

(MEASURE DD COMMUNITY COALITION LETTERHEAD)

18 November 2008

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**Subject: Comments of Measure DD Community Coalition on Oakland Re-Zoning
as Relates to Lake Merritt and its Environs**

The Measure DD Community Coalition is a broad-based, citywide body of 100 or so representatives, sanctioned by the City Council. The Coalition is charged by the Council to oversee the progress of Measure DD funded projects; to monitor project expenses; and to serve as community soundboard to staff, administrators, community, and City Council relating to the general Measure DD program. Measure DD is the \$198 Million bond measure approved in 2002 by over 80% of voters for the purpose of improving Lake Merritt, the Lake Merritt Channel, its tributaries, and the parks and parklands adjacent to the Lake.

The Coalition is aware that the Commission is in process of a comprehensive rezoning throughout the city; with the object of bringing zoning classifications into compliance with the already adopted Oakland General Plan.

The area of concern to the Coalition is the west area of Lakeside Drive – from 14th Street and the Cameron-Stanford House, northerly and easterly to Snow Park -- less than five percent (5%) of the greater CBD area. Presently, the Lake frontage exhibits a disorganized pattern of undistinguished high buildings interspersed with a few three and four stories residential buildings of what remains from the original Lakeside residential neighborhood.

This west portion of Lakeside Drive differs markedly from its northerly extension along Harrison Street to Grand Avenue. Here, the high rise office buildings, appropriate to that district's use and function, are appropriately set back from the Lake by wide landscaped and divided thoroughfares. The high rise office buildings and their sitings differ sharply from the condition along Lakeside Drive, where the street is two-way with no landscaped median, and the tall buildings crowd and seemingly overwhelm the narrow Lake front.

The City is presently in process of major improvements at this location. At the moment, substantial construction is underway renovating the historic Boathouse, its grounds, and Lakeside Drive. These substantial improvements will benefit the City in general, and are anticipated as well to become a regional destination. The Coalition is aware that the Zoning Update Committee is entertaining potential proposals for buildings as high as 275 feet among the rezoning alternatives for this area fronting Lakeside Drive.

The Coalition is concerned that the present pattern of intermittent high rise buildings fronting Lakeside Drive is not the most desirable or compatible fit for this area of the Lake. As result, much of the previous view corridors have been eliminated, such that only slivers presently remain. The Coalition would like to believe that were these tall building proposed today, they would not have been approved. It is therefore the Coalition's request that similar tall structures not be continued at this fragile frontage area of west Lakeside Drive.

The Coalition is also concerned that creating opportunities for additional tall structures along this area of Lakeside Drive is inconsistent with the General Plan designation of the area as one to receive "*maintain and enhance*" treatment in its rezoning, as opposed to sectors specifically designated as "*growth and change*" areas. The Land Use and Transportation Element (LUTE) of the General Plan defines the "*maintain and enhance*" designation as "*areas where there are predominately-established uses and densities that are to be continued, and where changes in use and density will be small.*" There is no question that the Lakeside Apartment District (Gold Coast neighborhood) is a long established and settled residential community of broad interests that will not change significantly for many years to come.

High rise structures at this area of Lakeside Drive are an inappropriate use for at least the following considerations.

- a) **View Impacts:** Present view corridors toward and from downtown and toward and from the Lake and beyond have been all but obliterated by the present high rise buildings fronting on Lakeside Drive. The few remaining view slivers deserve to be preserved (attached Sketch #1).
- b) **Lake Access & Interaction:** Lakeside Drive at the locations of the present high buildings is a narrow street with no setbacks or medians. The high buildings hover over the street, sidewalks and parkland. They put pedestrians enjoying walks around the Lake in deep shadows.
- c) **Solar Access:** The quality of the lakeside experience is highest where the area adjacent to the Lake is open to the sky. Low buildings bordering the Lake enhance openness and allow for greater access to the sun and sky.
- d) **Skyline:** Retaining low buildings at the Lake front, with structure heights incrementally building up so as to be highest at the central core of the CBD, makes for an more interesting and exciting skyline.
- e) **Context:** The initial character of the Gold Coast residential neighborhood, and which mostly remains intact beyond Lakeside Drive, is of walkup apartment buildings of relatively uniform three and four stories. Existing buildings are closely situated, and create an urban density that is economically supportive of nearby downtown commercial districts (attached Sketch #2).

- f) **Lake-Facing Front Yards at Pedestrian Level:** Uniform features of original buildings along Lakeside Drive are generous setbacks and planted front yards. To pedestrians, the setbacks significantly enhance the strolling experience, and offer relief and opportunity to admire details of yards and ornament at ground level.
- g) **Development Potential:** Existing buildings in the Gold Coat neighborhood typically exhibit a Floor-Area-Ratio of 1.5 to 2.0. One of the potential rezoning proposals will permit heights of 55 ft when a rebuilding opportunity is presented. At 55 ft high, a new building could achieve an F.A.R. of 3.3, and still fit in reasonably with existing neighborhood character. An F.A.R. of 3.3 permits a density increase of 66% or more, which is presumed a reasonable financial incentive to developers of opportunity sites.
- h) **Tall Buildings & Wind Effects:** Rows of tall buildings are notorious for changing the micro climates of their locations, creating wind tunnel effects, and making the walking experience unpleasant.
- i) **Sailing Affected by Wind Currents:** Sailing enthusiasts testify that tall buildings in the vicinity of sailing activity change the wind currents from the Bay, and make the sailing experience more problematic and less predictable
- j) **Halt – Not Replicate – Former Mistakes,** such as Nobel Towers, the Essex Apartments, and the regrettable apartment building just south of 17th Street. A stroll along Madison Street looking toward the Lake is conclusive in illustrating the misfit of high rise buildings of recent years along Lakeside Drive and their lack of fitting in and allowing the amenity of Lake Merritt.-- Oakland's jewel -- to be shared by all.

Lake Merritt, in addition to its beloved status, is a National Historic Landmark, and as such, is an amenity that benefits the entire region. Accordingly, the Measure DD Community Coalition urges the serious consideration of the Zoning Update Committee and of the Planning Commission to restrict building height for properties fronting the Lake to no more than 55 ft. In addition, the Coalition urges that a broader process of community involvement and interaction be implemented before formal rezoning recommendations are moved forward to the City Council.

Respectfully Submitted by:
The Measure DD Community Coalition
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For further information, please contact:

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