

April 18, 2022

Mayor Kate Colin and City Council members

City of San Rafael

1400 Fifth Ave. Room 203

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CITY COUNCIL Meeting for Monday, April 18, 2022 - Agenda Item 6.a.: Streamlined Review for Certain Residential Projects (Formerly Design Review Advisory Committee, DRAC)

Honorable Kate Colin and City Council members:

We recommend the following changes be made to the proposed “streamlined review”:

1. Properties zoned medium density (MR) or high density (HR) residential would be subject to “streamlined review” if 4 units or less. All other properties would be subject to “streamlined review” if 10 units or less.

Ten (10) units is an arbitrary number to determine which projects receive the “streamlined” review or review by the full board. In the Downtown District with high-rise mixed use properties, 10 units is a small project. However, in our residential neighborhoods, 10 units is a large project and should be reviewed by the full Design Review Board (DRB).

This proposed “streamlined” process would eliminate review by the full DRB from all projects in our residential neighborhoods, except for very few exceptions. Whereas, the Downtown would receive review by the full board for all but the smallest of projects. We want equitable opportunity for well designed projects in our residential neighborhoods and not just the Downtown. We feel using the zoning designation would be a better way to delineate the different review processes and considers the relative size of a project compared to existing development in a neighborhood/district rather than using an arbitrary number of 10 units for all neighborhoods.

2. There needs to be a way for a member of the Public to request that a project go to the full Design Review Board for review, instead of the “streamlined review.”

A member of the public can currently request an application be referred to the Design Review Board for minor physical improvements and the same public process should be available on applications for major physical improvements, which are the improvements being addressed by this proposal.

3. All projects subject to Chapter 14.12 Hillside Development Overlay District should be reviewed by the full Design Review Board and NOT just those with Exceptions, per SRMC 14.12.040.

The City of San Rafael went thru a comprehensive process to develop and adopt the “award winning” Hillside Design Guidelines which creates design standards on our hillsides to be compatible and blend-

in with the surrounding hillside, to preserve and protect our natural features and significant trees, avoid landslide risks on steep hillsides, and avoid development on the ridgeline to preserve the views of our hills for all to enjoy. There are around 30 design elements that need to be considered when reviewing hillside development and who is better able to review “design elements” than the Design Review Board. All projects subject to our Hillside Design Guidelines and development standards should be reviewed by the full Design Review Board at a regular meeting in order to continue San Rafael’s commitment to the protection of our hillsides and adherence to excellent design on some of our most challenging sites. This cannot be accomplished with 2 design review board members sitting in on a Planning Commission Meeting. I urge you to maintain the full 5-member Design Review Board for ALL hillside projects and continue to comply with the following General Plan program:

General Plan Program CDP-1.3A: Hillside Residential Design Guidelines. Continue to implement hillside residential design guidelines through the design review process, as well as larger lot size requirements for hillside areas where there are access limitations or natural hazards. Update the design guidelines as needed.

4. While the report states that projects with Hillside Exceptions shall not be eligible for streamlined review, staff has not specified this in the proposed changes to SRMC 14.25.070.

5. Here are recommended changes to staff proposed SRMC 14.25.070-2:

Streamlined Review of Certain Residential projects, as established by city council resolution under a pilot program known as the “Streamlined Review for Certain Residential Projects”:

- a. *The following residential projects shall be eligible for a “streamlined review” process.*
 - *Residential projects zoned medium density (MR) or high density (HD) residential with 4 units or less.*
 - *All other residential projects with 10 units or less.*

- b. *The following residential projects shall NOT be subject to a “streamlined review”:*
 - *Projects subject to Minor environmental Design Review*
 - *All projects subject to Chapter 14.12 Hillside Development Overlay, including projects with Exceptions, per SRMC 14.12.040.*
 - *Any residential structure located within one hundred (100) vertical feet of a ridgeline.*
 - *Subdivisions located on properties with an average slope of twenty-five percent (25%) or greater, or with a general plan land use designation of hillside residential or hillside resource residential.*

Thank you for your serious consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Victoria DeWitt
Linda Lieberman
Tom Heinz
Elizabeth Ryan
Steve Thomson
Jasmin Thomson

Peter Marks
Leslie Marks
Kristen Vyas
Amy Likover
Joe Likover
Susan Bradford

Tim Bowen
Anne Bowen
Ben Negrete
Vicki Fernandez