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January 10, 2013

Mr. Marc Babsin  
Emerald Fund  
532 Folsom Street, Suite 400  
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: Proposed Development at 101 Polk Street

Dear Mr. Babsin:

On behalf of the members of the SPUR Project Review Committee, we would like to thank your team for bringing the proposed development at 101 Polk Street to our group for consideration and review at our November 2012 meeting.

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, visually appealing, and vibrant urban setting for the people who live and work in San Francisco.

As a result of our review and discussion of the 101 Polk Street project, we provide the following comments for your information and action:

### Land Use

The project proposes a residential development at 101 Polk Street, on what is currently being used as a surface parking lot. Because the site was previously used as a gas station, it will require environmental clean-up. At the northwest corner of Polk and Hayes streets, the project area is adjacent to the Civic Center but is not part of the Civic Center Historic zone, nor is it within the Market/Octavia Plan. The parcel is zoned C-32 and is approved for residential use.

The proposed development is composed of 13-stories and 162 units, with an overall height of 120 feet. Inclusionary housing will be included onsite in the proposed mix of 23% 2-bedroom and 15% 1+ bedroom units. One level of parking will provide a ratio of 0.3:1 in a stacking configuration. The project faces the side of The Bill Graham Auditorium to the east. Though there is currently no residential use in the immediate area, the project sponsor also controls parcels directly across Hayes Street and on Van Ness, with the potential for the development of an additional 900 residential units.

The committee is supportive of the introduction of residential-use buildings in the busy Civic Center. We agree that this development has the potential to spark interest in the Civic Center as a nucleus of urban living. The prospect of reviving round-the-clock energy

in the Civic Center and along Market Street with the commitment full-time residents will bring to the area is exciting and welcome.

The site is exceptionally well served by public transit, near the Market Street streetcar and bus lines and the Van Ness transit corridor and this, as well as access to jobs in the immediate vicinity, justifies the low parking ratio. The committee is very pleased to see the inclusionary housing on-site. We agree that the buildings are appropriately scaled and consider the unit mix and project density to be appropriate for this location.

### **Public Realm Interface and the Promotion of a Pedestrian-Oriented Environment**

The 101 Polk Street project will include residential townhouse units along Polk and Hayes, parking access on Lech Walesea alley, and a 2<sup>nd</sup>-floor public terrace above a solarium. The introduction of a private, residential building into what is, currently, a predominantly public-serving area of the City requires a delicate design balance. The committee agrees that this challenge has been met by the proposed project. The echo of classical forms in the strong corners, base, and cornice line are softened by the setbacks of the private entryways and the added texture of the balconies along Polk.

The committee agrees that proposed improvements along Lech Walesea alley, setbacks for private entryways and well-considered landscaping and introduce a transition from the powerful edifices of the Civic Center into the vibrant activity of Hayes Street and the Market/Octavia corridor.

An especially attractive feature of the proposed development is the Public Arts Component. The committee was pleased with the project sponsor's acknowledgement of City efforts toward developing the Mid-Market Arts and Entertainment District. The suggestion that some of the \$400K fund be earmarked for public art projects which engage the utilitarian west-façade of the Bill Graham Auditorium was met with enthusiastic approval by committee members.

### **Building & Landscape Design**

Though it is not included in the Civic Center Historic zone, the committee was very impressed by the commitment on the part of the project sponsors to respond both visually and formally to the Civic Center historic context. The near-perfect cubic form, three distinct horizontal levels, the punched-back windows, and glass/metal/stone materials proposed present a beautifully modern interpretation of the surrounding classical forms. At the same time, staggered balconies along Polk Street and the unusual, undulating setback on the Hayes Street façade are clear but subtle indicators of the residential use.

The committee applauds the creative approach to open space in this most urban of environments. The inclusion of private balconies, the ground-floor solarium and the open, curve-linear form above it, present an intriguing juxtaposition to the overall cubic-form, while contributing to open space

requirements. We stress that the success of the project will depend on the use of high-quality materials and attention to detail – especially the detail of the balcony railings.

### **Environmental Effects**

SPUR believes it is essential for projects to build environmental sustainability into their design and function. In all instances, the committee encourages project sponsors to incorporate sustainability early in the design process and we look forward to seeing more specific information regarding sustainable features as the project evolves. We concur with the project sponsor's goals to achieve a minimum of 15% below Title 24 rating and Greenpoint status, and we encourage the exploration all avenues for the highest certification possible.

### **Conclusion**

The SPUR Project Review Committee finds the proposed project at 101 Polk Street to be an appropriate use of the site. The dense residential development will energize and enhance this transit-rich neighborhood.

We thank you for committing your time and resources to the presentation at SPUR. 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 projects sponsors to this review letter, including an update on any significant changes to the project program or design since the project was initially 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,

Charmaine Curtis    Mary Beth Sanders    Reuben Schwartz  
SPUR Project Review Committee Co-Chairs

cc: SPUR Board of Directors