



Panoramic Hill Association

PO Box 5428, Berkeley, CA 94705

February 6, 2006

Mayor and City Council
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, California 94704

Dear Mayor and Council members:

I write to express my opposition to any action that might be taken to weaken the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance (LPO), an ordinance that has served the City and its residents well for more than 30 years.

As you may be aware, the lower section of our Panoramic Hill community was recently added to the National Register of Historic Places. This honor resulted from the diligent work of a number of our neighbors, and we learned a great deal about historic preservation during this process. The importance, not just of unique and significant structures, but of other buildings and their occupants, paths, and the natural landscape all contribute to the integrity of this special community

Thus, on Panoramic Hill we know, first hand, that the preservation of the City's historic resources contributes significantly to the area's quality of life and to its desirability as a place to live, work and shop. By weakening this ordinance, you will likely cause irreparable harm to the character of many Berkeley neighborhoods – once a historic structure is lost, it can never be replaced, and the coherence of the community in which it stood will be forever damaged.

I understand that your proposed actions will take three forms. First, by eliminating the category of "Structure of Merit," you will adversely impact any neighborhood in which such structures contribute to the "sense of place." This would be a serious mistake with citywide consequences. Second, by preempting the current public initiation process, you will open the door to speculators and developers whose sole interest in a property may be the profit motive, and these people will eventually come to dominate and control the process. And third, by creating a staff Preservation Officer, you will usurp the authority of a commission that is now accountable to the public. I strongly disagree with each of these three proposals, and urge you to reject them.

Finally, these proposed revisions to the LPO have apparently moved forward with little, if any, public input or even awareness. Since your proposed changes to the Ordinance are contrary to the City's 2002 General Plan, we believe that these proposals should be allowed full public review and debate as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Sincerely yours,

Jerry Wachtel
President