

Project Description -- The Neighborhood at Los Gamos

Introduction

The Neighborhood at Los Gamos (“The Neighborhood” or “Project”) is a new development consisting of 192 multifamily residential units, a neighborhood market, and a community center. The vision for the Neighborhood is just that, it is designed as a true neighborhood, with its own grocery store, central gathering area, and fitness and outdoor amenities. Instead of a standalone residential building that relies on outside services, a *neighborhood* has been designed.

The plans for the Neighborhood are submitted at a time of crisis. As recognized by the San Rafael City Council, the lack of housing in San Rafael is an imminent emergency. This project is a direct response. However, the Project provides housing in a uniquely unimpactful way because of its location. Specifically, this site has direct access to the freeway and nearby transit opportunities without passing by a single existing home in San Rafael. Furthermore, the size and shape of the Project site allow the upper hillside area to be preserved, and a density of only 18 units/acre to yield the requested number of units. To “facilitate housing opportunities” was listed as one of the top goals for the City Council. This is the perfect, least impactful, location to meet this goal.

Site Description

The Project site is a 10.24-acre property located at the southwest end of Los Gamos Drive in Northern San Rafael. Los Gamos Drive is accessed from Lucas Valley Road to the north and dead ends with no through vehicle access to Los Gamos Road to the south. On the eastern side of Los Gamos Drive near the Project site is an office building and the YMCA building. The Project site is bordered by open space to the immediate north. The Kaiser-Permanente garage project currently under construction is also located north of the Project site on the west side of Los Gamos Drive near its intersection with Lucas Valley Road.

Project Information

The 192 multifamily units and retail and community service facilities would be contained in six (6) buildings as follows:

- 2 buildings of 3-stories above parking;
- 3 buildings of 4-stories above parking; and
- 1 building of 2-stories above parking that will house community service facilities for the residents, a retail market use, and a plaza open to the public.

The buildings will be clustered and located significantly downslope to the east, close to Los Gamos Drive, in order to preserve the community-wide visibility of the hillside above. The apartments are affordable by design, with smaller units resulting in rents more affordable for the local workforce. In addition, the Project will contribute towards the City of San Rafael’s housing goals and meet the City’s currently targeted inclusionary rate of 10% Below Market Rate units.

The Project will provide 224 on-site parking spaces.

Project Design

The Project has been designed to create a pocket neighborhood that will provide both its residents and members of the public, and employees of and visitors to the nearby Kaiser, Marin Commons, the YMCA, San Rafael Manor, and 1401 Los Gamos with a sense of place. The Neighborhood incorporates elements of the natural surroundings while providing opportunities for recreation and relaxation for visitors.

The Project includes the creation of accessible hiking trails that provide improved connectivity to the adjacent open space. Residents can stroll across a prefabricated metal bridge over an ephemeral drainage to access a small trail system to the southwestern portion of the property and enjoy the “South Park,” which provides an overlook area to sit and enjoy a view of San Rafael from an uphill vantage point, a children’s playground area that incorporates natural elements such as wood logs, and a slide integrated with the natural sloping terrain.

The Project would also include a community center called the “Village Commons,” which will house a market/coffee shop that would be open to the public and conveniently located near Los Gamos Drive. This amenity would also benefit both the residents of the Neighborhood and the immediate local workforce. The Village Commons will also include a community room and outdoor plaza for use by project residents. Other elements that will foster a sense of neighborhood and community include shared outdoor areas, including a children’s play area, stepped lawn terraced seating, and more seating in an olive grove setting.

The Neighborhood is designed and will be constructed with sustainability and environmental stewardship at the forefront. The Neighborhood will plant over 180 trees to further blend the development with the landscape. The Neighborhood will also utilize Silva Cell technology for Bio Retention purposes which supports trees, in part by capturing and cleaning stormwater runoff onsite. As discussed in the amenities section, the Project includes comprehensive solar, electric vehicle, and electric bike components. Finally, the Neighborhood is strongly considering utilizing BamCore prefabricated wall systems, a highly-engineered bamboo-wood hybrid, for its buildings, however, other possible environmentally sustainable means and methods of construction are also being researched in order to ultimately select the one best suited to this type of construction.

The Project had the benefit of initial review by both the City’s Planning Commission and Design Review Board. These reviews indicated broad support for the project, and also provided critical feedback that has been incorporated throughout the Project design.

//

Amenities

The Neighborhood is designed with multiple on-site amenities. In addition to the neighborhood convenience market, playgrounds, South Park, Village Commons, open space access, and community center, the following elements are also included:

- In-unit storage.
- Separate dedicated storage lockers on the interstitial floors above the garage.
- Amazon lockers strategically located by the market in order to reduce traffic and exhaust.
- Installation of the maximum number of solar panels in order to reduce electricity costs for the residents and reduce the carbon footprint of the Neighborhood.
- Pre-paid Clipper cards, in an amount equal to 5 weekly round trips to Santa Rosa or San Francisco, will be included in annual rent, to facilitate the use of public transportation.
- The Neighborhood will install Electric Vehicle (“EV”) charging stations and will pre-wire all parking spaces with EV charging capability to more easily meet the potential future increased EV demands of residents.
- The Neighborhood will acquire seven to ten EVs for residents to utilize on-demand in order to reduce the need for residents to own a personal vehicle.
- Annual YMCA membership for residents will be included in the lease to promote and facilitate a healthy lifestyle.
- The Project will be pre-wired to allow Wi-Fi accessibility throughout the site.
- The site will also be pre-wired for electric bike charging with storage throughout the development for residents and near the market for the neighboring community.
- The Neighborhood would also like to work with the owner of the office building located at 1401 Los Gamos Drive on redesigning the bollards between the parking lot of 1401 Los Gamos Drive and Los Gamos Road for the purpose of improving both the safety and functionality of this intersection for walkers and bikers, but still preventing traffic throughfare.

Entitlements Requested

The site consists of two assessor’s parcels. The “Northern Parcel” located at APN 165-220-07 is currently zoned PD-H (Planned District - Hillside Development Overlay District), The “Southern Parcel” is currently zoned R2a-H (Residential - Hillside Development Overlay District). Each of the parcels currently has the HRR (Hillside Resource Residential general plan designation.)

Entitlements requested as part of the Project include the redesignation of both of the parcels to the Neighborhood Commercial Mixed Use 2040 general plan designation. The Project’s density fits squarely within the 8.7-24.2 units/acre range of this category, as do the residential and supermarket uses.

The application also seeks the rezoning of both parcels to Planned Development District (PD) pursuant to General Plan 2020 Policy LU-10 *Planned Development Zoning*, which requires a Planned Development zoning for development on lots larger than five acres in size, and General Plan 2040 Policy LU-1.15 *Planned Development Zoning*, which encourages a PD zoning for lots larger than 5 acres. Specific development standards and allowable uses will be established for the PD as part of the development review process and pursuant to the plans submitted.

The standards of the Project and proposed for the PD are as follows:

Density (Units/Acre)	18.75 units/acre
Setback-North	168'
Setback- East	42'
Setback- West	50'
Setback- South	472'
Height	44' (flat)/ 54' (ridged)
Lot Area	446,054 sf
Lot Coverage	17.08%
Floor Area Ratio:	0.01 (only commercial uses apply to FAR)

Also included is a Vesting Tentative Map application to formalize the longstanding lot configuration of the existing parcel.

State Density Bonus Law -Waiver/Modification Request Details

The Project is a “housing development” as defined by the State Density Bonus Law at Cal. Gov. Code § 65915 (“SDBL”). The SDBL, as implemented in San Rafael Municipal Code (SRMC) §14.16.030-H, provides that when an applicant proposes to build the required number of affordable units, the applicant is eligible for, and entitled to a Density Bonus, and further entitled to concessions and incentives to facilitate the construction of the Project.

A Density Bonus is not being requested for the Project, since the density fits squarely within the requested general plan designation. However, the Project seeks concessions/incentives and/or modification/waiver for building heights and parking ratios as designated in the application materials.