



SPUR URBAN CENTER
654 Mission Street
San Francisco, California
94105

415.781.8726

www.spur.org

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August 27, 2012

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Gabriel Metcalf

Cara Houser, Director of Development

Urban Center Director
Diane Filippi

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2116 Allston Way, Suite One

Berkeley, CA 94704

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Dear Cara,

Secretary
Mary McCue

On behalf of the members of the SPUR Project Review Committee, we would like to thank your team for bringing the proposed residential redevelopment at 1321 Mission Street to our group for consideration and review at our June 2012 meeting.

Treasurer
Bob Gamble

Immediate Past Chair
Andy Barnes
Lee Blitch

The mission of the SPUR Project Review Committee is to consider projects that are of citywide importance and to evaluate them according to criteria related to land use, public realm interface, building design and environmental effects. In all cases, we are seeking a combination of excellent planning and design solutions that will ensure the positive contribution of each project to a safe, comfortable, visually appealing and useful urban setting for the people who live and work in San Francisco.

Advisory Council
Co-Chairs
Michael Alexander
Paul Sedway

As a result of our review and discussion of your project, we provide the following comments for your information and possible action.

Board Members

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Michael Teitz
James Tracy
Will Travis
Jeff Tumlin
Steve Vettel
Debra Walker
Cynthia Wilusz-Lovell
Cindy Wu

Land Use

The Committee is intrigued with the proposal to build an eleven story, 160 unit building to house approximately 300-400 students and nearby California College of the Arts (CCA) and the Academy of Art University (AAU). The rental units will essentially create a dormitory with efficiently, creatively designed residential spaces (which are awaiting patents) in an area extremely well-served by mass transit, just a short walk from the main Market Street trunk of the MUNI and BART lines and a quick bike ride to either of the two institutions. Given the building's location and intended use, we applaud the sponsor's plan to eliminate car parking and focus on accommodating several hundred bikes instead. This is a truly forward-looking approach to this project, one which we hope will serve as a model to others.

Retail space is provided on the eastern half of the Mission Street frontage, wrapping the corner at 9th Street. The western portion of the Mission Street street level façade is proposed to be a student lounge, active around the clock.

Public realm Interface and the Promotion of a Pedestrian-Oriented environment

The committee feels that the disorganized ground floor lobby design, insofar as it adversely affects the pedestrian experience around the building, is a deficiency in an otherwise excellent project. We have several areas of concern regarding the ground floor.

SPUR SAN JOSE
38 West Santa Clara Street
San Jose, California
95113

408.510.5688

www.spur.org/sanjose

Firstly, the Mission Street pedestrian frontage needs to be a lively and appealing space, so we would rather see the retail occupy this space rather than wrap a long stretch down the busy 9th St. corridor. Further, we have doubts as to whether the glassy student lounge that is proposed for the western half of the Mission street façade will really be as active as imagined. Currently the art exhibition space, which has the potential to form a connection between the building and the street, is tucked away from the street to an interior area of the lobby, invisible from the street.

Secondly, in an exciting design move, the building will be home to at least 300 bike riders who come back and forth at least once a day, at all hours of the day and night. However, bike storage is proposed for the basement, and there is no clear or effective circulation route from either the Mission or Washburn entrance to facilitate this traffic. Washburn in particular, where most bikes would be brought in, should be more pedestrian-friendly and porous to the street. For a bike-only building to work, bike parking and storage has to be quick, convenient, and secure. While the basement provides security, the lobby access, one cramped stair, and a shared elevator make bike access unnecessarily cumbersome.

An innovative and effective solution to the bike problem is also important because, to the best of our knowledge, this will be the only bike-only building of this size in the City. Not only do the sponsors and designers have a responsibility to make it work so that others can emulate it, but it is an opportunity to display the appeal and excitement of this type of city living. The building in its current lobby layout misses this important opportunity. We imagine more visibility for the bikes, better access and security for their riders, and a more innovative and pleasant way to park and move them through the lobby.

Building and Landscape Design

The design of the residential units in the building are innovative, efficient, modern, and will likely be very popular among the students for whom they are intended. The corridor spaces as well let in light to the interior and show an intent to foster neighborly interaction. While the units are too small to function as traditional apartments, we see many design elements that could improve many dwelling units throughout the City.

Issues with the lobby space have been discussed above and will not be further elaborated on here, except to say that for a building serving art students, the designers could improve on the placement of the art room (currently located in a windowless, artificially ventilated basement space).

The façade of the building shows thoughtful articulation. The committee believes that the design would be further improved by the addition of a third color or material. The quality of the construction will be critical in realizing this façade as shown in the renderings.

Environmental Effects

The location, density, and bike-centric design of the project offer tremendous environmental benefits before any other design decisions are made. The building will be constructed with

environmentally appropriate materials consistent with the City's and State's green building codes, and given the environmental "headstart" this project has, along with the importance of sustainability to the population it will serve, we urge the sponsors to consider certification beyond the minimums required by San Francisco codes. SPUR always looks to projects to build environmental sustainability into their design and function and encourages the project sponsor to regard sustainability as an ongoing priority throughout the design and construction process rather than as an add-on at a later stage.

Conclusion

In sum, the SPUR Project Review Committee finds this project to be an exciting and laudable project which will add life to this corner of Mission Street and strengthen the presence of valued San Francisco institutions. With some upgrades to the lobby, this building could seize the opportunity to be an innovative exemplar of how a bike-only building could succeed in the City. We thank you for committing your time and resources to the presentation at SPUR, and hope that you will take our recommendations into consideration. We will follow further refinements of this project with great interest and invite you to keep us informed on its progress.

Consideration for Endorsement

Should you intend to request SPUR to consider this project for endorsement, you should contact the Committee co-chairs at the appropriate time. Endorsement by SPUR is reserved for projects of the highest quality and significance to the city. Consideration for endorsement begins with a formal response by project sponsors to this review letter, including an update on any significant changes to the project program or design since the project was presented at SPUR. The project is then taken up for discussion by an endorsement subcommittee of SPUR board members who serve on committees in the areas of project review, urban policy, housing, sustainability, and transportation. We normally require a month's lead-time to schedule a meeting of the endorsement subcommittee.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for questions/clarifications.

Sincerely,

Reuben Schwartz Mary Beth Sanders
Co-Chairs, Project Review Committee

Charmaine Curtis