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February 18, 2009

Mr. John Rahaim, Director
San Francisco Planning Department
1650 Mission Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94103-2479

Re: Discretionary Review Reform

Dear Director Rahaim:

I wish to compliment the Department on its efforts to reform the entirely dysfunctional Discretionary Review process. The proposals as outlined during Public Outreach should go far in eliminating the arbitrariness, uncertainty, and costs to the Commission, Staff and public of the current process.

I have been following the discussion of the proposed changes over the web and wish to endorse a few comments made by others:

- Design professionals should be permitted to meet with the RDC during the review of the project. In a short period of time, the designer can explain to staff background issues and design challenges and their response, saving considerable staff and proponent time.
- The hearing office should not refer DR cases to the Commission due to "neighborhood opposition" or "public interest in the project". This would completely undermine your attempt to build some certainty into the process, and relieve the Commission of hearing unnecessary cases. Limit referral to the Commission to policy issues.
- Multiple Hearing Officers would be desirable to avoid backlogs and delays.
- Clarify to the public the internal DCP review process so it is evident what cases will be referred to the Hearing Officer(s).
- The RDC should be able to approve projects that are not considered to be "exceptional or extraordinary". The recourse for the DR applicant would then be to go to the Appeals Board.
- There should be a clear process for dealing with revisions to projects that can avoid another Hearing. Staff should be able to review and sign-off on revisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these comments.

Sincerely,

David S. Gast, AIA, LEED AP
Principal