

May 29, 2018

Berkeley City Council

Via email: [council@cityofberkeley.info](mailto:council@cityofberkeley.info)

Re: Support for AB 2923 (Chiu)

Dear Members of the Berkeley City Council:

We urge you to support AB 2923 (Chiu), allowing BART to provide more transit-oriented development, including much-needed housing units, on land the agency owns surrounding current stations. As a Council committed to providing more decent, affordable housing to its residents, as well as helping reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change, Berkeley leaders now have an opportunity to signal to Sacramento that they understand the need for more transit-oriented development not only within our borders, but also at BART stations across the region.

Currently Berkeley has only one station – North Berkeley BART - that would be affected by this particular bill. But AB 2923 will benefit not just Berkeley: it is about the move toward a more affordable and sustainable housing strategy that is necessary for our region, both environmentally and in terms of economic opportunity and equity. Building great communities at BART stations represents the best tool to reduce congestion, increase affordable housing, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, preserve open space, improve air quality, and maintain diversity. In fact, delivering thriving developments adjacent to high-capacity transit is at the heart of our region's Sustainable Communities Strategy--that's why both the Greenbelt Alliance and the California League of Conservation Voters support the bill.

AB 2923 prioritizes these important equity and sustainability goals. The bill mandates that any development include at least 20% affordable units, requires solid labor practices, and focuses on vacant land rather than on displacement of existing communities. Developing these projects at BART stations across the region will provide housing for Bay Area residents who can more easily access work, school, and medical care using nearby transit. It will more seamlessly connect existing neighborhoods with these communities, improving overall security at the BART stations, which is a high priority for our city. And the new residents in these developments will support local businesses, bringing more retail choice and convenience to existing residents.

We appreciate that there is a good community conversation underway about potential development around the North Berkeley BART station. It is conceivable that this will lead to a suitably compact development that is oriented toward transit, walking and biking and without excessive parking that encourages more driving, traffic and pollution. However, history suggests that this process may take decades and include far less housing than our city desperately needs. By setting some basic parameters around zoning and affordability, AB 2923 can help start the

local conversation at a productive point where we are debating key issues of design, mix of uses, public space amenities, and vital services -- rather than questioning the basic need for more affordable, transit-oriented housing.

It is important to note that AB 2923 does not imply that BART will simply “takeover” the zoning and planning process at North Berkeley BART. Although the bill sets thresholds for certain zoning allowances that relate directly to whether the project is transit-oriented), it leaves most zoning considerations to the city, including design standards. As a matter of policy and practice, BART as a landowner must work with local government on any transit-oriented development proposal. In addition, BART is run by an elected board that is accountable Bay Area residents, making it different than other non-local actors such as the University. Finally, BART has a long history of collaboration with local communities and officials and is committed to ensuring this positive collaboration going forward.

We strongly encourage the Council to signal your support for AB 2923. At the same time, if the Council has recommendations to improve the bill, we believe its authors are open to suggestions.

We all know well how important it is for Berkeley to lead in the fight for more housing, transportation, and climate change strategies. We encourage you to show the courage and leadership that is needed to guide our region through these challenging times and vote to support AB 2923.

Sincerely,

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