

San Rafael Chamber

July 18, 2019

City of San Rafael
Planning Commission
1400 5th Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Re: Northgate Walk Housing Proposal- 1005-1010 Northgate Drive

Dear Planning Commissioners:

On behalf of the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce (SRCC), which represents nearly 625 Marin County employers with over 26,000 employees, I write to express our support for the multi-family housing project Northgate Walk being proposed at 1005-1010 Northgate Drive in San Rafael.

This proposal would transform an underutilized site that is zoned for multi-family by replacing an existing gas station and surface parking lot with a unique mix of 136 senior, affordable, and market-rate homes. It is a perfect site for workforce housing as it is located along the 101 corridor, near a SMART station, and a major bus route and it is in close proximity to some of our largest employers including Kaiser Permanente, Northgate Mall and the County Civic Center.

The type of housing being proposed is a type that is not currently available in San Rafael. That is, housing for the missing middle; younger, first time home owners who want new, modern housing that meet their needs and who are currently working in our community and commuting long distances to their employment. A project that provides amenities to its residents that a smaller project cannot, like a gym, restaurant use, gardens and outdoor paths. These features are attractive to younger home buyers and create a sense of place. The project also provides 30 units for seniors looking to downsize and need single level housing so they can age in place without living in a traditional senior community. That in turn frees up older homes in San Rafael and adds to the inventory.

Northgate Walk is completely consistent with our planning visions; the North San Rafael Vision, the Station Area Plan and the General Plan 2020. The housing project will add much-needed supply to the local housing stock, including 28 affordable units and meets the goals of the City's Housing Element to support housing development either as redevelopment or infill.

The SRCC is completely in support of this project and we respectfully ask that you approve the application on July 23rd. However, I would be remiss if I did not mention our disappointment in the low number of units being proposed. The cost of small projects makes adding housing incredibly difficult and adding the 20% affordable on top of the cost makes it nearly impossible. The site is zoned for High Density Residential which would have allowed up to 313 units by code. Originally 217 units were proposed but the project has been reduced twice to its current density of only 136 total units.

San Rafael Chamber

As a community who has made a commitment in our visioning process to add housing, I ask why the project is not reaching its goals. It is the type of housing, in the kind of location and of a style and form that we have all been advocating for.

Sincerely,



Joanne Webster

President and CEO

cc via email: Chamber Board of Directors

July 18, 2019

Planning Commission
City of San Rafael
1400 Fifth Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

RE: Northgate Walk

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in support of the Northgate Walk Project, scheduled to be before you on July 23rd. I am sorry I cannot attend the meeting in person.

Seldom have I seen a significant project that deserves your full and enthusiastic support more than this one. Northgate Walk offers San Rafael new, multi-family housing so desperately needed. It also fulfills many important goals agreed to over years (decades, actually) of community planning and repeatedly ratified by numerous planning commissions and city councils. Project benefits include:

- Added affordable housing at a significant 20% ratio
- Limited traffic impact
- Infill project with minimal impact on the natural environment
- Housing with easy access to all transit types – bus, SMART, walking, bike
- Close to 101 with minimal traffic impact on adjoining neighborhoods
- Provides housing for an aging population
- Fully accessible to the disabled
- Supports the gathering place concept, so central to North San Rafael planning schemes
- Height and mass are a match to adjoining office and hotel buildings (which are up to 5 stories)
- Modern housing in a community where housing is mostly over 40 years old, meeting the needs of today
- Close to a wide variety of employers, including Kaiser and the County

As many of you know, I have been active in San Rafael community-based planning efforts for nearly 30 years (Downtown Vision, N. San Rafael Vision, N. San Rafael Station Area Plan, General Plan 2020 and now General Plan 2040). I am also a current member of the CAC. Moreover, I have a lifetime of experience in North San Rafael and my office was at 899 Northgate Drive for 20 years. I know the area and I helped write many of its planning documents.

While I understand neighbors' concerns expressed in numerous letters, upon more careful review, it turns out the majority were either factually incorrect or a reflection of people's natural resistance to change. As planning commissioners, you are no doubt used to being faced with these passionate and mostly sincere entreaties to prevent a wide range of ills that can result from insensitive development.

Hopefully, in this case, you will be more moved by rational analysis and by San Rafael's extreme need for housing. The major issues have been studied by neutral professionals and have been either mitigated by the developer or found to be in fact inconsequential or immaterial. In addition, and this is extremely important, this project is totally in keeping with the City's housing goals for both the area and the entire City. It is the type of housing, in the kind of location and of a style and form that we have all been advocating for.

At the risk of hyperbole, I would like to take the planning matter further. Why bother with community-based planning, with all of the thought and effort that goes into it, if we are simply going to ignore goals we set forth for ourselves when an actual project comes forward? My personal take on Northgate Walk is that it should be far closer in size to its full potential of 422 units than the 136 approved. I think as Planning Commissioners, you should take note of the failure in a planning process that resulted in this project being whittled down so dramatically. How many prime, low impact housing opportunities like this do you think you will see in our built-out city? Yet, before the project even came to decision makers for formal consideration, it ends up only 1/3 of what it could deliver to San Rafael in fulfillment of our oft repeated but seldom achieved housing goals.

Based on this experience, it is no wonder that the State of California is moving to take away local control of local planning. More's the pity.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Smith", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Roger A. Smith
65 Moncada Way
San Rafael, CA 94901
rsmith@rasprop.com



July 17, 2019

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San Rafael Planning Commission
1400 Fifth Avenue,
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Planning Commissioners:

Marin Environmental Housing Collaborative (MEHC) is a consortium of advocates building support for projects and policies that advance affordable housing as well as environmental integrity and social equity. We are writing to express our support for the Northgate Walk project in Terra Linda.


Northgate Walk provides a rare opportunity to develop a large number of much-needed housing units in San Rafael. MEHC is particularly supportive of this project for the following reasons:

1. The project will be developed on an infill site, jeopardizing no open space;
2. The project is well-sited—within walking distance of shopping and amenities, and close to the SMART Train stop as well as several major employers including Kaiser San Rafael, Civic Center, the Northgate Mall, Embassy Suites, and Autodesk.
3. The project will provide 28 units of critically lacking affordable housing and 30 units of senior housing.

Very little housing has been built in San Rafael over the past 15 years, yet job growth brings in thousands of commuting workers, contributing massively to greenhouse gas emissions from their daily drives, as well as to choking traffic congestion. The rising cost of housing precludes many members of our workforce from living here and the need for affordable housing has reached a crisis state in San Rafael. We encourage you to consider whether there is still potential for this site to include more housing as the current plan for 136 units is well below the density that this site was zoned for.

The Northgate Walk project received high marks from San Rafael's Design Review Board, and the developers have worked hard to accommodate the community's recommendations and provide amenities to the community. We urge you to approve this project and consider the potential for more units.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sami Merich".

Co-Chair, Marin Environmental Housing Collaborative