

Telegraph Avenue housing project plans to offer amenities to tenants with disabilities

BY [ARIEL HAYAT](#) | SENIOR STAFF



After hours of public comment and discussion Thursday, Berkeley's Zoning Adjustments Board unanimously approved an environmental impact report for a proposed six-story building on Telegraph Avenue.

The mixed-used project is planned to be built at 2539 Telegraph Ave. at a location that formerly housed the Center for Independent Living, or CIL, an organization that provides disability services to residents of the city and surrounding areas. CIL relocated to Adeline Street, and once completed, the new building will feature 70 residential units.

Because of CIL's role as the nation's first consumer-operated self-help service delivery agency for individuals with disabilities, the building is considered a historical resource under the California Environmental Quality Act. As a result, a historic mural on a south-facing wall of the existing property — which will be removed during construction — will be replicated and refurbished at CIL's Adeline Street site.

Patrick Kennedy, a developer with Panoramic Interests, has been working closely with CIL to ensure that the organization's legacy is commemorated, according to CIL Executive Director Stuart James. Installing what the environmental impact report refers to as an "interpretive display" on the portion of the building facing Telegraph Avenue will allow passersby to view memorabilia and images depicting the organization's history.

"The presence of CIL is noteworthy, and we are going to acknowledge that," Kennedy said. "We will provide a narrative of CIL's story that someone can read."

In addition to the measures set forth in the environmental impact report, Daniel Backman, an architect with Lowney Architecture, said several other accessibility-related design features will be implemented. He said at the meeting that five of the building's units will come pre-equipped with accommodations for tenants with disabilities, including roll-in showers and elevator kickplates.

James commended the developers at Panoramic Interests during the meeting and said his organization has long advocated for the type of accessible housing planned for the new project.

But community members voiced concerns about the proposal, specifically regarding its large scale in relation to nearby homes and businesses. Leila Moncharsh, chair of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association's preservation committee, said a six-story complex would be "very unattractive (and) out of scale with the residential properties behind it."

Board member Nicholas Dominguez acknowledged the necessity of additional student housing in the Telegraph neighborhood, saying the community "needs to recapture some of the student population that doesn't live in Berkeley anymore, because there's no housing."

The Zoning Adjustments Board is set to consider the project's use permit at a later meeting.

Another residential project on University Avenue was also granted its use permit at the meeting, and developers for a proposed parking garage on Center Street presented preliminary design plans.

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Correction(s):

A previous version of this article and headline stated that the Zoning Adjustments Board approved the use permit for the project at 2539 Telegraph Ave. In fact, the use permit was not approved and will be discussed at a future meeting.