



Thursday, July 16, 2009

Chair Frank Kluber
And Martinez Planning Commissioners
525 Henrietta Street
Martinez, CA 94553

RE: Berrellesa Palms Development Proposal - SUPPORT

Dear Chair Kluber and Commissioners,

For over 50 years, Greenbelt Alliance has protected the Bay Area's open spaces in part by promoting smart infill development in our existing cities and towns. Our Compact Development Team (CDT) endorses and advocates for livable, transit-accessible communities with a wide range of housing options for families of all sizes and income levels. The Compact Development Team evaluated the Berrellesa Palms project, proposed by Resources for Community Development (RCD), using an established set of endorsement criteria. We have endorsed the project for a variety of reasons: first and foremost, due to its compactness and affordability, in addition to its superb infill location. Secondly, we believe the project will enliven downtown Martinez and contribute to ongoing revitalization efforts. Finally, the developer's decision to pursue green building practices is evidence of a strong commitment to the health of the residents, the community, and our environment. We urge the Planning Commission's support of this project. Providing new homes, jobs, and shops along transit corridors is one of our best tools in limiting greenhouse gas emissions and combating climate change.

With 49 homes situated on slightly more than 1 acre, Berrellesa Palms translates into 47 homes per square acre, the maximum allowable density under both the City's local zoning ordinances as well as under state law. New compact homes, within the city's existing urban footprint, not only help to alleviate development pressure on the Bay Area's open spaces, but also use land and infrastructure more efficiently. In this case, the development's proximity to the bus hub and Amtrak station will increase ridership on both the local and regional lines, thereby helping to ensure continued access to quality public transportation for all of the City's residents, as well as enhance the likelihood of more extensive transit service here in the future. Furthermore, the superior infill location of the development, within walking distance of downtown's Main Street, as well as regional parks and open space, means that Berrellesa Palms residents will have access to daily needs without having to use a car.

Greenbelt Alliance also strongly applauds RCD's decision to pursue 100 percent affordable housing here, with 48 homes—minus one manager's unit—slated to rent for an average of around 49 percent of the area median income (AMI). Affordable housing is an essential component of a community's housing stock, and attractively designed, high-quality affordable homes are a vital element in the revitalization efforts of neighborhoods and communities. Such developments help communities fulfill development objectives for underutilized sites, such as the project site, and often increase the property values of the surrounding area.

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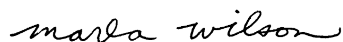
Greenbelt Alliance believes that the Berrellesa Palms will positively contribute to the City of Martinez, as a well-designed development that fits the residential character and scale of the neighborhood and site and helps the City meet its inclusionary housing goals. By blending the project into the neighborhood in terms of form, scale, and architecture, RCD has worked hard to ensure that the building will become an attractive part of the area's urban fabric. As residents of the building utilize the parks, walk along the sidewalks, shop at local stores, and participate in community and civic events they will increase the vitality and energy of the neighborhood, contributing to a diverse, healthy, and prosperous city.

RCD has committed to employing green building practices in this project. As proposed, the project will attain either Build It Green or the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. Efficient building practices and environmentally-friendly products help preserve vital energy and water resources, minimize construction waste, and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. A green building is a healthier home for residents and helps create a more livable and sustainable city for everyone. Greenbelt Alliance strongly encourages the developer to attain the high standard of LEED certification.

In conclusion, Greenbelt Alliance is aware that this project is not without controversy; debates exist as to whether or not the project is the best development to catalyze economic revitalization under the Downtown Specific Plan, as well as what degree of parking is appropriate. To address the first of these concerns, Greenbelt Alliance believes that affordable housing is perhaps the *most* appropriate form of development to kick-start economic development efforts, as affordable housing residents—particularly seniors—are very likely to spend the vast majority of their discretionary income within the local community, rather than traveling to surrounding cities. In regard to parking, Greenbelt Alliance feels RCD has gone above and beyond the call of duty in addressing community concerns over insufficient parking: RCD has not only granted a public easement on their property for additional surface parking, but they are also providing nearly *double* the minimum of 0.35 spaces per dwelling unit called for in Chapter 23.36.030 of the City's zoning requirements, a type of concession Greenbelt Alliance does not generally support.

We encourage the Planning Commission to support Berrellessa Palms. Doing so will mean taking a stand for high-quality, affordable infill development that will help protect the region's open spaces and contribute to a vibrant, diverse community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "marla wilson".

Marla Wilson
Sustainable Development Associate