

September 22, 2024

Re: Comments for Planning Commission Study Session on Northgate Town Square

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for taking the time to hear public comments on the Northgate redevelopment project. By now, I assume you are familiar with the concerns that many residents have raised about the traffic study. In case you are not, I have attached my comments on the draft EIR, which details those concerns.

I want to take this opportunity to reiterate my request that the City ensure an accurate traffic study is conducted before making any decisions regarding the EIR and other project approvals. An accurate traffic study is important for ensuring the developer adequately mitigates impacts. It is also essential for maintaining community trust. Nobody who has spent time at Northgate Mall over the past decade can possibly believe that adding 1,422 residential units to the site will substantially reduce daily trips. If the City signs off on the project without scrutinizing that conclusion, it sends a message that the City is not interested in accuracy or transparency, that community concerns don't matter, and that the City is merely rubber stamping the project.

Some have suggested that it is too late to redo the traffic study because it would cause delay. I first highlighted the flaws in the traffic study for City staff and leadership in September 2023 and have reiterated those concerns many times since. The City was aware of the flaws in the traffic study long before the draft EIR was released, and there was plenty of time to remedy the issues and incorporate a proper traffic study into the draft EIR. After ignoring this glaring deficiency for over a year, raising concerns about delay seems disingenuous.

I want to see housing at Northgate and I do not believe traffic impacts should affect the project's ability to receive permits. However, I also believe Terra Linda residents deserve to understand how the project is going to impact their daily lives. In the spirit of transparency and fact-based discussions, I hope you will use your authority to recommend revision of the traffic study.

Sincerely,

Rachel Zwillinger

From: [Laura Silverman](#)
To: [April Talley](#)
Cc: [Planning Public Comment](#)
Subject: For Public Comment re; Planning Comm Meeting on 09.24.24
Date: Monday, September 23, 2024 10:51:55 AM
Attachments: [LTR TO PC 09.23.24 .docx](#)

Dear Ms. Talley and the City of San Rafael Planning Commissioners,

I'm a 20 + year resident of Terra Linda and value our beautiful community.

Although I support the redevelopment of the Northgate Mall and enthusiastically look forward to a sustainable mixed use development that welcomes new residents and offers a vibrant gathering place for the community, I have considerable concerns with the current proposal.

Some of my concerns are as follows which are explained below:

TRAFFIC/POLLUTION/GREEN HOUSE GASES/DRIVE THROUGH RESTAURANTS/EVACUATION SAFETY...all falling under the CONCERN OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Mayor Kate Colin states on her website (<https://katecolinsanrafael.com/local-issues/>) that **Climate Change** is one of her key priorities.

The Mayor states: "Over the past two years, I've set the foundational strategy across the four key priority areas (homelessness/housing, economic growth, **climate change**, social justice) and I respectfully ask for your vote so I can implement the programs poised to move the needle within each priority area.

As our climate conditions change, everyone is being impacted from the threat of sea level rise, extreme heat or **increased risk of fire** and smoke. These events serve as an opportunity to expand the conversation to a broader group of people and get their support for **climate-related policies**. San Rafael cannot solve these issues alone and I am on the Countywide BayWAVE Committee as well as the Bay Area-wide BCDC Elected Task Force.

When I was elected your Mayor in 2020, one of the first initiatives I undertook was having **Climate Change** be one of the City's four priority policy areas. Now that it is a **priority area**, internally the City is integrating **climate impacts** into city projects. And externally, it enables San Rafael to continue to be a leader in this arena. When voters passed Measure C in 2020, it provided the critical funding to address **wildfire prevention**."

If indeed these are truly the concerns of the Mayor and the City, I implore the Mayor and the City to stand by their commitment in regards to the Redevelopment of Northgate, the largest residential/commercial development in Marin County.

TRAFFIC/POLLUTION

The increase in Traffic that this project will generate with the addition of 3500 new residents is going to create grid lock in the surrounding area especially during high usage timeframes.

Vehicular Green House Gas (GHG) emissions caused by the increase in traffic will pollute the environment and be detrimental to the health of the community and the environment.

To have the baseline usage of the DEIR report reflect a fully functioning Mall can't be justified. This Mall has been declining for many years and not operating near capacity. Using this comparison for Traffic is detrimental and does not realistically represent the reality of the situation.

EVACUATION/SAFETY

In addition to GHG, the increase in Traffic will overburden evacuation routes during natural disasters due to the limited roadways surrounding Northgate and the bordering residential neighborhood.

Emergency response times will be greatly challenged. We need to improve the current road conditions to mitigate the high risk that this project poses. It's illogical to support the premise that

the Transportation Impact Study states that the Project would have a “beneficial” impact on emergency response times. How can that be possible especially when we consider that there are three senior communities within yards of Northgate and these communities specifically are at greater risk and will require more care during emergencies and evacuations. Quail Hill Townhomes comprised of 124 residences is directly uphill of the Mall and would be in a traffic lock down if there was a mass exodus during a disaster.

The increase in capacity of the current roads needs to be considered so that our community is safe.

DRIVE THROUGH RESTAURANTS

- The proposal to add two drive through restaurants to this project, is just wrong. All research indicates that idling cars increase GHG.
- In addition to cars idling, these restaurants will increase traffic, create noise and congestion when commuters exit 101 for a quick burger.
- These consumers will not stop at Northgate, nor participate or engage with the Northgate community nor visit other retailers.
- The result of these toxic emissions is in opposition to San Rafael’s goals of the Climate Change Action Plan 2030.
- We need sit down local restaurants and cafes, which have proven successful in other Marin developments including the Marin Country Mart and Town Center Corte Madera.
- Let’s make Northgate a vibrant destination not a transient drive through.

https://afdc.energy.gov/files/u/publication/idling_personal_vehicles.pdf

“Idling your vehicle—running your engine when you’re not driving it—truly gets you nowhere. Idling reduces your vehicle’s fuel economy, costs you money, and creates pollution. Idling for more than 10 seconds uses more fuel and produces more emissions that contribute to smog and climate change than stopping and restarting your engine does.”

<https://csumb.edu/transportation/vehicle-idling/>

“Tailpipe emissions are the major source of greenhouse gas emissions and over 50,000 deaths per year. Idling is linked to lung disease, asthma, increased allergies, heart disease and cancer. Because of the known link between idling and health problems, many agencies and organizations are dedicated to reducing these impacts”

This project will have a long term effect on the safety and health of our community and the environment for many years to come and it’s imperative that the City consider the concerns and suggestions that the community has expressed over many years since the inspection of this project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Warm regards,

Laura Silverman

Responsible Growth in Marin, Member

Marin Conservation League, Member

September 23.2024

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Responsible Growth in Marin, Member
Marin Conservation League, Member

From: notify@proudcity.com
To: [April Talley](#)
Subject: New submission from Northgate Mall Project Updates Sign Up Form
Date: Sunday, September 22, 2024 7:34:26 AM

Next Steps: Sync an Email Add-On

Name

marilyn Reyes

Email

[REDACTED]

Submit Public Comment

Please let me know how to apply for the affordable units when they come available.

From: [Keith Granger](#)
To: [April Talley](#); [Planning Public Comment](#)
Subject: Re: Northgate Drive Town Square Comment - thumbs up to pre-built in-law units
Date: Saturday, September 21, 2024 12:38:23 AM

Important correction to previous comment just submitted – add “professional working couples,” in 3rd paragraph.

From: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] 26 AM
To: <april.talley@cityofsanrafael.org>, <planningpubliccomment@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: Northgate Drive Town Square Comment - thumbs up to pre-built in-law units

Keith Granger
Golden Hinde Blvd, Terra Linda
One block from Northgate.
Homeowner and 35+ year Resident

I am still disappointed with the Northgate Town Square plans for its focus on the **parking-lot-centric design**, and the **percentage of housing that is rental**.

1. Although the design has really improved a great deal, it is still a town square built around a parking lot instead of a public square! A lot of valuable public space is being lost due to parking and the ingress/egress needed to access the parking lot area. We need to think “Main Street” -- like we have now -- not a town square with a parking lot at its heart!
2. Nearly all the housing except for a token number of townhomes is rental housing; for individuals and younger couples that are not in a position to buy a home, or able to make a long-term commitment to a community. Our community also needs housing for families, professional working couples, and older couples who need units they can PURCHASE in order to build or maintain their equity; Families need space and the stability that home ownership provides. Seniors and empty nesters need homes they can purchase using proceeds from sale of their existing home. I love Terra Linda having lived here 35+ years, but I’m not going to sell my home and start paying \$60,000+ a year in rent with annual increases going forward!

The City of San Rafael, our school system, and the state needs a property tax base that will increase steadily in the future. Commercial rental housing will not do this. If one argues “well, the land is too valuable to sell..” it’s because developers know that 5-story high density housing is possible if approved. We need to enforce development limits to change that mindset. Rental units make it easier for cities to meet the state housing

numbers in the short term, but it will not solve our housing needs.

We have many wonderful neighbors/families renting homes around the Terra Linda High School area, but sadly, they'll likely have to look to Petaluma, Rohnert park, or points north to do achieve their dreams.

The developer at their last meeting mentioned design possibilities that include town homes with pre-built in-law units. That could open up a lot of possibilities and should be explored or mandated.

Keith Granger
Golden Hinde Blvd, Terra Linda

From: [Keith Granger](#)
To: [April Talley](#); [Planning Public Comment](#)
Subject: Northgate Drive Town Square Comment - thumbs up to pre-built in-law units
Date: Saturday, September 21, 2024 12:26:21 AM

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Golden Hinde Blvd, Terra Linda
One block from Northgate.
Homeowner and 35+ year Resident

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Keith Granger

Golden Hinde Blvd, Terra Linda

From: [Cecil Nielsen](#)
To: [April Talley](#)
Subject: Northgate Planning Commission Study Session
Date: Friday, September 20, 2024 6:53:25 PM

Hi April- I am unable to attend your meeting, therefore submitting this email.

Having worked on many projects for the City of San Rafael on behalf of the VIA committee for many years, and Northgate being a big one, I would like to remind you and the developer to keep the following under consideration:

1. Try and keep as many of the existing trees as possible. Trees take many years to grow. They keep us healthy and provide shade. They create habitat for birds. Owls take care of the rodent population.
2. Stay away from artificial grass and rocks;
3. Town square still seems small;
4. Location for Music Venue a must;
5. Shade, shade, shade: trees are the best remedy for this;
6. Drinking fountains as well as water fountains;
7. Paths should be wide enough for wheelchairs and strollers
8. Remember to consider night skies.

Best,

Cecil Nielsen



From: [NORMAN WOLFF](#)
To: [April Talley](#)
Subject: NORTHGATE PROJECT COMMENT
Date: Sunday, September 22, 2024 10:14:35 AM

I would like the county Civic Center library to move to the new Northgate Development, possibly as an anchor or flagship facility. I don't think it matters that the Northgate land is within City of San Rafael.

The Civic Center county library is the main county library branch and administrative office.

As a public library it is not accessible enough, requiring at least two (2) different elevators. I think this may be deliberate on the part of the library administration to keep out the great unwashed, but that is contrary to what a public library does.

The San Rafael City library is being repaired due to its age. They have moved temporarily to Fourth Street. A ballot measure in November asks voters to fund a new San Rafael City library. If approved I understand that it is likely to be built in the Albert Park area, possibly in combination with a new Community/Senior center.

In other words, the new City library seems to be out of the running for the new Northgate.

That is why the Civic Center library must move to New Northgate. It does not matter whether Northgate is within City limits or not. That line is a cop out.

Once out of the Civic Center, the current county library space can be used by the county law library, which is currently not even in the Civic Center at all. It is across a four lane main artery in an extremely inconvenient location. That makes no sense.

I really want the New Northgate to have a new county library that is a centerpiece of the whole project.

NORMAN M WOLFF
Federal Park Ranger (retired)
San Rafael.

From: [Chuck Becker](#)
To: [April Talley](#)
Subject: Northgate redevelopment
Date: Monday, September 23, 2024 9:01:00 AM

April,

I live around the corner from Northgate in Los Ranchitos and wanted to share my concern for this project. Overall, I think redeveloping Northgate is a great idea, but this current proposal has WAY too many residences. Adding over 1,400 homes to that area will have a huge impact on traffic, noise and light pollution, and overall community enjoyment. For what it's worth, all of Terra Linda is approximately 900 residences (per Wikipedia), this development over doubles the size of the local community, without addressing the impacts that will cause, schools, public safety, and especially roadways and traffic.

I don't know that the FAR is here, but this looks like it is well exceeded. Merlone Gier maxed out the space with blocks of apartments.

I absolutely request the city to reconsider approving this project until a plan is put forth that won't negatively impact the current residents while providing additional housing the state needs.

Thank you,

Charles Becker
Los Ranchitos