



September 20, 2018

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San Francisco Planning Commissioners  
1650 Mission Street, Suite 400  
San Francisco, CA 94103

RE: Case #2016-00378CUA – Whole Foods 365 at 1600 Jackson Street  
**Letter of Support**

Dear Commissioners:

You have before you *a small miracle*:

- *A developer who wants to open a new neighborhood-friendly grocery store in San Francisco.*
- *An owner who has the financial strength to make it succeed.*
- *A project that will not require another teardown and will reuse a familiar but long-vacant early 20<sup>th</sup> century structure.*
- *A project that will displace no one.*
- *A store that the vast majority of residents in the neighborhood have repeatedly said they badly want.*

**Russian Hill Neighbors**, which represents over 500 households in the neighborhood of the proposed project, has now submitted multiple letters of support for this project in the course of more than two and a half years since it was originally proposed. As the continued October 4<sup>th</sup> Conditional Use hearing approaches, we are writing again to confirm our strongest level of support for this project and to respond with additional information.

Here are our main reasons for supporting this project:

**It has overwhelming support from the neighborhood.** Based on our own survey and other surveys, there is huge backing for this project. The strongest support comes from the people who live the closest to it. Most of the opposition appears to come from people and entities who live far away from it.

**We need a grocery store here.** In the last few years hundreds of new housing units have been built adjacent and near this site while meanwhile several independent general grocery stores on Polk Street have closed. We

now have in the blocks around the proposed project a large imbalance in the mix of uses where there is housing, but insufficient full-service grocery stores to serve the people who live there.

**We need to bring more life to this part of Polk Street.** There is a dead zone here, which a well-run grocery will help fix.

**The mixed-use alternative that some of the opponents advocate has major disadvantages.** An almost full-block vacancy would be extended yet another 4-5 years for new planning and construction. This would be intolerable. Given the recent spike in construction and financing costs, this vacancy could extend even longer, as we understand a number of approved projects have recently been put on hold as their financial feasibility is reevaluated. A new building could not provide a grocery, as zoning limits a new retail space to no more than 4,000 square feet. If and when the smaller retail spaces are ultimately rented, the likely types of tenancies, such as gyms or work-space, would be far less successful in creating foot-traffic.

**Having a store that is part of a larger company could in fact be a positive.** It is clear that the independent locally-owned grocery store, however attractive in concept, is an unlikely proposition in a world of modern supply-chain management. No non-chain groceries have been proposed here and most feature much higher prices than WF365 and are less positioned to serve families and seniors in this neighborhood. Since this store is backed by a company with financial strength, it may be able to succeed in what is widely thought to be a brutal retail environment.

**This project would preserve a familiar 1908 structure that fits well in the neighborhood.** This project can be finished in months. Unlike the hypothetical alternative proposed by the organized opposition, it is feasible and reuses a simple but useful and pleasant concrete garage. We don't need to tear down any more of our built history.

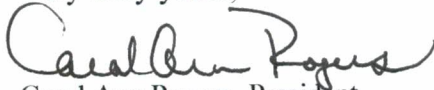
**The three or four local merchants who say the new store will cost them business are probably mistaken.** There has been some opposition from a few local merchants who indicate they are worried that their businesses and livelihoods will be harmed. But what we know about urban land use actually tells us the opposite is usually true: in vibrant cities, activity breeds activity.

The problems of brick-and-mortar retail have been much discussed, and we have seen that it has been difficult to get a grocery store to open up in San Francisco lately. This is a project that, if approved, has a good chance of succeeding in a difficult environment.

Commissioners, after a very long wait, we ask you again in the strongest possible way to please, finally, allow this project to go forward.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,



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