

June 11, 2003

Planning Commission  
1 City Hall Plaza  
Oakland CA 94612

Re: Jack London Square, Phase II

Dear Commissioners:

I've been living in the Jack London area for over 13 years and, as an active participant in several groups, including Estuary Residents Business & Associated Neighborhoods (ERBAN), Oakland Waterfront Coalition (OWC), West Oakland Commerce Association (WOCA), Economic Council for West Oakland Revitalization (ECWOR) and Supervisor Nate Miley's Waterfront Roundtable, my observations regarding our Waterfront have come about due to writing on a daily basis about the highest and best development for the area.

You may agree that my experience as a founder of the Old Oakland project back in 1973, when development in this area was just beginning, lends an added depth to those observations, particularly since my primary responsibility was retail leasing, and I trust, therefore, that you will seriously consider the following comments:

#### Historic Preservation

Though the proposed Phase II project is mostly confined to Jack London Square proper, the reverberations of any development there will be felt throughout the surrounding area, particularly for Oakland's historic Produce Market (c. 1916) and also on Lower Broadway where, between the County Buildings and the Square, well over two thirds of the building stock is equally historic < one, the oldest commercial building (c. 1864) in the City itself.

To allow Lower Broadway and/or the Produce Market to suffer at the expense of Phase II < the beneficiary, after all, of a public subsidy < is to mismanage valuable City assets that can serve as a needed counterpoint to the modern commercial architectural statement that Phase II contemplates, much as Seattle's world renowned Pike Place Market and Pioneer Square tandem serve as a recreational draw (the most heavily visited attraction in the Pacific Northwest) for the more modern shops and stores of that city's flourishing downtown.

What is needed is a Specific Plan for the entire area that satisfies not only the goals and objectives of the proposed Phase II project, but also the highest and best development for the contributing historic subareas within the surrounding Jack London District.

To sever this profound relationship de facto, by concentrating on the Square only, will ultimately prove to be a major setback for any marketing program: how many new

consumers will come to an <sup>3</sup>improved<sup>2</sup> Jack London Square if the surrounding area is to remain in its current run-down condition?

### Building a Destination

Though Oakland has historically been the crossroads of the East Bay, and Broadway its main street; the most unfortunate set of circumstances, acts of God, and God knows what else have combined over the last fifty years to beget a nearly dysfunctional transportation hub right here in the Jack London District.

Meanwhile, the national perception of Oakland as a <sup>3</sup>can't do<sup>2</sup> City is unfortunately reinforced by the lack of expertise that too many policymakers reveal when it comes to understanding the challenges retailers are faced with. Yet, since retail and marketing are obviously the primary problem facing the Jack London area, some kind of a policy change with respect to the area must occur if we are ever to enjoy < and profit from < our Waterfront as an authentic Bay Area destination.

Over the years, we have ardently sought a new rationale for the Jack London District that not only includes solutions for the County buildings, Lower Broadway and the Produce Market, but also converts these assets into the most profitable venues possible, redounding to Oakland as no other facility, including the Square itself, possibly can. Each time we're told that there isn't enough funding available to make any of it happen, or this policymaker is against it, or that consultant has analyzed the market, or that yet another study needs to take place.

Yet the answers are obvious and have been presented over and over to this body (mostly in a prior incarnation) and we have yet to see a complete, holistic vision for the area emerge and receive official sanction from the City: does lack of money equate to lack of imagination? For example, the Estuary Policy Plan has enough holes in it to allow for almost any change imaginable, including a complete departure from the express wish of the Estuary Plan Advisory Committee (EPAC) to see height limits enforced as a way to retain the <sup>3</sup>quality and character<sup>2</sup> of the District, one of the main themes of the whole planning effort. It is clearly time to add these concerns into the EIR and begin to do what is best for the entire District and not just the limited portion belonging to the developer.

As it is perfectly in keeping with the concept of how the proposed development of the Square will impact the surrounding area, please acknowledge that the EIR is incomplete without mandating a retail-oriented Specific Plan for the surrounding area so that the complementary aspects of the Jack London District can at last become righted, instead of listing so heavily to Port.

We trust you will consider these important elements in your review of the EIR. You have been charged with an arduous task: finding new, more productive uses for an area that has remained underused for several decades, and preserving the character and authenticity of one of the last remaining, unsterilized Waterfronts in the country must be a priority.

Some cities have chosen the bulldozer and, by severing those ties to the past, have paid the price of living in Anytown, USA. Still others have fought to keep their uniqueness and, by so doing, kept alive the personality and patina that draws to it the same kind of people who, inevitably, prefer the honesty of a unique place like Oakland's historic Produce District to the plasticity of, say, San Francisco's increasingly ersatz Fisherman's Wharf.

Cordially,

Steve Lowe