

Honorable Mayor
Members of the Berkeley City Council,

We are writing to appeal the Landmarks Preservation Commission's vote to designate 2526-2530 Shattuck Ave a landmark. We believe the commission erred in their designation of this property as a Landmark as the current building has dramatically changed in form and appearance since its initial construction. Thus many of the architectural features of merit are no longer present, negating the value of the landmarking of the property. Specifically, all the original chimneys have been completely removed, the front façade has been altered to remove unique ground floor architectural features and the original and distinct wood siding has either been removed or covered. The building is nearly unrecognizable in its current form compared to its original form (see pictures below). Given the absence of these original architectural features the building does not satisfy landmarking architectural criteria as it is not the first, last or most significant of any type of architecture, nor is it any longer an outstanding representation of architecture from its original time period as it is much more similar to more contemporary buildings than those of the early 20th century when it was constructed.



Left: 2526-2530 Shattuck Ave as photographed early 20th century (California Japantowns website) Right: contemporary photo of 2526-2530 Shattuck Ave

It is our understanding that for a time period of ~30 years this building housed a Japanese Laundry up until Executive Order 9066 resulted in the forcible internment of Japanese-Americans in the United States. This is a dark and despicable period of American history that mars our nation's self-image as just and equitable. It is thus crucial that these events are not allowed to disappear from our collective consciousness as the fight for true equality and social justice continues today. Given the nearly wholesale architectural changes to this building, however, we believe in its contemporary form it is an unworthy monument to this significant chapter in American history, as it currently communicates next to nothing about the actual history of the site or the people who used it. There are other ways to commemorate the history of Berkeley's Japanese-American community without landmarking the current structure – Berkeley currently offers more worthy memorials to Japanese internment such as the plaque at First Congregational Church of Berkeley and the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study Digital Archive housed by the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. Instead of

trying to preserve this building as an unworthy monument, we suggest designating the 1% Public Art Fee any future development on this site would be required to pay for the construction of a fitting and proper monument to the 1300 Japanese-Americans Berkeley residents unjustly interned during World War II with particular attention to utilizing a broader process of community engagement than has been demonstrated in the landmarking of this building.

Furthermore, we want to highlight that landmarking is not a costless process. Cities are inherently dynamic entities that must continually change to meet the needs of their ever-changing populace and to respond to the challenges of the world they exist as part of. Currently society's most existential crisis is climate change, which demands a shift away from low density sprawl and its associated extensive greenhouse gas emissions to dense infill living that is co-located with electrified, low-emissions public transportation networks like BART and large job and education centers like downtown Berkeley and UC Berkeley, respectively. As this property is 0.4 miles from downtown Berkeley BART and UC Berkeley's campus and currently zoned South Area Commercial (C-SA, up to 5 stories of residential) this is an ideal location for denser housing that can spur crucial reductions in our region's greenhouse gas emissions. Landmarking, however, will make the realization of such housing on this site, and the desperately needed greenhouse gas reductions such housing would provide, so onerous as to be all but impossible on a useful timescale. Additionally, delaying or preventing the construction of additional homes on this site would be doubly tragic given the current housing crisis, which is largely the result of decades of under building.

In summary, we believe that the architectural features of this building have changed in such a holistic way as to negate its value as an architectural landmark per the technical requirements for landmarking. Additionally, we recognize its role in a horrific period of American history, but believe that in its current form it fails to communicate anything about this history and is thus an unworthy monument. We also ask that you consider the future societal costs this landmarking will cause as humanity desperately fights to prevent the most devastating effects of global climate change while we simultaneously struggle to correct the inequities caused by our regional housing shortage.

Alex Sharenko
Organizer, East Bay for Everyone