



March 26, 2011

City of Alameda Planning Board
2263 Santa Clara Avenue
Alameda, California 94501

Subject: Proposal to increase height limits on portions of Webster Street (Item 5-B on Joint Planning Board/EDC 3-28-11 agenda)

Dear Boardmembers:

As you may recall, the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) opposed a previous proposal to increase the height limit along most of Webster Street to five stories and 60'. As stated in our May 24, 2010 letter to the Planning Board, we were very concerned that a five story height limit will adversely affect the setting of the numerous historic buildings along Webster Street (such as Croll's, Trans Pacific Bank and Holtz Hall) by promoting much taller new buildings that will visually overwhelm the historic buildings. Five story buildings would also be drastically out of scale with the mostly 1-2 story buildings on the side streets and create a canyon-like effect along Webster Street

However, we do not oppose the staff recommendation to increase the height limit to five stories and 60' along the west side of Webster Street between Eagle Avenue and Appezatto Parkway. This frontage does not contain any historic buildings, is not adjacent to any low density housing and will help implement the Webster Street Vision Plan. We also support the staff proposal to increase the height limit at the southern terminus of Webster Street at Central Avenue to facilitate reconstruction of the Neptune Beach Tower.

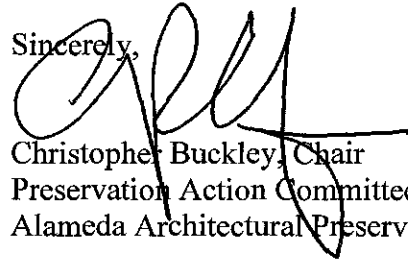
We recommend the following refinements in the proposed height limits:

1. The actual height of the historic Neptune Beach Tower should be verified. It may have been taller than 60'. We can assist with the verification process.
2. The proposed restriction that the reconstructed Neptune Beach Tower be nonhabitable should be reconsidered. It may, for example, be desirable to provide an observation platform at the top served by an elevator.
3. The specific areas covered by the proposed height increases should be mapped so that it is clear which areas are specifically affected. This is especially important for the Neptune Beach Tower.

AAPS strongly supports efforts to add to the vibrancy of Webster Street and promote additional investment. However, we do not believe that a wholesale increase in the height limit is necessary to achieve these objectives and could instead compromise the qualities which make Webster Street attractive and special. The staff proposal is consistent with the Vision Plan and is a reasonable approach to target additional intensity at a key location.

Please contact me at 523-0411 or cbuckleyAICP@att.net if you would like to discuss these comments.

Sincerely,



Christopher Buckley, Chair
Preservation Action Committee
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society

By electronic transmission:

cc: Mayor and Councilmembers
Jennifer Ott, Deputy City Manager
Andrew Thomas and Margaret Kavanaugh-Lynch, Planning and Building Department
West Alameda Business Association
AAPS Board and Preservation Action Committee members