

NEIGHBORS OF CAPITOL VILLAS

915 L Street, C-262, Sacramento, CA 95814

December 2, 2008

Dear Mayor Johnson,

I'm sorry to have to write to you on this, your first day as official Sacramento City Mayor, but you need to understand an issue which will be discussed at tonight's City Council meeting.

I am the President of Neighbors of Capitol Villas, a neighborhood group which was organized in June, 2008. I represent approximately 735 households who live in the 4 block "superblock" bounded by 5th & 7th and N & P Streets. A partnership of AIG and a developer from L.A. (The Bond Company) purchased the Capitol Towers and Villas rental residences and have proposed to demolish most of the trees, green space, and existing two-story apartments, and build 5 high rise towers on the property. Initially the Application was for *residential* buildings, but then AIG and Bond amended their application to expand three towers to office or residential use (at developer discretion), and to 35-story heights, both ideas which the Neighbors strongly oppose. The AIG/Bond Company has put its plans "on hold" until the City's General Plan has been adopted.

My neighbors and I feel there are problems mixing hotel or multi-story commercial use into our immediate neighborhood. The City Planning Commission listened to our arguments and recommended that an area between N & Q Streets and from 7th Street west to I-5 be redesignated as "Urban High Density Residential," (equivalent to the current High Density Residential designation) in deference to the neighborhood ambience and success of our immediate all-pedestrian "superblock" as well as the 400 - 500 additional households contained in these boundaries proposed by the City Planning Commission. The only other buildings in that area are State buildings, which are not subject to the City GP.

This issue was discussed again at the last City Council meeting on 11/18/08, and there was no opposition to the City Planning Commission's recommendation for the special "Urban High Density Residential". BUT, this morning, I was told that the City Manager is now going against the City Planning Commission recommendation and wants our neighborhood thrown in as part of the "Central Business District" on the City General Plan.

My neighbors and I oppose this decision for several reasons:

1) Our neighborhood has been in existence for the past 30 years, with Pioneer and Capitol Towers being built in the 1970's, and Bridgeway Tower (my building) in 1980. All three towers are 12 - 15 stories high, and offer a diversity of housing options, include low-income, senior, and housing for special needs groups, such as the visually impaired. Additionally, we have over 100 on-site trees, some being huge, including over 30 heritage trees, lawns and green space, wide pedestrian walkways (where city rights-of-way exist in the outline of the former 6th and O Streets), as well as a friendly atmosphere enjoyed by both the residents and others who use our "park-like" setting at lunch time and before and after work. We do not want to live on a construction site for over a decade, watch the trees and green space be torn down, or see our neighborhood's integrity ripped up. Our neighborhood is successful and is a very desirable place to live;

2) Our neighborhood is surrounded by office/commercial buildings, including a 26-story office building currently under construction across the street from us at 501 Capitol Mall. The vacancy rate in downtown Sacramento commercial buildings is currently 18%, the highest rate in over 30 years. In addition, the U.S. Bank Building at 7th and Capitol, the STRS building in West Sac, and another high rise office building at I-5 and Garden Highway exit are all nearing completion, adding several hundred thousand square feet of new, unleased office space in the immediate vicinity to our neighborhood. Is more commercial or hotel space needed in downtown Sacramento when the current available space is going unleased?

3) We understand that downtown Sacramento needs residents to support its success and that it is long-standing City policy to retain and expand residential use in this area. There need to be more businesses in our neighborhood to support us, such as dry cleaners, grocers, cafes and restaurants which have business hours on evenings and weekends, which are allowed under our current Urban High Density Residential designation.

Re-designating the area as "Central Business District" would allow, even invite, developers to demolish existing downtown housing and replace with office towers, which is the opposite of the City's goal of increasing downtown housing.

4) Our neighborhood meets most of the City's stated goals in the updated general plan, as well as the goals for green growth supported by the State Attorney General's office:

- * We can park our cars and walk to work, to shop, to restaurants, entertainment, or even the art museum;

- * We have access to various mass transit sources (a Regional Transit light rail station, Regional Transit and private buses, the Amtrak station, etc.)

- * Residential growth in our neighborhood would not contribute to "urban sprawl."

- * Green space is preserved, air quality is improved by the "urban forest" supported by our neighborhood. It is certainly a "Neighborhood of Trees" in the "City of Trees."

Opposition to the recommended Urban High Density Residential designation for our neighborhood on the proposed City General Plan is surely generated by special interests, developer greed, or short-sightedness by its proponents, and this opposition has been neither transparent nor has our neighborhood group or any other interested Sacramento citizens had an opportunity to express their concerns about it, since it was proposed literally within the final hours of public input into the City's General Plan proposal.

We have hosted tours to our neighborhood for City Council members Cohn, Tretheway, and Fong, in addition to sending countless mailings to them regarding our position and the rationale for them.

None of them were opposed to our neighborhood maintaining its current ambience or residential nature. Changing the Planning Commission's recommendation on the last day for public comment does not support a Mayor-City Council representative form of government. We will continue to oppose this idea.

Two of our representatives had lengthy discussion with Tom Pace, Senior Planner, prior to the Planning Commission meeting. The Planning Commission also discussed it extensively. Both support the re-designation of the area as Urban Neighborhood High Density. So we do not understand why the City Manager so abruptly reversed the staff recommendation on the morning of the Council meeting.

Sincerely,

Jeanie Wilcox, President
Neighbors of Capitol Villas neighborhood group