MEMORANDUM

To: Thomas Shanahan, Office of Economic and Workforce Development
From: Emerald Fund, Inc. (Emerald) and Mercy Housing California (Mercy)
Date: July 14, 2017
Re: Response to Public Comments

Community Engagement
The Balboa Gardens team appreciates the time and attention that community members dedicated to the RFP process by participating in presentations and meetings and by submitting questions and comments on the various proposals. It is clear from the thorough and substantive feedback that community members care deeply about the scope, character and quality of the transformation of the Balboa Reservoir.

Emerald Fund and Mercy Housing were struck by the diversity of opinions that were expressed. Many community members praised Balboa Gardens for best utilizing the site by including the most new homes while also preserving ample, well designed open space and connecting to the surrounding neighborhoods. Balboa Gardens also received repeated praise for providing senior housing, CCSF housing, neighborhood-serving retail and mentorship programs with CCSF and Archbishop Riordan students. Conversely, several community members were apprehensive about elements of the project's urban design, architecture and programming; others held divergent views on the appropriate amount of on-site parking and the potential impact on traffic congestion.

Mercy Housing and Emerald Fund have deep experience, developed over the past 30+ years in dozens of San Francisco neighborhoods, in listening to and dialoging with existing neighbors to build consensus for development proposals that are complimentary to, and respectful of, the surrounding neighborhoods. Mercy and Emerald understand and appreciate that many community members have a different vision for the Balboa Reservoir and that proposed projects often improve through a rigorous community engagement process. Mercy and Emerald pledge to meet with, and listen to, all community member voices and to incorporate their feedback to the greatest extent possible. The Balboa Gardens proposal is merely a start to the conversation. We look forward to many, many more months of iterative discussion and visioning with the Balboa Reservoir Community.

Urban Design, Architecture & Programming
Height and Density
Several community members expressed concerns about the height and density of the project; comments included “too tall,” “too high” and “too many units.” Many of these comments seem to address the basic parameters of the RFP guidelines. Balboa Gardens does conform to the design parameters of the RFP and, unlike another proposal, does not suggest exceeding the 65’ limitation. Indeed, by stepping down from 65’ next to the 65’ City College Multi-Use Building to 25’ townhouses adjacent to Westwood Park, Balboa Gardens’ building heights reflect a sensitivity to neighborhood context. Broad green spaces also buffer existing residential neighborhoods from the new buildings. Of course, the proposed financial terms are premised upon the building heights and development program presented in our RFP response. If it is determined that the RFP development parameters should be modified, we would request the opportunity to revisit the economic aspects our proposal.

Architecture
Some commenters felt that the buildings looked “too institutional,” “too boring” or “too imposing.” The architectural expression shown in the RFP response is intentionally preliminary and, as with our teams’ other San Francisco housing developments, will be evolved and refined based on many conversations with the community. Our team includes four award-winning design firms – Mithun/Solomon, CMG Landscape Architects, Kennerly Architecture & Planning, Studio VARA – that are each known for tasteful, innovative, engaging and contextual design. We anticipate a variety of design expressions that address the aspirations of the community and, together, form a dynamic and inviting neighborhood.
Shadows and Wind
Some community members expressed concern about shadows and wind. While the height, form and location of the residential courtyards in Balboa Gardens are very similar to those presented in the other proposals, the illustrations in our RFP were, unfortunately, modeled on a late winter date (March 1, 10:00 am) and as such depicted one of the most heavily shadowed courtyard conditions of the year. The illustrations were not reflective of the shadow condition for most of the year. In fact, the proposed residential courtyard dimensions of 80’ by 76’ and 83’ by 182’ are larger than typically found in residential developments in the area and throughout San Francisco. Moreover, the main open space, Balboa Green, was deliberately configured to enjoy generous sunlight throughout the year, benefitting a wide range of community users as well as the new residents. We will continually study and consider potential shadow impacts throughout our iterative design process.

Two of Balboa Reservoir’s greatest assets are the views to the Pacific Ocean and the connection to CCSF. Balboa Gardens includes a grand East-West axis to maintain the views to the ocean for the CCSF campus and residents and to celebrate the connection with CCSF; however, we understand that with this alignment come concerns about wind. Our development team is well acquainted with wind challenges. Emerald Fund has developed three residential projects, totaling 1,000 homes, in one of the windiest locations of San Francisco, near the intersection of Van Ness Avenue and Market Street. Emerald has consulted with wind experts, studied wind patterns and simulated wind behavior in the U.C. Davis wind laboratory. Our architectural team intends to work closely with our wind expert to balance the desire to maintain views and connection while using trees and other measures to break the wind and allow residents and neighbors to comfortably enjoy the site amenities.

Connection to surrounding communities
Some community members expressed concern that the buildings along Lee Avenue seemed “closed off” to CCSF or created a wall. Our design intention is to engage with the CCSF campus, both in the planning process and in the final design. We look forward to understanding more about CCSF’s plans for the east side of Lee Avenue and hope to, together, craft an active beautiful streetscape on both sides of Lee Avenue. For example, we would like to discuss the possibility of courtyard and walk-up entrances for residents along Lee Avenue. The Lee Avenue opening to Balboa Commons is a node that celebrates and continues the grand CCSF campus axis and is activated with a community dog run that will draw in dog owners from Balboa Gardens, Sunnyside, Westwood Park, CCSF and beyond, throughout the morning, afternoon and evening.

Others expressed concern that the project did not connect well with the surrounding communities, with the exception of our approach to Westwood Park. On its southern edge, Balboa Gardens offers multiple inviting connections to Ocean Avenue, Ingleside and the adjacent neighborhoods. Pedestrian connections will be enhanced and provided at the Ingleside Branch Library, Brighton Avenue, Lee Avenue, Lee Plaza, and Unity Plaza. By programming the connections with neighborhood serving retail, a child care center, community meeting space and recreational opportunities along the Unity Greenway, we aim to engage the community and draw people into Balboa Gardens.

On the northern edge, despite being bounded by Archbishop Riordan High School along the entire border, Balboa Gardens aims to enhance the link to Sunnyside, Westwood Highlands and the adjacent neighborhoods by honoring the ways in which the berm is currently accessed by neighbors. The new public greenway along the perimeter of the site follows the existing berm route and leads community members from the north into and through the site. Similarly, Sunnyside pedestrians who currently use the informal shortcut across the Archbishop Riordan parking lot will now enjoy a new landscaped, pedestrian friendly entry node at Balboa Gardens’ northwest corner when they emerge from the shortcut.

Indeed, whereas the other proposals push circulation to the perimeter resulting in a campus-like enclave in the center, Balboa Gardens brings pedestrian, bicycle and auto traffic deep within and through the site, resulting in an interwoven network of connections with the surrounding communities.

Finally, some comments felt there were too many semi-enclosed spaces that weren’t open to the public. While providing the most publicly accessible open space at 5.0 acres plus an additional 1.2 acres of ground floor open space for residents, Balboa Gardens seeks to layer the various types of open space together...
throughout the site. Most notably, a string of publicly accessible paseos provide broad, 33-foot wide landscaped pathways for neighbors to use while crossing through Balboa Gardens on their way to BART, MUNI Metro or the Ocean Avenue shops. We hope and believe that the paseos will be vital, well-loved connectors for the surrounding communities. We look forward to exploring the design and functionality of all of the open spaces with the community during the ensuing community engagement process.

**Mix of Uses and Populations**

Some expressed concern that the plan was too segregated by housing type. Our team has spent much time contemplating how to provide multiple types of housing (senior housing, family housing, workforce housing, CCSF faculty and staff housing, market rate housing, flats and townhouses) in the most integrated manner possible. The Balboa Gardens’ vision is one of a mixed-income, multi-generational community that brings people from different backgrounds and different life experiences into contact and communication with one another. It is our ardent belief that herein lies some of the magic of city living.

For reasons of financing and ownership, the low-income family and senior homes are best located within a single, shared building. Similarly, the CCSF designated homes would likely be financed and owned as a distinct and separate building. However, the 120% AMI workforce homes will be distributed throughout the site as these require no special financing. Furthermore, each phase of the Balboa Gardens development will include some form of public benefit; examples include senior housing, neighborhood serving retail, community meeting space, a child care center, CCSF housing, workforce housing, Habitat for Humanity for-sale housing, income restricted housing and publicly accessible open space.

**Traffic, Parking and Transportation**

One of the most complex and difficult challenges of the project will be to understand and manage the impact of the development upon local traffic flow. Many community members expressed concerns about parking and traffic congestion.

The site’s proximity to BART, three MUNI light rail lines, and five MUNI bus lines presents a prime opportunity to encourage transit trips. Similarly, to promote bicycle trips, the site will be ringed by bicycle lanes, bike sharing stations will be installed and abundant bicycle parking will be provided. Numerous TDM measures will be incorporated into the project. The inclusion of senior housing and CCSF faculty and staff housing on site will also reduce the number of automobile trips generated by the project.

Our initial approach to parking seeks to strike a balance between providing too little and too much parking. Balboa Gardens contains 660 sub-grade parking spaces in two levels of garage; 135 of those spaces will be dedicated exclusively to CCSF; another 135-200 of the spaces will be shared by residents and CCSF based upon temporal parking demand. An additional 110 visitor parking spaces will be provided on-street. We would also agree to a restriction that prohibits future residents of Balboa Gardens from obtaining a neighborhood permit parking sticker that could be used to park in Westwood Park and other nearby neighborhood parking zones.

We plan to carefully study the potential traffic impacts of Balboa Gardens along with effective mitigation measures. Our transportation analysis will be led by Tim Erney of Kittelson & Associates. Tim brings deep experience in this neighborhood’s traffic and transportation challenges. Tim prepared the transportation study for the Balboa Park Station Area Plan and the Avalon/Whole Foods development as well as provided input on the Phelan Loop transportation study. Neighbors and stakeholder opinions and insights will be sought out and considered during our traffic and transportation study. We know traffic will be a major challenge, and we commit to tackling the issue with vigor and creativity.

**Conclusion**

Balboa Gardens offers the vision of a complete neighborhood for 21st century San Francisco; one based upon livability, sustainability and vitality. In combining new housing for a broad variety of people with abundant recreational open space for the community and new connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods, Balboa Gardens can offer a shining example of what is possible in San Francisco. Thank you for your consideration.