



May 8, 2020

Hon. Joel Koppel, President
San Francisco Planning Commission
1650 Mission Street, 4th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103

Re: Balboa Reservoir Project
Hearing Date: May 28, 2020

Dear President Koppel and Commissioners:

Reservoir Community Partners LLC, which is comprised of BRIDGE Housing Corporation and AvalonBay Communities, is the project sponsor of the Balboa Reservoir project. Additionally, the development team for the project includes Mission Housing and Habitat for Humanity of Greater San Francisco. We write to urge the Commission to certify the project's Final SEIR, adopt CEQA findings, approve the project's General Plan Amendments and Design Standards and Guidelines, and recommend approval of the project's Special Use District and Development Agreement to the Board of Supervisors.

The project will replace the city-owned Balboa Reservoir lower parking lot, which has never been used for water storage, with a well-designed new development that will provide 1,100 new homes for the people of San Francisco. Half of these homes – 50% – will be affordable to low- and moderate-income households, with a special focus on housing for families. One of the affordable housing buildings will be dedicated to housing for local educators, and the project will also create four acres of new publicly accessible open space, a child care center, a community facility, and new streets, sidewalk improvements, a new protected bicycle lane and utility infrastructure.

The design of each new building, as well as the project's streetscape and open space improvements, will be guided by the comprehensive Design Standards and Guidelines document before you for consideration. Building heights will range from two stories on the west adjacent the Westwood Park neighborhood to seven stories on the east adjacent to City College. Residential parking is limited to .5 space per unit, and we are also providing public parking mainly to serve City College faculty, staff and students.

Your hearing is the culmination of nearly six years of planning and robust public engagement by both the City and us. That community engagement has shaped many elements of the project before you.

* The City established a Public Land for Housing program in 2014 and selected the Balboa Reservoir as the first site identified for housing through this process. The site was also identified in the 2009 Balboa Park Station Area Plan for residential and open space development, given its close proximity to the Balboa Park BART Station and the Ocean Avenue commercial corridor.

* In 2015, the Board of Supervisors established the Balboa Reservoir Community Advisory Committee. The CAC and the City then developed the Balboa Reservoir Development Principles & Parameters, including a desire that 50% of the project's housing be affordable.

* In 2016, the City issued a request for qualifications to developers. Out of nine respondents, the City identified three development teams, including Reservoir Community Partners, most qualified to submit detailed proposals in response to an RFP.

* In 2017, the City selected Reservoir Community Partners from the three RFP respondents. Our RFP response proposed 1,100 units and maintained the CAC's desire that 50% of the units be affordable to low and moderate income households.

* In April 2018, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution finding the project to be fiscally feasible and authorized the commencement of environmental review.

* On August 7, 2019, the Planning Department published the Draft Supplemental EIR, and this Commission took public comments on the draft on September 12, 2019.

The SEIR imposed a total of 13 environmental mitigation measures to reduce both construction-period and operational impacts of the project, all of which we have agreed to implement. The SEIR did identify a handful of impacts that cannot feasibly be reduced to a less-than-significant level, mainly associated with construction period noise and air quality emissions, impacts that any development of the reservoir site would cause. The SEIR also identified and evaluated four project alternatives, including an 800-unit Reduced Density Alternative that would reduce but not eliminate any project impacts. For public policy reasons, including a substantial reduction in market rate and affordable housing production, and because an 800-unit project is not financially feasible, the Planning staff and we urge you to reject the identified alternatives in your CEQA findings. Your Commission packet includes a financial feasibility study prepared for us by Economic and Planning Systems and a peer review of that analysis by the City's economic consultant Century Urban.

* On April 9, 2020, this Commission initiated General Plan Amendments, and on April 28, 2020, District 7 Supervisor Norman Yee introduced the Special Use District rezoning and Development Agreement approval ordinances at the Board of Supervisors.

* Also on April 28, 2020, the Planning Department published the Responses to Comments on the Draft SIER.

Throughout the RFP, environmental review, and legislative process, we have worked extensively with Planning Department staff, the CAC, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Supervisor Yee, City College, and the SFPUC to maximize the public benefits of the project, including assurances that the proposed affordable housing units, open space, public transportation improvements, and other public amenities will be timely delivered. Those benefits and assurances are memorialized in the Development Agreement, Special Use District rezoning, and Design Guidelines and Standards that are before the Commission for your consideration.

We are confident that the Balboa Reservoir project will result in not only a major addition of family friendly market rate and affordable housing to a site in close proximity to the Balboa Park BART Station and multiple MUNI lines, but will also result in substantial urban design and transportation improvements in the project vicinity

Very truly yours,

Joe Kirchofer
Vice President
Avalon Bay Communities

Brad Wiblin
Senior Vice President
BRIDGE Housing Corporation

cc: Commissioner Kathryn Moore
Commissioner Sue Diamond
Commissioner Frank Fung
Commissioner Theresa Imperial
Commissioner Millicent Johnson