

December 15, 2020

San Rafael Planning Commission

1400 Fifth Avenue

San Rafael, CA 94901

Via email: barry.miller@cityofsanrafael.org; lindsay.lara@cityofsanrafael.org

PLEASE INCLUDE THIS 6-PAGE LETTER IN PUBLIC COMMENTS for the Planning Commission hearing on December 15, 2020, for the draft General Plan 2040

Dear Planning Commissioners:

I.) I have the following comments/alternate suggestions to address staff’s response to previous comments:

Chapter 6. Conservation and Climate Change

Program C-1.16C. Redwood Tree preservation, pg 6-19:

Modify the proposed wording to eliminate reference to “private property”. Protected trees should include all specified trees regardless of whether the tree is located on private or publicly owned property.

Chapter 8: Safety and Resilience Element

Program S-2.1B: Geotechnical Review: pg 8-7

The word “feasibility” should be included here as it is a critical part of geotechnical review and is included elsewhere in the Safety element. Please see additional comments for the Safety Element in the new comment section of this letter.

Chapter 10. Mobility Element:

Policy M-6.1: pg 10-43

“Public stairways” should also be included. Public stairways currently exist in hillside areas where there are NO sidewalks and these public stairways provide a shortcut down the hill to streets with sidewalks, which are safer for pedestrians. These public stairways provide a safe evacuation route when narrow hillside streets may be blocked. A public stairway currently connects Marquard to Fremont Road and is safely used by pedestrians as a shortcut and avoids pedestrians walking down a narrow street with no sidewalk and inadequate lighting. These type of pathways should be encouraged in hillside areas and should be planned as a connection

to sidewalks and other trails and pathways. Public stairways should be given equal consideration as pathways and trails. There are some public stairways that have fallen into disrepair and should be restored and maintained, e.g. Miramar to Second Street.

Policy M-7.3: Parking Technology, pg 10-47

Where feasible, use technology to improve parking efficiency and reduce the land area required to meet parking needs.

Program M-7.3A: Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Study Recommendations., pg 10-47

Implement the technology recommendations of the 2017 Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Study and consider the application of these recommendations to other parts of San Rafael by doing a similar study for residential areas.

Chapter 13. Economic Vitality:

Program EV-3.8C: Pre-Submittal Process, Pg 13-22

Improve the efficiency ~~and speed~~ of the development review process by updating departmental procedures, revisiting neighborhood notification and meeting procedures and ~~updating~~ the pre-submittal process to identify initial concerns and encourage higher quality applications.

Comments:

I don't think the word "speed" is appropriate here. The word "efficiency" already encompasses the notion of doing something at maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort. By emphasizing "speed", it may infer that everything else, such as accuracy and thoroughness, are secondary to being "fast." I think the intention is to review and update all procedures involved and be as efficient as possible but still maintain thoroughness and accuracy. I recommend eliminating the word "speed."

II.) I have the following New Additional comments:

Chapter 3. Land Use

Policy LU-2.6: Lot Consolidation, pg 3-29

Encourage the consolidation of small (<6,000 SF) lots zoned for higher density residential, commercial, and mixed uses in order to create more viable development sites. Encourage consolidation of hillside lots which are difficult to develop because of size or slope or have difficult fire and emergency access. Lot consolidation can provide greater flexibility in site planning, make it easier to meet parking and access requirements, hillside development standards and enable building sizes and dimensions that are more economically viable.

Program LU-2.12D. Accessory Dwelling Units, Pg 3-31, add:

Adopt a policy to disallow ADUs and JADUs in areas where risks to the public health and safety exist due to extremely narrow streets, lack of sidewalks, and access difficulties for fire and emergency vehicles.

Policy LU-3.2: New Development in Residential Neighborhoods, pg 3-33, add to bulleted list:

- Should not increase risks to public health and safety or contribute to access difficulties for fire and emergency vehicles.

Chapter 4. Neighborhoods

WEST END, pg 4-18, replace the entire description with this edited version:

The West End neighborhood is located between Downtown San Rafael and San Anselmo. It includes Fourth Street's "Miracle Mile" and extends up the hill on both sides of Fourth Street to the ridgetops. The neighborhood consists primarily of single family homes, some historic Victorians (on Marquard and Sentinel Ct) as well as duplexes and apartment buildings, the largest being the Bayo Vista apartments. Small businesses are located along West End Avenue and the Miracle Mile (Fourth St). The neighborhood includes many tree-lined streets, including walkable Greenfield Avenue, Santa Margarita Drive with its unique Spanish Mediterranean homes and Redwood trees covering the north facing slopes where summer homes for San Franciscans were originally built. The West End Neighborhood Association organizes many social events during the year, including the popular annual picnic.

West End residents enjoy their proximity to Downtown, its walkable streets, and the neighborhood's comfortable small-town feel. The neighborhood has its own identity, distinct from Downtown San Rafael and the West End Village. Residents seek to maintain the established scale of the West End, with smaller buildings and local-serving stores along Fourth Street. The community would like increased pedestrian and bicycle safety by widening the sidewalk next to busy Second Street, completing sidewalk connections on Second between Shaver and Hayes and East Crescent at Fourth, and safety improvements at busy Second/Third/Fourth Street crossings. Pedestrian pathways, stairways and trails make the neighborhood more walkable, and residents would like to see the Grove Hill Estates pathway completed, a public pedestrian easement approved in 1983, that connects the West End to Sun Valley. Landscaping improvements and maintenance of medians along Second Street, the Miracle Mile and West End Avenue as well as attractive sidewalk and setback landscaping along all streets increase the beauty and value of the neighborhood. When new development takes place, encourage tree planting in addition to the preservation and protection of existing trees.

Development potential in the West End is limited, with a number of opportunity sites along Fourth Street and West End Avenue where older non-residential uses could be replaced over time. Remaining undeveloped hillside properties are constrained by limited access, very narrow windy roads, and steep slopes. The scale of future projects along Fourth Street are constrained by heavy and fast-moving traffic and limited ingress and egress to Fourth Street. Where commercial or mixed development occurs, encourage neighborhood-serving uses (rather than regional or "drive-thru" type uses) on the ground level. Design should avoid "strip mall" style buildings and instead include pedestrian-friendly features and compatibility with the scale

and character of nearby homes. With traffic circulation improvements, a limited amount of housing in mixed use projects may be considered.

Policy NH-2.4: Development of Remaining Vacant Residential Lots

Ensure adequate provisions for emergency vehicle access and water supply prior to constructing additional homes on vacant lots in the West End, especially on narrow and substandard streets and in hillside areas.

Policy NH-2.5: Hillside Construction

Ensure compliance with the Hillside Design Guidelines for all new construction and major remodels on hillside lots. The siting, height, and design of new or expanded structures should be carefully evaluated to ensure adequate emergency vehicle access, slope and foundation stability, adequate surface and sub-surface drainage, erosion control, and meet parking requirements. Buildings that are out of scale, damage the natural landscape, cause excessive tree loss or habitat destruction, or obstruct scenic vistas from public vantage points, should be discouraged

Chapter 6. Conservation and Climate Change

Policy C-1.17: Tree Management, pg 6-19, add:

Program C-1.17A. Tree replacement policy.

Adopt a tree replacement policy that reduces our carbon footprint and aligns with the City's policies for Climate Change. Rather than require tree replacement of 3:1, without regard to size, and frequently settling for a noncompliance fee, require tree replacement based on a calculation of energy costs savings, runoff absorption, wildlife support, carbon absorption, fire hazard mitigation, and beauty that is equal to or greater than the trees that are removed.

Chapter 8: Safety and Resilience Element

Introduction, 2nd paragraph, pg 8-1:

An overarching goal of this Element is to reduce the economic and social dislocation associated with environmental hazards. While it would be impossible to remove all risks entirely, there are steps the City can take to reduce losses risks and make more informed decisions about land use and development near these hazards by implementing policies and programs to reduce losses to life and property.

Program S-1.2B: Use of Hazard Maps in Development Review, pg 8-4

Review slope stability, seismic hazard, flood hazard, sea level rise, wildfire, and other environmental hazard maps when development is proposed. Require appropriate studies and actions other reports necessary to identify ensure that hazards on or adjacent to the site are identified and implement effective mitigation measures. ~~mitigated.~~

Per the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP), "a successful mitigation program involves both the public and private sector". Information regarding the investigation, identification, and proposed mitigation measures for local hazards discovered during review of a development proposal should be assessed and available for public review before the application is deemed complete and the City takes action to approve the development. Update the City Study and mapping to include potential landslide areas and other hazards identified during development review, per LHMP.

Geologic Hazards, 2nd paragraph, pg 8-5, this wording is taken from the the City's LHMP (Local Hazard Mitigation Plan) and I am adding some additional wording, also from the LHMP:

Geologic and seismic hazards should be considered in planning the location, design, intensity, density and type of land uses in a given area. Long term costs to the City,.....

The City will only approve new development in areas of identified hazard if such hazard can be appropriately mitigated, per the City's LHMP. Moreover, Certain land uses

Landslides, last paragraph, last sentence, pg 8-6

The City has also adopted a Hillside Development Overlay District and the Hillside Residential Guidelines Manual which applies to all lots with an average slope of 25 percent or greater and includes development requirements and procedures to identify and minimize hazards associated with development on steep or unstable slopes.

Policy S-2.1: Seismic Safety of New Buildings, pg 8-7, change:

Policy S-2.1: Geologic and Seismic Safety of New Buildings

Design ~~and construct~~ all new buildings construction to resist stresses

Program S-2.1B: Geotechnical Review: pg 8-7

Continue to require geotechnical studies and peer review for proposed development as set forth in the City's Geotechnical Review Matrix to assess soil/geologic hazards and determine if these hazards can be adequately mitigated. (See Appendix F and text box at right).

Such studies should determine the extent of geotechnical hazards, optimum design for structures, the feasibility and suitability of a proposed development for it's location, the need for special structural requirements, and measures to mitigate any identified hazards. In some instances, an engineering solution may not be economically feasible, and avoidance of the hazard may be the best way to assure public health and safety, per LHMP. These findings shall be considered in conjunction with development review before project approval.

Periodically review and update the Geotechnical Review Matrix to ensure that it supports and implements the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan by identifying potentially hazardous areas that

may be experiencing geotechnical instability., ~~reflects current practices and is internally consistent, and potentially remove the procedures from the General Plan and instead adopt them as part of the Zoning Ordinance or through a separate resolution.~~

Comments:

I think “current practices” should follow the policies and programs of the General Plan not the other way around (General Plan agrees with “current practices” as stated). Also, what is meant by “internally consistent”? I think Geotechnical Review should remain in the General Plan with subsequent zoning updates, as with all other adopted General Plan policies/programs. To remove it from the General Plan is to make it less transparent and visible to the public.

Policy S-2.2: Minimize the Potential Effects of Landslides

Development proposed in areas with existing or potential landslides (as identified by a registered Certified Engineering Geologist or Registered Geotechnical Engineer or the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP)) shall not be endangered by, nor ~~or~~ contribute to, hazardous conditions on ~~a~~ the site or on adjoining properties. Development in areas subject to landslide hazards shall incorporate adequate mitigation measures that have a design factor of safety of at least 1.5 static conditions and 1.0 for pseudo-static (earthquake) conditions. The City will only approve new development in areas of identified landslide hazard if the hazard can be appropriately mitigated and secondary impacts can be reduced, including erosion control and replacement of vegetation.

Appendix F: Geotechnical Review Matrix:

Add to the bottom, under NOTE:

NOTE: For Hillside lots with an average slope greater than 25%, refer to the Hillside Residential Guidelines Manual, Appendix C for Geotechnical/Hazardous soils review

Sincerely,

Victoria DeWitt
West End neighborhood resident