



**REPORT TO DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

**SUBJECT: The Neighborhood at Los Gamos** – General Plan Amendment GPA 20-001 (from Hillside Resource Residential to Neighborhood Commercial Mixed Use); Zone Change ZC 20-002 (from Planned District – Hillside Development Overlay District (PD-H) and Residential – Hillside Development Overlay District (R2a-H) to Planned Development District (PD)); Vesting Tentative Parcel Map (to combine and adjust the boundaries of the existing parcels); and Environmental and Design Review ED 20-058; for a mixed-use project with 192 multi-family residential units; an approximately 5,600-square-foot market; a 5,000-square-foot community center; and 225 at-grade and semi-subterranean parking spaces; on a 10.24 acre site located on Los Gamos Road north of Oleander Drive; on APN 165-220-06 and 165-220-07; Christopher Hart, Applicant and Property Owner; Mont Marin/San Rafael Park Neighborhood.

**PROPERTY FACTS**

Location	General Plan Designation (2040)	Zoning Designation	Existing Land-Use
<b>Project Site:</b>	<b>Existing: HRR Proposed: NCMU</b>	<b>Existing: PD-H and R2a-H Proposed: PD</b>	<b>Vacant hillside</b>
North:	PROS, P/QP	P/OS, PD (1963)	Vacant hillside
South:	PROS, VLDR	R2a-H	Single and Multi-family Residential
East:	MDR, OMU, P/QP	R2a-H, O, PD (1963), PD (1508)	Office, Gymnasium
West:	PROS	P-OS	Vacant hillside

<b>Lot Size</b> Required: 2.5 acres min. Proposed: 10.24 acres	<b>Lot Coverage (Max.) OR Natural State (Min.)</b> Standard: No standard for residences; 0.01 FAR for commercial. No Natural State minimum because the property would be in a PD zone Proposed: 17.08% lot coverage; 50% (5.17 acres) in natural state (4.83 ac unimproved open space and 0.34 ac of improved hillside open space); 1.29 acres of improved landscaping near buildings; 0.01 FAR for commercial component
<b>Height*</b> Allowed: 30' Proposed: approx. 58'***	<b>Residential Density OR Gross Building/Floor Area</b> Allowed: 24.2 du/ac Proposed: 18.75 du/ac
<b>Min. Lot Width (New Lots)</b> Required: No min. Proposed: >1,100'	<b>Upper Floor Area (Non-hillside residential)</b> Allowed: n/a Proposed: n/a
<b>Outdoor Area OR Landscape Area</b>	

Required: No standard Proposed: 1.29 acres of improved landscaping; 0.34 acres of improved hillside open space; 4.83 acres of unimproved open space	<b>Setbacks</b> Front:	<u>Required</u> n/a	<u>Existing</u> n/a	<u>Proposed</u> Min. 46' from easterly PL; approx. 80' to street ROW
<b>Grading</b> Total: 88,000 cy Cut: 71,000 cy Fill: 17,000 cy Export: 54,000 cy	Side(s):	n/a	n/a	Over 400' to southerly PL, 165' to northerly PL
	Ext. side:	n/a	n/a	
	Ped. side:	n/a	n/a	Min. 20'
	Bldg. sep	n/a	n/a	
Rear:	n/a	n/a	Min. 51'	

**Tree Removal**

Total (No./Species): 285; 256 oak, 21 bay, 8 other  
55 trees proposed for removal incl. 51 oak, 1 bay, 2 pine, 1 Australian blackwood  
Requirement: 11 trees in parking area; 26\*3 for oaks=78 new trees  
Proposed: 210 trees to be planted in and around development site; (55 Cathedral Live Oak—not a species recommended in the hillside guidelines Appendix B)

**Residential Parking (Affordable Housing)**

	<u>Required (Unit Type)</u>	<u>Total Required</u>
Studio	1/unit	36 Studios: 36 spaces
1 BR	1/unit	48 1 BR: 48 spaces
2 BR	1.5/unit	90 2 BR: 135 spaces
3 BR	1.5/unit	18 3 BR: 27 spaces
Guest	None required	None required
	<u>Required</u> Total: 246 spaces	<u>Proposed</u> Total: 213 spaces (171 resident & 42 guest spaces)

**Commercial Parking**

	<u>Required</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Market (5,574 sf)	1 space/250 sf: 22 spaces	12
Community Center (5,003 sf)	1/250 sf: 20 spaces	0

Total Residential Parking Required (affordable housing standards): 246 spaces      Provided: 213 spaces\*\*  
Total Commercial Parking Required: 42 spaces      Provided: 12 spaces\*\*  
Total Parking Deficit: 63 spaces

\* Hillside building height is measured from natural grade to top of roof/structure at all points of the structure. Standard building height is measured from an established exterior finished grade elevation to mid-point of a sloped roof.

\*\*Building height and parking waivers and concessions sought through Density Bonus provisions.

## **SUMMARY**

The subject project is being referred to the Board for review of site and design improvements of a mixed-use project with 192 residences, 225 parking spaces, a 5,574 square foot market, and a 5,003 square foot community center. The project is subject to review by the Design Review Board because it proposes a Major Physical Improvement (with 3 or more dwelling units) as defined in SRMC Section 14.25.040(A). The Board's recommendation would be forwarded to the Planning Commission. Staff requests feedback from the Board and provide a recommendation on compliance with all pertinent design criteria. Based on review of the applicable design criteria, staff asks the Board to specifically consider the following:

### *Architecture*

- Whether the design of the buildings has sufficient vertical and horizontal articulation 1) to avoid creating a "wall" effect; 2) to avoid large expanses of a wall in a single plane on the downhill elevations; 3) to create sufficient shadows; 4) to avoid extended horizontal lines.
- Whether the gable ends should face downhill.
- Whether the east-facing elevation of the market/community center building is an appropriate design.

### *Landscaping*

- Whether the use of trees not on the approved list in the Hillside Design Guidelines is appropriate.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Site Description & Setting:**

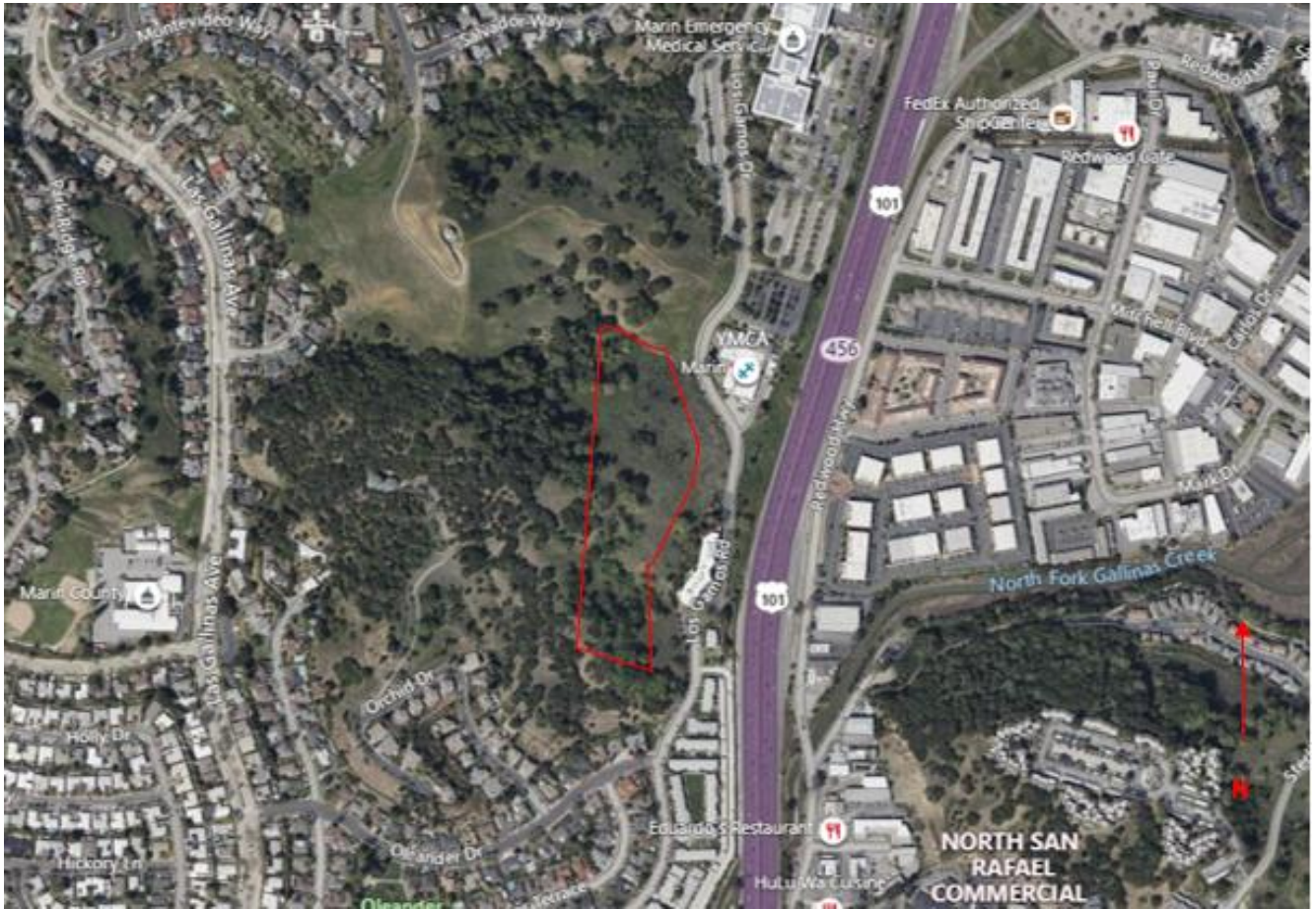
The 10.24 acre site is on a hillside, generally east-facing slope. The site is located below the ridgeline west of the site. The average slope of the property is 36.9%; it is 34.1% for the area to be developed.

According to the arborist's report there are 285 trees on the property, including 256 oaks of various species and 21 Bay Laurel. Other trees include Stone Pines, Toyon and Australian Blackwood.

The site is within the Mont Marin/San Rafael Park neighborhood. It is north of the Oleander Park neighborhood, west of Redwood Highway (State Highway 101), south of the homes along Montevideo and Salvador Ways, and east of the homes along Las Gallinas Avenue. There is an existing office building east and below the site at 1401 Los Gamos Drive. The Marin YMCA at 1500 Los Gamos Drive is northeast of the site.

The site does not have frontage on a public street. The Los Gamos Drive right-of-way currently terminates just east of the site. Access to the site is proposed via an easement running generally east-west from the site to the existing terminus of Los Gamos Drive. The applicant currently owns this easement. The easement would connect to the existing driveway serving the office at 1401 Los Gamos Drive. See Figures 1 and 2 below.

**Figure 1: Vicinity Map**



**Figure 2: Proposed Development**



According to the hydrology study for the project, there are two existing drainage paths that cross the site from west to east, and another that skirts the northerly edge of the development site.

### **History:**

A preliminary version of the project was submitted in 2019 for consideration. At a hearing on January 14, 2020, the Planning Commission reviewed the project and individual commissioners offered the following comments:

- It is time to re-evaluate zoning for this site;
- Intensity could be ok if properly designed and with thorough review of environmental impacts;
- Clustering is good idea;
- The project would contribute to the City's housing need;
- Would not support any more than 180 units;
- Would like to see the applicant address work force housing;
- Make market more visible;
- Continue reaching out to County for access swap;
- Consider reducing the amount of trails within the private open space areas;
- Need to define whether trails would be accessible to public;
- Specify how trails would be maintained;
- Address how trails and recreational equipment impact natural state;
- Recreational equipment should be located closer to buildings;
- Contribute as much green/low energy elements as possible;
- EV; Solar; roof orientation and design;
- Prepare more photo-simulations including views from street level to get a better sense of what the project would look like;
- Demonstrate compliance with Hillside design;
- Height might be okay if bulk and mass can be addressed and proforma supports; use hillside definition of height;
- Consider adding carports over parking areas to reduce the appearance of bulk and mass;
- Address views from open space;
- Landscaping design and materials needs to be appropriate;
- Environmental review needs to consider all impacts including traffic impacts of other projects.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The mixed-use development project proposes to change the Land Use designation of the site in the General Plan from Hillside Resource Residential to Neighborhood Commercial Mixed Use. The site is proposed to be rezoned from Planned District – Hillside Development Overlay District (PD-H) and Residential – Hillside Development Overlay District (R2a-H) to Planned Development District (PD). A Vesting Tentative Tract Map is proposed to combine the two existing parcels into one and to reconfigure the boundaries. The project is subject to Environmental and Design Review because the project proposes a Major Physical Improvement (with 3 or more dwelling units) as defined in SRMC 14.16.030.

**Use:** The project proposes multifamily residential use, a small grocery store, a recreational facility consisting of a “community center” and the leasing office, parking, landscaping, private and common open space, and physical improvements including a circular driveway and retaining walls necessary to support the project. The residential component includes 192 dwelling units. The apartments range in size from 496 square-foot studios to 1,153 square-foot three-bedroom units. There would be 36 studios, 48 one-bedroom units, 90 two-bedroom units, and 18 three-bedroom units. The two-bedroom units would be offered in three floor plans; the one and three-bedroom units would each have one floor plan. Each

unit would have a private balcony or deck ranging from 72 square feet for the studios to 143 square feet for the three-bedroom units. The applicant is proposing that ten percent of the units be affordable. There will be 225 parking spaces for the project including 171 covered spaces, 42 at-grade spaces and 12 covered spaces serving the recreational facility. The small grocery is at the ground floor of a two-story building that would also contain the recreational facility and leasing office. The grocery store would be 5,574 square-feet. The recreational facility totals 5,003 square-feet including the leasing office of just over 900 square feet. There is common recreation space on the roof of the recreation facility including a children's play area and a pergola providing a shaded seating area. There would be more common open space on a series of terraces south of the building that would contain the grocery store and recreational facility.

Access to the site would be via a private driveway from Los Gamos Drive. The driveway would connect to a large loop internal driveway. Buildings 1 and 2 would have 36 parking spaces for the 36 apartments in each building. Buildings 3, 4 and 5 would have 33 parking spaces for the 40 apartments in each building. Since the applicant has stated that at least 10 percent of the units will be "Below Market Rate", the project qualifies as an affordable housing project, and since the applicant has applied for a density bonus and the reduced parking standards of State Density Bonus Law (Government Code Section 65915(p)). A total of 225 parking spaces are provided where 288 are required. As part of the density bonus application, the applicant has requested that a parking reduction be granted as a concession.

The buildings range from 47 to 58 feet in height above the natural grade. The allowed maximum height is 30 feet per the 2040 General Plan, Figure 3-3. As an affordable housing project and as part of the density bonus application, the applicant has requested that the height increase be granted as a waiver. In no case may the City apply any development standard that will have the effect of physically precluding the construction of a qualifying density bonus development (Govt. Code section 65915(e)).

**Site Plan:** The property totals 10.24 acres, or 446,054 square feet. Approximately 5.07 acres of the site would be improved with buildings, roads and landscaping. Landscaping in the development area would total approximately 1.29 acres. Another 0.19 acres of the site would be improved with bio-treatment areas to manage stormwater before it enters the storm drain network. South of the development area is the proposed improved open space totaling approximately 0.34 acres. Approximately 4.83 acres of the site would remain as unimproved open space which would primarily be west and upslope from the buildings and south and surrounding the improved open space area. A total of 50 percent of the site would remain as natural open space as defined in the City's Hillside Design Guidelines. As shown on the building elevations (page A105 of the plans), the peaks of the proposed buildings are all below the ridgeline behind and west of the site.

There would be five apartment buildings. Buildings 1 and 2 would be three stories tall above semi-subterranean parking. Buildings 3, 4 and 5 would be four stories tall above the parking. The market and community center would be two stories tall above the parking level. At-grade, above and adjacent to the market/community center building would be a public plaza (the "Village Commons") of almost 10,000 square feet that includes seating, a water feature, a children's play area and other recreational amenities. South of the apartment buildings, the applicant proposes to improve the hillside with a recreational area while leaving most of the existing woodland intact. There would be a walking path, play structures and exercise stations in this area.

Landscaping would be planted around the proposed buildings, the surface parking areas and along the loop drive system. Other than the surface parking lots, all resident and customer parking would be in semi-subterranean, "tuck under" structures beneath each of the buildings. Trash would be stored in the parking garages. On collection days, bins would be moved to short-term at-grade pads adjacent to the buildings, then put away after collection. A storage enclosure would be provided for each apartment in half of the building level above the parking area.

Views of the site from neighboring properties are shown on pages A801 and A802. Some of the neighboring structures are also shown on A802.

**Architecture:** The buildings are designed in a Contemporary style. Walls would be a combination of stucco, lap siding and painted concrete. Trim would be painted wood. Colors are earth-tones in complementary shades. Large areas of each of the walls of the residential buildings incorporate windows, introducing considerable light into the units. The residential buildings use horizontal and vertical articulation to break up the mass. The rooflines also vary and utilize gables to increase visual interest. The roofs would be a combination of composition shingle on the pitched roofs and rolled roofing on the flat area. Solar panels are proposed for each of the buildings.

The smaller market/community room building is proposed in the same style with the same materials and finishes but includes large windows on the east side of the building. Each of the floors of the building steps back up the hill, creating small sitting and eating spaces on the east side of the façade. The stairway and elevator columns are also styled in a way that breaks up the mass. In addition, the rooftop pergola adds interest while providing some shade for people using the rooftop recreation area.

Perspective drawings of the proposed project are shown on pages L1.02, L1.05, L1.07, and L1.08. Building renderings are shown on pages A301 and A302. Building elevations are shown on pages A105, A202, A205, and A209. Building and site sections are shown on pages A106, A203, A206, and A208.

**Landscaping:** The existing hillside has numerous trees, primarily oaks, concentrated for the most part south of the proposed development area. Almost half of the site (4.83 acres) would remain undisturbed. Of the 285 existing trees identified on the site, 55 are proposed for removal including 51 oaks, 1 Bay Laurel, 2 Stone Pines and 1 Australian Blackwood. A total of 210 trees are proposed to be planted including 55 Cathedral Live Oaks, Coast Live Oaks, California Black Oaks, Scrub Oaks, Brisbane Box, Olive specimens and Crepe Myrtle. The plans include an extensive landscape palette (see plans L3.01-L3.03) that relies on a variety of low-water using trees, shrubs and groundcovers. The overall landscape plan is depicted on pages L1.03 and L1.04 of the plans.

**Lighting:** Light poles with cut-off fixtures would be used along the internal driveway system and the surface parking areas. Low bollards would be used near buildings and along pathways. Recessed lighting would be installed in building overhangs and on stair risers. Examples of the fixtures are shown on sheet L2.04 of the plans. A photometric study was submitted (pages PH-1 and PH-2 of the plans) and shows illumination along the driveway system and near the buildings.

**Grading/Drainage:** Grading would occur to create the 5.07-acre development site, the off-site access road (on the easement owned by the applicant) to Los Gamos Drive, and, to a more limited extent, in the 0.34 acre improved open space area south of the proposed buildings. Grading is necessary to create the access to the site, the internal driveway system, building pads, and the landscaped areas, walls and paths near the buildings. Grading in the 0.34 acre improved open space area is proposed to create a walking path and pads for play structures and exercise equipment. Grading is depicted on the engineering plans, sheets C1, C2, C3 and C4.

A total of 88,000 cubic yards of dirt is proposed to be moved: 71,000 cubic yards of cut and 17,000 cubic yards of fill. A total of 54,000 cubic yards of dirt is proposed to be removed from the site. It is estimated by the City's Public Works Department that this would require 2,500 to 3,500 truck trips.

Several retaining walls are proposed. In addition to the retaining wall that forms the upslope wall of each building, additional retaining walls are located upslope from Buildings 3, 4 and 5. One retaining wall with a maximum height of eight feet is proposed behind Building 3. Three walls, each with a maximum height of eight feet, are proposed behind Building 4. Two retaining walls, each with a maximum height of eight feet, are proposed behind Building 5. The site sections shown on page A106 generally depict the retaining

walls within and behind the buildings. Walls behind the buildings are unlikely to be seen from offsite since the walls are shorter than the buildings.

Other retaining walls are located near the buildings to support landscape planters and pedestrian paths. A number of retaining walls are proposed to support the internal driveway system. In two locations, one on the north curve and one on the south curve, these walls would be over eight feet tall. Parallel walls are proposed to support the downhill side of the loop driveway north and east of Building 1. This becomes a single wall for most of the east side of Building 1 and east of the proposed market/community center building. A single retaining wall is proposed on the downhill side of the loop driveway east of Building 2. Retaining walls are also proposed on both the north and south sides of the entry driveway. These walls have a maximum height of approximately 5 feet.

All retaining walls other than those behind the buildings would be concrete block construction with a stucco finish. Vines would trail over the top of the walls and trees and shrubs would be planted below them to create an effective screen. The walls behind Buildings 3, 4 and 5 would be "soil nail walls", vertical retaining walls with large steel rods inserted deep into the hillside behind the wall. These walls would have a slurry concrete finish. These would also be screened by landscaping in areas where the retaining wall system extends beyond the walls of the buildings.

**Other (such as Signage, Proposed Regulations, Design Guidelines, etc.):** Because the project is a Multi-family Residential Development on an average slope greater than 25 percent, it is subject to the Hillside Design Guidelines ("HDG"). It is also subject to the development standards listed in the 2040 General Plan for Neighborhood Commercial Mixed Use projects. In addition, since the property is proposed to be rezoned to Planned Development, the project is required to have a minimum lot area of 2.5 acres. The site is 10.24 acres so the project complies with this standard. The General Plan requires that lots larger than five acres be within a Planned Development zone, which the applicant has proposed. The General Plan establishes a residential density of 8.7 to 24.2 dwelling units per acre. The proposed density is 18.75 dwelling units per acre. The General Plan has a 30 foot height limit for the site and a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.01 for the commercial component of the project since the slope exceeds 15 percent. The commercial component meets the FAR but the proposed maximum height of 58 feet exceeds the allowed height. Since 10 percent of the units are proposed to be affordable, the project qualifies as an affordable housing project and the applicant has applied for a density bonus with a waiver of the height limits as provided under the State Density Bonus law as described previously.

A project identification sign is proposed on the face of the lowest retaining wall at the top of the entry driveway. A mural is also proposed on the retaining wall at the lower level of the recreation area south of the market. Details of the sign and mural, such as size, lettering, and lighting have not been provided. The sign and mural are subject to a sign permit. Since the project would be new construction in a PD zone, the project must prepare a sign program which would be reviewed by the Design Review Board for a recommendation to the Planning Commission (Mun. Code Sections 14.19.043 and .046). This would be required as a condition of approval.

All other development criteria for the site are found in the HDG. These criteria are discussed in detail below.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **General Plan 2040 Consistency:**

The property is proposed to be located within the Neighborhood Commercial Mixed Use (NCMU) Land Use Designation. The following General Plan policies are relevant to the project site:



Land Use Policy LU-1.8 (Residential Density): The NCMU allows residential densities from 8.7 to 24.2 dwelling units per acre. The proposed density is 18.75 dwelling units per acre, so the project is consistent with the policy.

Land Use Policy LU-1.9 (Clustering): Clustering is recommended to “conserve environmentally sensitive or hazardous portions of a site....” The project utilizes clustering to keep the development area compact, preserving the majority of the significant trees on the southern portion of the site. The project is consistent with the policy.

Land Use Policy LU-1.10 (Intensity of Non-Residential Development): A maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.01 is allowed for properties with a slope greater than 15 percent. The commercial component of the project has an FAR of 0.01 so the project is consistent with the policy.

Land Use Policy LU-1.17 (Building Heights): The maximum allowed building height is 30 feet for the site. The proposed maximum building height is 58 feet. Since the applicant has applied for a density bonus, the applicant has requested that the height increase be granted as a waiver as provided under the State Density Bonus law as described previously.

Community Design and Preservation Policy CDP-1.3 (Hillside Protection): The Policy seeks to protect the visual integrity and character of the hillsides by controlling development through the Hillside Design Guidelines (HDG). The project is consistent with several hillside design standards, including clustering to minimize grading and to avoid the appearance of larger, more massive structures, and the retention of the majority of significant trees on the property. The buildings utilize vertical and horizontal stepbacks which are encouraged. The top floor of the residential buildings are pushed back from the lower floors, but the buildings still present tall downhill facing elevations in a vertical plane. Gable ends face downhill, which is discouraged, rather than sloping the roofs with the hillside. The market/community center building has a two-story east facing wall consisting mostly of large windows. The floors of this building are also stepped-back up the hill, creating vertical articulation and providing outdoor seating space on the east façade. The use of large windows may be in response to the comment from the Planning Commission during the preliminary review hearing that the market should be given greater visibility. The project has an extensive landscape palette using low water using trees, shrubs and groundcovers. Some of the trees, including Brisbane Box, Cathedral Live Oak, and California Black Oak, are not on the list of approved trees in Appendix B of the HDG. The applicant has suggested that the Cathedral Live Oak is a more appropriate street tree as it generally takes a more vertical form rather than the spreading form of the Coast Live Oak found in the list. Brisbane Box, although not on the list of approved trees, is very commonly used in California landscaping schemes. Staff is seeking Board input on these choices:

- Whether the design of the buildings has sufficient vertical and horizontal articulation 1) to avoid creating a “wall”effect; 2) to avoid large expanses of a wall in a single plane on the downhill elevations; 3) to create sufficient shadows; 4) to avoid extended horizontal lines..
- Whether the gable ends should face downhill.
- Whether the use of trees not on the approved list in the HDG is appropriate.

More detailed discussion of consistency with the HDG is below in that section.

### **Zoning Ordinance Consistency:**

The proposed land use is consistent with the proposed Neighborhood Commercial Mixed Use (NCMU) designation in the Land Use Element of the General Plan and the proposed Planned Development (PD) zoning. As noted in the Property Facts and Project Description, the project complies with the allowed residential density, commercial FAR, and required lot size. The project would not comply with the following standards:

*Building Height (Land Use Policy LU-1.17)*

Buildings up to 58 feet tall are proposed where the Policy allows a maximum height of 30 feet. Although this is a policy from the Land Use Element of the General Plan, there is no comparable standard in the proposed PD zone. The applicant is requesting a waiver pursuant to State Density bonus law.

*Resident and Customer Parking (Mun. Code Sec. 14.18.040)*

A total of 171 covered parking spaces and 42 guest parking spaces are proposed where 246 are required, and 12 customer spaces serving the market/community center building are provided where 42 are required. The applicant is requesting a concession from the standard provided for under State Density Bonus law.

**San Rafael Hillside Design Guidelines:**

The Hillside Design Guidelines serve as a guide for evaluating development on hillside properties. The project is a mixed-use development with residential and commercial components. The project complies with the following criteria:

- Grading should be kept to a minimum and performed in a way that respects significant natural features and visually blends with adjacent properties.
- Be compatible with the natural features, building location and existing open spaces of neighboring properties.
- Respect existing views, privacy, access to light and safety of neighboring properties.
- Avoid the unstable or hazardous portions of the site.
- Preserve “existing natural features” including:
  - Mature trees
  - Significant or unique vegetation grouping(s) which contributes to the character of the site
  - Topography
  - Drainage.
- When significant trees must be removed, replanting with approved species is recommended.
- Circulation and parking should be located and landscaped to minimize views from the valley floor, roads and neighboring properties.
- Parking should be located beneath buildings.
- Avoid building facades that are designed with a ground level wall of repetitive garage doors.
- Avoid long continuous building masses that create a “wall” effect and inhibit views.
- Facades should be articulated to produce shadows.
- Rooflines should avoid extended horizontal lines.
- Group usable open space should be provided and include a children’s play area of at least 400 square feet.
- Each unit should have private usable open space. Ground level spaces should have a minimum dimension of 12 feet and decks above-ground should have a minimum dimension of 8 feet.
- Color selection should show evidence of coordination with predominant colors and values of the surrounding landscape.
- Site lighting should minimize intrusion into adjacent properties, roadways, the hillside silhouette and the night sky.

The project utilizes clustered, compact development to minimize grading. Grading is generally confined to the northerly portion of the site which preserves the majority (230 of 285) of the existing trees and avoids one of the drainage paths crossing the site. A variety of low water using trees are proposed, though some (Brisbane Box, Cathedral Live Oak, California Black Oak) are not on the list of approved trees in Appendix B of the HDG. The Cathedral Live Oak is a tall spreading tree which seems like a good choice as a “street tree” alongside the driveway system. California Black Oaks are native to the state and widely distributed. Brisbane Box is a tall tree native to Australia that is commonly used in California landscaping.

Although the site is visible from State Highway 101 and properties to the east, development is located below the ridgeline behind the site. Keeping the developed portion of the project to the north side of the property helps preserve the existing views and privacy of the residential areas south of the site. The internal driveway system and parking are designed to be screened by the proposed buildings and landscaping. The project is divided into six buildings with each of the building pads at a different elevation. The distribution of massing into six separate buildings helps the project better conform to the hillside than if the project used fewer, more massive buildings.

The buildings utilize horizontal and some vertical articulation to reduce the apparent building mass. Large windows introduce natural light and provide views to the east. There are both vertical and horizontal stepbacks in the building form as are encouraged by the HDG. The design includes gable ends on downhill elevations which are discouraged.

The project utilizes natural colors in exterior finishes for walls and roofing materials. Finishes are varied and include stucco and siding. The market/community center building has a two-story, east-facing wall primarily composed of large windows, which the HDG discourages. This could be mitigated by the introduction of the outdoor seating areas at each of the levels of the building on the east façade, and the proposed trees east of the building that would provide a substantial screen. This may also be a design choice influenced by the request from the Planning Commission to make the market more visible. In addition, large windows are reasonable design choices for the intended use as a market and community center, providing the interior with considerable natural light and views to the east.

The HDG discourages the use of retaining walls taller than 4 feet upslope from structures, and 3 feet downslope. As noted previously, in some cases walls would be up to 8 feet tall behind buildings, up to 8 feet tall upslope from the driveway, and up to 5 feet tall below roadways. The tallest portions of the walls behind the buildings are completely screened by the buildings. Walls elsewhere, including the walls up to 16 feet high between the market building and residential Building 2, are proposed to be screened by trees and shrubs below the walls and landscaping trailing over the top of the walls.

Each proposed dwelling unit would have a private balcony or patio of 72 to 143 square feet with a minimum dimension of 8 feet. Group useable open space would include a large plaza with seating and large-scale chess board above the market. A children's play area totaling approximately 610 square feet with more seating would also be above the market. The recreational area above the market, including the children's play area, totals over 4,000 square feet. South of the market, there would be three terraced outdoor areas, with a lawn at the upper level, a covered seating area with a water feature on the middle level, and more seating around a fire ring at the lower level. Each of the terraces can be accessed by stairs. This recreational area is roughly the same size as the area above the market. There would also be a large (approximately 3,000 square foot) children's play area with a variety of play structures in the "South Park" area of the hillside south of the apartment buildings. This area would also include a circuitous path, seating areas and considerable undisturbed hillside. This area would be accessed via a metal bridge over the natural drainage gully that bisects the site from west to east.

Virtually all of the proposed parking is located beneath each of the buildings. Just 42 of the 225 parking spaces are at-grade and these are located on the driveway that is bordered to the east and west by the proposed buildings. None of these parking spaces would be visible from surrounding properties.

Light poles with cut-off fixtures would be used along the internal driveway system and the surface parking areas. Low bollards would be used near buildings and along pathways. Lighting is designed to minimize spillover onto neighboring properties.

In summary, the project appears to meet the overall intent of the Hillside Design Guidelines with certain exceptions.

**Staff seeks the Board’s guidance regarding the following:**

- Building Design
  - Whether the design of the buildings has sufficient vertical and horizontal articulation 1) to avoid creating a “wall” effect; 2) to avoid large expanses of a wall in a single plane on the downhill elevations; 3) to create sufficient shadows; 4) to avoid extended horizontal lines.
  - Whether the gable ends should face downhill.
- Landscape Design
  - Whether the use of trees not on the approved list in the HDG is appropriate.

**NEIGHBORHOOD CORRESPONDENCE**

Pursuant to the noticing requirements found in SRMC Section 14.29, notice of the Design Review Board hearing was provided by mail on September XX, 2021, to the applicant and property owner; the Mont Marin/San Rafael Park Neighborhood Association, all property owners, occupants and tenants within a radius of 300 feet of the property boundaries; the Marin Sanitary Service; Pacific Gas & Electric Company; Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District; and various City departments including the Department of Public Works. Notice was posted on the property in the manner required on September 17, 2021. Notice was also published in the newspaper on September 18, 2021.

**CONCLUSION**

The project proposes additional housing on a challenging site. The project generally meets the intent of the Hillside Design Guidelines in that it minimizes grading and maximizes the preservation of the existing landscape and topography. Separating but clustering the buildings helps the project conform to the hillside while minimizing the building footprint. The tradeoff is that the buildings are rather tall and boxy. The proposed landscaping scheme, although it includes trees not on the approved list, appears reasonable; the use of replacement oaks is especially welcome. Staff seeks the Board’s guidance.

**EXHIBITS**

1. Project Plans, dated 2/22/21 and amended on 5/19/21 available online:
  - Part I: [https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/sanrafaelca/uploads/2021/10/Exhibit-1\\_Los-Gamos-Residential-Plan-Set-Reduced\\_Part1.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/sanrafaelca/uploads/2021/10/Exhibit-1_Los-Gamos-Residential-Plan-Set-Reduced_Part1.pdf)
  - Part II: [https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/sanrafaelca/uploads/2021/10/Exhibit-1\\_Los-Gamos-Residential-Plan-Set-Reduced\\_Part2.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/sanrafaelca/uploads/2021/10/Exhibit-1_Los-Gamos-Residential-Plan-Set-Reduced_Part2.pdf)
  - Part III: [https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/sanrafaelca/uploads/2021/10/Exhibit-1\\_Los-Gamos-Residential-Plan-Set-Reduced\\_Part3.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/sanrafaelca/uploads/2021/10/Exhibit-1_Los-Gamos-Residential-Plan-Set-Reduced_Part3.pdf)

For more project information, visit the project website:  
[https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/los\\_gamos\\_apartments/](https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/los_gamos_apartments/)

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