, as well as the small changes that have been to its design since then.

Following the review and discussion in 2010, our Project Review Committee believed the project had many merits and would make a substantial contribution to SFHAC's mission of increasing the supply of well-designed, well-located housing that conforms to good urban design principles and meets the needs of present and future San Franciscans. This is still SFHAC's position.

The proposed project meets our criteria in the following ways:

**Project Description:**

The project proposes construction of approximately 72 residential units, including ground-floor commercial space, above-ground-floor retail and flex space, with 48 total car parking spaces and 97 bike spaces.

**Land Use:**

The proposed high-density, transit-oriented and mixed-use design is an excellent use of the site. The project site, due to its location and size, is well suited for the neighborhood. It is within walking distance to the City's job centers, entertainment, shopping and cultural venues. The lot has been vacant for several years and was previously a gas station.

**Density:**

We understand that the project proposes 72 housing units. This project would also provide 2,529 sq. ft. of ground-floor commercial space, as well as five units of flex space. This is appropriate for the site and complies with zoning, as there are no density limits for this project.

**Affordability:**

The SFHAC is pleased that you propose building on-site Inclusionary Housing. Because this project is in a UMU zoning district, the requirement is for 16 percent, or 12 units, higher than in most other parts of the city.



The San Francisco Housing Action Coalition advocates for the creation of well-designed, well-located housing, at ALL levels of affordability, to meet the needs of San Franciscans, present and future.

Mr. Warner Schmalz  
August 4, 2014  
Page 2

**Alternative Transportation and Parking:**

The proposed project is in a transit-rich location. It's within short walking distance to several Muni bus lines and the 16<sup>th</sup> Street BART Station. This project will provide 97 total bike parking spaces, one car share space and six scooter and electric bicycle parking spaces.

Your project proposes a car-parking ratio of 0.66 spaces per units, totaling 48 spaces, which was approved by Conditional Use Authorization. When the project was presented in 2010, the City was in a serious recession and traffic congestion was not the urgent priority it is today. The SFHAC believes this is a high parking ratio for the location because of its central location and proximity to transit and biking. We encourage you to either reduce the total number of spaces or consider ways to incorporate a trip demand management plan into the project.

**Historic Preservation:**

There are no sites of significant or cultural merit on or near the site that would be affected by the proposed project. The site has been vacant for years.

**Urban Design:**

The proposed project promotes the principles of good urban design and increased transit-orientation. The SFHAC commends you for the "affordable-by-design" of the generally smaller units. The scale, profile and use of materials are an improvement on the character of the surrounding neighborhood. Common open space is provided on the second floor and roof.

The SFHAC supports your plans to make the project and intersection more pedestrian friendly. The plan proposes to set the building back along South Van Ness Avenue to create more open space and plant new street trees along the sidewalk.

**Environmental Features:**

The SFHAC is highly supportive of the project's commitment to the City's Greenpoint standards. It incorporates green roof features on the second floor and roof deck that will help retain and treat storm water, while reducing overflow. Native plants on the green roof will also help reduce potable water consumption.

**Community Input:**

The SFHAC supports your efforts to engage the community. Over the past few years, you have reached out to neighbors of the site, who expressed concerns about the vacant lot being a crime magnet. At a recent voluntary community outreach meeting held at the SFPD Station, you mentioned that the response among the attendees was widely supportive. You also met with the SFUSD Chief Facilities Officer to demonstrate that the proposed project would not cast a shadow on nearby Marshall Elementary School.

Thank you for keeping the SFHAC Project Review Committee updated. Please keep us abreast of any changes or updates with this project. However, we are pleased to fully endorse your excellent project. It meets our guidelines in an exemplary fashion. Please let us know how we may be of assistance.

Mr. Warner Schmalz  
August 4, 2014  
Page 3

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim Colen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tim Colen, Executive Director

## **SFHAC Project Review Criteria**

**Land Use:** Housing should be an appropriate use of the site given the context of the adjacent properties and the surrounding neighborhood and should enhance neighborhood livability.

**Density:** The project should take full advantage of the maximum unit density and/or building envelope, allowable under the zoning rules.

**Affordability:** The need for affordable housing, including middle income (120-150 of Area Median Income) housing, is a critical problem and SFHAC gives special support to projects that propose creative ways to expand or improve unit affordability beyond the legally mandated requirements.

**Parking and Alternative Transportation:** SFHAC expects the projects it endorses to include creative strategies to reduce the need for parking, such as ample bicycle storage, provision of space for car-share vehicles on-site or nearby, un-bundling parking cost from residential unit cost, and measures to incentivize transit use. Proximity to transit should result in less need for parking.

In districts with an as-of-right maximum and discretionary approval up to an absolute maximum, SFHAC will support parking exceeding the as-of-right maximum only to the extent the Code criteria for doing so are clearly met. In districts where the minimum parking requirement is one parking space per residential unit (1:1), the SFHAC will not, except in extraordinary circumstances, support a project with parking in excess of that amount.

**Preservation:** If there are structures of significant historic or cultural merit on the site, their retention and/or incorporation into the project consistent with historic preservation standards is encouraged. If such structures are to be demolished, there should be compelling reasons for doing so.

**Urban Design:** The project should promote principles of good urban design: Where appropriate, contextual design that is compatible with the adjacent streetscape and existing neighborhood character while at the same time utilizing allowable unit density; pleasant and functional private and/or common open space; pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly site planning; and design treatments that protect and enhance the pedestrian realm, with curb cuts minimized and active ground floor uses provided.

Projects with a substantial number of multiple bedroom units should consider including features that will make the project friendly to families with children.

Mr. Warner Schmalz  
August 4, 2014  
Page 5

**Environmental Features:** SFHAC is particularly supportive of projects that employ substantial and/or innovative measures that will enhance their sustainability and reduce their carbon footprint.

**Community Input:** Projects for which the developer has made a good faith effort to communicate to the community and to address legitimate neighborhood concerns, without sacrificing SFHAC's objectives, will receive more SFHAC support.