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September 3, 2024

Re: Builders Remedy Projects at 505 E. Los Olivos and 1609/1615 Grand Avenue

Dear Mayor Rowse and City Council Members

Allied Neighborhoods Association has been working for five decades to preserve and protect the City of Santa Barbara and its neighborhoods through conservation and good planning. We are responding to the two proposed Builder's Remedy projects on the lower Riviera and in the historic Mission Historic District/Mission Canyon area.

505 E. Los Olivos

The eight-story, 250+ unit proposed housing development at 505 E. Los Olivos is grossly out of proportion to the existing nearby community and built environment. There are no other housing units immediately adjacent to this property which is bordered by the beautiful Natural History Museum to the north and the historic Santa Barbara Mission to the south. The only access is via a very narrow section of E. Los Olivos. Mission Creek borders this property to the west as well.

This parcel is in the Foothill Very High Fire Hazard Zone. The City took steps in 2021 to exclude SB9 splits from High Fire and Extremely High Fire Hazard Zones with the stated purpose that increased density would NOT occur in these areas due to potential danger and need to facilitate quick evacuation with fewer residents. Allowing this high-density development along this existing narrow escape route from Mission Canyon goes against these goals of limiting increases in density.

We should follow the precedent of that SB9 Ordinance and continue to restrict additional density in this area. It is not a matter of IF but WHEN a major fire will happen in Mission Canyon and the surrounding area.

This area was partially burned in the 2009 Jesusita Fire and hasn't completely burned in over 60 years. We know that the main cause of wildfires is human activity and placing more people and structures in a high fire hazard zone is antithetical to the principle of reducing the incidence and risk of wildfire.

This proposed project is also near to Mission Creek and the Mission where there are oak trees and possibly native burial sites. It begs the question— how can this proposal be acceptable at all? The project description lists amounts of soil to be CUT and REMOVED from the site: Approximately 51,496 cubic yards of cut, 7,104 cubic yards of fill, 300 cubic yards of backfill and 44,392 cubic yards to be exported off the site. This is close to 3000 truckloads of dirt removed from the site which is adjacent to culturally significant institutions that represent Santa Barbara to locals and tourists alike as identity markers of Santa Barbara. Both the Mission and the Natural History Museum rest in relatively rural tranquility in our bustling city and we all love them for that.

1609 – 1615 Grand Avenue

The proposed 50-unit project on Grand Avenue is also a project ill-suited for its proposed location surrounded by single family homes, on steep streets and right across the street from the border of the Foothill Very High Fire Hazard Zone in the Lower Riviera. It would significantly increase evacuation risks in the event of a wildfire or other emergency.

Both of these projects would increase traffic and overwhelm our narrow and/or winding streets. On street parking is extremely limited in the Lower Riviera location which is currently not well served by public transport.

We know that the City desperately needs more workforce housing yet we believe these sites are NOT appropriate for such large-scale developments for all of reasons stated above. As well, the character and charm of our Riviera neighborhoods will be permanently affected for future generations.

Also and importantly, these projects do NOT bring the kind of housing needed for our City; we need units which are affordable for our workforce. A large majority of the units proposed for both of these projects will be offered at market rate with only a relatively small percentage designated as affordable to medium and low income families.

In short, these projects are incompatible with their neighborhoods, would significantly increase evacuation risks in the event of a wildfire or other emergencies and do not provide the type of workforce housing we need for our workforce. Such larger buildings with greater density belong in our downtown area, along transit corridors, and not in the foothills close to fire danger.

Please do all in your power to prevent them from coming to fruition.

Sincerely,

Mary Turley
President, Allied Neighborhoods Association

Cc: Planning Commission, Allison De Busk, Elias Isaacson, Sarah Knecht

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS from ACELA CITIZEN ACCESS SYSTEM

505 E. Los Olivos

This application is the SB330 Builder's Remedy full submittal in relation to the preliminary application previously submitted and assigned record #PRE2024-00012. The proposed project is a 255 unit multifamily residential development that includes 51 low income units. The 11,570SF of existing structures are to be removed and a new multilevel residential building is to be constructed that has covered parking below the residential units with 434 parking spaces with 13 ADA spaces. The proposed project will have approximately 203,980 square feet of residential living space and a total of approximately 487,784 square feet of construction. Grading and excavation will be performed including approximately 51,496CY of cut, 7,104CY of fill, 300CY of backfill and 44,392CY of export. The proposed project will include a new Landscape and irrigation design.

1609-1615 Grand Avenue

THE PROPOSED PROJECT IS A 50-UNIT MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING 10 LOW-INCOME UNITS, AND IS BEING SUBMITTED AS A VESTED BUILDER"S REMEDY PROJECT UNDER SB330 AND IN FOLLOW-UP TO THE PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED PRELIMINARY APPLICATION PRE2023-00156. THE PROPOSED NEW STRUCTURE CONSISTS OF 6-STORY APARTMENT BUILDING WITH A PODIUM DECK SEPARATING TWO LOWER LEVELS OF A PARTIALLY SUBTERRANEAN PARKING GARAGE. THE PROPOSED PROJECT WILL HAVE 50,654 SQUARE FEET OF INTERIOR RESIDENTIAL LIVING SPACE AND A TOTAL OF 83,901 SQUARE FEET OF CONSTRUCTION INCLUDING THE LIVING SPACES ALONG WITH COMMON AREAS BALCONIES, PATIOS, LOBBIES, HALLWAYS, MECHANICAL SPACE AND GARAGES. GRADING AND EXCAVATION WILL BE PERFORMED FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT. THE PROJECT ENCOMPASSES APN'S 027-270-037 & 027-270-038 AND WILL INCLUDE A LOT TIE OF THE TWO PARCELS.