

14 July 2014

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

Re: Proposed Development at 150 Van Ness Street

Dear Mr. Babsin:

Thank you for submitting the proposed residential project at 150 Van Ness Street for consideration by SPUR's Endorsement Subcommittee. Thank you for providing us with a project update and response to the Project Review Committee comment letter. We are pleased to inform you that we have endorsed this project.

SPUR's endorsement is reserved for projects of citywide importance. 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.

Land Use

The project proposes a block-long residential development at 150 Van Ness Street, on what is currently surface parking lot and the former AAA building. Occupying a full block on Hayes Street between Van Ness and Polk, the project area is within the Market/Octavia Plan and is part of the Van Ness & Market Downtown Residential Special Use District. The parcel is zoned C-3-G and residential use is encouraged. The former AAA Building is not considered a historical resource and, given extensive structural and façade damage, the building will not be preserved.

The proposed 13-story (120 ft) development will support 419 rental units and approximately 9,000sf of retail space. Fifty units of inclusionary housing (12%) will be included onsite in the proposed mix of 26% 2-bedroom, 55% 1-bedroom, and 19% studio units. A single level of below ground parking in a stacking configuration will accommodate 0.5 spaces/unit, four car share spaces, and accessible parking. Parking access on Hayes Street will be shared by both the 150 and 100 Van Ness Street buildings, thereby eliminating the existing curb-cut on Van Ness.

The 150 Van Ness project provides approximately 18,550 sf of common open space – including two courtyards on the second level, an additional courtyard on the third level, and a roof terrace. The project sponsor has set aside a Public Art contribution of \$1 million.

The committee is supportive of the residential-use buildings in the busy Civic Center. In combination with the two additional properties currently being developed by the project sponsor on Van Ness and Polk Streets, the 150 Van Ness Street project forms a welcome nucleus of residential development in the Civic Center.

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

With the use of alternating solid and glass vertical forms, the 150 Van Ness project seeks to offer a design transition from the glass tower at 100 Van Ness to the stone forms of the Civic Center. The ground floor combines retail space along the Van Ness frontage with the lobby entrance, leasing office, and private stoops for walk-up units along Hayes Street. One curb-cut on Hayes Street provides parking access, with an additional cut on Polk Street for loading. The project proposes a combined total of 211 bike parking spaces for both residential and retail use.

Trees and landscaping improvements will be included along the entire property frontage and a portion of the \$1 million public art budget will be used to enhance the lobby entrance area. Additional funds will be contributed to a proposed art installation on Polk Street at the Bill Graham Auditorium.

The committee was in agreement that the retail space along Van Ness was an appropriate use. We suggest that continuation of the arcade element in the 100 Van Ness tower could be a desirable modification for 150 Van Ness. As with the 101 Polk Street development, the Public Art Component is a very impressive feature of this development. The committee continues to be pleased with the project sponsor's acknowledgement of City efforts toward developing the Mid-Market Arts and Entertainment District. That significant portions of the fund are earmarked for public art projects that engage the utilitarian west-façade of the Bill Graham Auditorium is laudable.

There was considerable disagreement, however, regarding the inclusion of walk-up entryways along Hayes Street and, especially, at the corner of Polk Street. Many committee members acknowledge that the new concentration of residential units in the area will likely change the character of the neighborhood enough to approve the walk-up units, though some members still had reservations. Some members thought that the inclusion of some neighborhood serving retail at the corner of Polk and Hayes Street would be a more effective use of that space. Thank you for your detailed explanation of the considerations (loss of units required to accommodate ground floor retail space height, potentially challenging retail space that may sit vacant) that the project sponsor continues to weigh.

The committee suggests that bike parking, though it meets City requirements, is inadequate for a development in this area. Bike usage is likely to increase over time and we agree that bike parking should not be less than 1:1 per unit. We would also encourage additional landscaping along Hayes Street. In addition, the committee sees a need to more emphatically call out the building entry and we are interested in the evolution of the suggested art component for that area. We appreciate the project sponsor's continued attention on these points.

Building & Landscape Design

Given the full-block length of this mid-rise building, the committee was largely impressed with the façade treatment. The alternating rhythm of glass and masonry along Hayes Street demonstrates enough visual differentiation of form to negate the need for a mid-block passage. As is generally the case, the success of the design will depend on the materials used. We encourage the project sponsor to use high quality materials throughout.

As mentioned above, we would be interested to see a continuation of the arcade treatment of the ground-floor retail area along Van Ness. This would provide not only a pleasant experience for pedestrians, but might also add interest to the ground floor design.

With most of the open space centered on the above ground courtyards and roof terrace, landscaping along the street frontage will become a more important element of the design. The committee would welcome more details on this as the project develops. While there were no specific comments or suggestions concerning the courtyards, the committee found these areas to be potentially interesting retreats for residents in the midst of this very urban context.

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 applaud the project sponsor's goals to achieve a minimum of 15% below Title 24 rating and Greenpoint Rated status, and we encourage the exploration all avenues for the highest certification possible.

Conclusion

The SPUR Endorsement Committee finds the proposed project at 150 Van Ness Street to be an appropriate use of the site and endorses this project. This 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.

Sincerely,

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

cc: SPUR Board of Directors