January 8, 2013

Joshua Switzky
San Francisco Planning Department
1650 Mission Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94103

Re: Central Corridor Project

Dear Mr. Switzky:

SPUR wishes to offer its comments on the latest version of the Central Corridor Plan. Given the enormous transit investment in the Central Subway that will run along 4th Street, coupled with the proposed extension of Caltrain and plans for High Speed Rail, this area’s importance to San Francisco cannot be overstated.

Downtown San Francisco is the most sustainable job center in the region due to its walkable compact nature and its position as the hub of the region’s transit infrastructure. Downtown San Francisco is the only employment node in the region where most people travel to work by sustainable transportation modes such as walking, bicycling and taking public transit.

The Central Corridor is one of the very few areas in the entire city that has the existing and planned transit infrastructure to build on these successes. It is critical that we consider the rezoning of Central Corridor Plan in the context of our long-term need for employment and housing space. We should make the most of the opportunity we have right now to zone for our future needs.

It is with these thoughts in mind that we provide the following specific comments on the proposed height alternatives for the Central Corridor. Specifically, we recommend making adjustments to the higher height alternative to study greater heights as part of the upcoming EIR process.

EIR Alternatives

In our letter dated April 5th, 2012, we requested that the Department study an additional scenario to the four scenarios originally put forward on November 29th, 2011 – one with greater heights in a number of locations, including those parcels adjacent to the freeway and those adjacent to Townsend Street. We also suggested that higher heights along 5th Street and in other locations be encouraged within the plan area as well.

In June 2012, the Department put forward two alternatives to be studied in the EIR (the “proposed height limit” alternative and the “higher height limit” alternative). We prefer the higher height alternative to the proposed height limit alternative, but we believe there is more work to be done to improve the higher height limit alternative. Specifically we offer the following suggestions:
1. The higher height alternative studied in the EIR should include more intensive heights along the 5th Street Corridor south of the freeway. This area is only a block from the new Central Subway and within walking distance of Caltrain. At minimum the 85/160 ft zoning should be extended to the parcels on the eastern side of 5th Street between Bryant and Brannan as was proposed in Scenario 4. However the block to the west of 5th street should also be explored for intensification.

2. The Northeast corner of 3rd and Harrison should be zoned for higher heights. This site is currently a parking lot.

3. The Department should work with the MTA to pursue higher heights and joint development opportunities at the Central Subway Station site at 4th and Folsom. This is an ideal location for transit-intensive job uses.

4. The west side of the block of 4th Street between Bryant and Brannan should include the slightly higher heights contemplated in the November 29th Scenario 4 Alternative as this areas is located directly adjacent to the Brannan Street Central Subway Station.

5. The 85/200 ft zoning should be extended across the entire parcel located at the northeast corner of Brannan and 4th as was proposed in Scenario 4.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 415-644-4292

Sincerely,

Sarah Karlinsky
Deputy Director

cc: SPUR Board of Directors
John Rahaim, San Francisco Planning Department
Jose Campos, San Francisco Planning Department
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Steven Wertheim, San Francisco Planning Department
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