Greg VanMechelen
Architect

Mayor Tom Bates and Berkeley City Council
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA

Reference: Berkeley Deep Green Building Standards
Date: July 18, 2016

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council,

I am writing in support and to urge you to approve the Berkeley Deep Green Building Standards. I believe these Standards will continue the City's leadership in the causes of the global environment and human well-being.

I have practiced architecture in Berkeley for over 24 years. During this time my work has embraced the need for environmental stewardship, and my projects include Berkeley's Shorebird Park Nature Center (the first municipally-owned strawbale building in the country), renovations for Urban Ore, and the current Urban Adamah Farm. I have also been involved in creating green building standards, including Resource Efficient Guidelines for Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories, and the Architectural Resource Guide by Architects/ Designers/ Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR).

Berkeley has a long and proud history of innovation in the built environment. Historic programs such as RECO/ CECO were at the forefront of energy stewardship, and Berkeley's early requirements for accessibility showed foresight in concerns for humans well ahead of ADA. The Deep Green Standards will further these goals, incorporating best practices for the global environment while enhancing human health.

There is an increasing recognition for more environmentally considered measures in our Building Codes, such as the "California Green Building Standards Code". The State of California is undertaking a model Zero Net Energy Code that will take this even further. Unfortunately many Codes fail to take a holistic approach to the effects of development on the natural environment, and the Berkeley Deep Green Standards aim to simultaneously address energy, material resources, water, toxicity and the effects on human and planetary health.

While reduction and better sourcing of energy use is critical, we cannot lose focus that the materials that meet those goals must also be carefully scrutinized. For example, future Codes will mandate rigid insulation to surround a building envelope. This is generally a good option for reducing energy use, but the cheapest and most popular options for that insulation include very toxic products that actually create more global warming in their manufacture than they will save over the life of a building. Documented in the Deep Green Building Standards, this sort of information is essential to create sensible legislation and to guide building designers towards appropriate choices.

For energy production, Berkeley Deep Green recognizes that we need to work as a community to meet our energy needs. In an urban environment not all buildings can individually meet their own energy needs through renewables, and the approach must be done in the context of the larger geographic and physical area.

The Deep Green Building Standards similarly address numerous other choices, finding the materials that work best while minimizing damage to, or even improving, the natural environment. These measures, if adopted, will not only put Berkeley at the forefront of model Codes, they can help influence other communities throughout California and across the country to take a holistic approach towards building.

I therefore hope that the Berkeley City Council will adopt these measures.

Sincerely,

Greg VanMechelen, architect

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