

Dear Mr. Weintraub and the Oakland Landmarks Commission Board,

I have only just been made aware of the Historic Resource Evaluation Draft. Very few of the neighbors and impacted residents of this area (The Claremont is the most prominent feature of my back yard view) are aware of this 200 page document, and we have precious little time to review such a significant report much less to prepare proper comments on it. This asymmetry with the developers who have had many months and years to make such preparations should be seriously considered by the Board as you do this review and schedule future meetings. I implore you to notice not only the few Oakland neighbors but the far more numerous Berkeley neighbors heavily impacted by this development.

In reading this draft, one thing becomes remarkably clear - there is no effort at a balanced report but purely a concentrated effort at supporting the developer's intent to develop regardless of impacts, destruction of the site, diminishment of the building itself and serious other damage to this historic hotel property.

I strongly urge the Board to demand that this report be fully rewritten by truly independent professionals to account for the following missing aspects of the assessment:

**1. Open space around the Hotel** The original application for Landmark Status in 2003 clearly called out the value of open space around the Hotel. Even if the landscaping has been severely degraded with parking lots and tennis courts, it maintains a sense of openness totally at odds with a massive condominium complex closely adjacent to the building. Even worse, for most of the residents to the east and south, the new condo structure severely diminishes or eliminates the vistas and views they currently enjoy of the Claremont Hotel main building. From the original application, note the concern with open space:

**2. Ease of restoration** Even where the landscaping has been severely diminished, the cost to restore significant landscaping is insignificant compared to the costs of the planned development. It is very easy for any owner of a landmarked property to allow such deterioration and incremental destruction to the historical aspects as to allow for future redevelopment to the highest economic return regardless of the historical damage. No assessment has been done of the cost of returning some of the splendor of the gardens as an alternative to forever covering them with buildings just because they have been allowed to deteriorate. Almost nothing in the application speaks of the specificity of the landscaping but rather the general impression of having open natural and landscaped grounds around the building, something still maintained and easily improved. Again from the 2003 application:

**3. Integrity** The seven criteria identified on pages 31-32 of the draft identify the criteria by which integrity is established. These are:

- Location
- Design
- Setting
- Materials
- Workmanship
- Feeling
- Association

Of these seven criteria, the open space around the hotel maintains most of the significant aspects including **location** (unchanged), **design** (in this case, design refers to the layout of the hotel upon these extensive grounds and the views and vistas such design creates), **setting** (damaged by surface construction but it's essence easily restored), **feeling** (largely maintained by the extensive open spaces) and **association** (stronger than ever today with more people with more memories and its established place as the traditional anchor of the entire community).

I am sure there are plenty more reason for a thorough rewrite of this report if I had the opportunity for a thorough and thoughtful review. I implore the board to consider the balance of cultural and historic value that this property contributes to the area, and the obviously developer biased report that seeks to minimize all of the issues to allow for the reckless development and destruction of a cultural treasure. Of course we would all love to see the improved landscaping that the developers squeeze in around the remaining edges, but this is no reason to allow them to destroy the openness of the site which is absolutely critical to it's essence as a loved landmark.

Balance is what planning is all about. Balancing the competing needs of different interest groups to provide communities that thrive and that people want to live in. This community currently thrives and people want to live here. The proposed development threatens that in the most dramatic ways. At this point the Board is concerned with this draft report. Please consider it in context with what historical review is intended to protect, and how this report purely protects developer's interests while ignoring the permanent destruction of an historical gem that this development will cause. I am confident you will agree that it needs to be significantly rewritten to account for a truly balanced view of this historic resource.

Thank you all for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Steven Berger  
Resident on Hillcrest Road with significant Claremont Hotel views