

SAN RAFAEL CHAMBER

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May 17, 2022

Dear Chair Rege and Board Members:

On behalf of the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce which represents nearly 625 Marin County employers with over 26,000 employees across 25 industry sectors, I write to express our support for the updated plans and design of the Northgate Town Square redevelopment application.

The San Rafael Chamber strongly believes that the Northgate project represents a rare opportunity to create substantial new housing opportunities for our local workforce. Marin employers are the backbone of our local economy. Due to our exorbitantly high cost of living, they are being severely constrained in their ability to grow and plan for the future. These local employers face serious difficulties in recruiting and retaining employees, which is directly related to home prices and rents that are out of reach for many in the workforce. The fact is that we desperately need more housing supply.

As it relates to the project design of Northgate, the Merlone Geier team has responded to the feedback it received from the Design Review Board, Planning Commission, and community earlier in the application process. These represent significant changes to the proposal which demonstrate the developer's commitment to community engagement in the following ways:

- The proposed Town Square amenity is now part of the initial phase and has been significantly expanded in size to create a true destination for the local community.
- For-sale townhomes have been incorporated into the proposal, which is in direct response to feedback asking for homeownership opportunities.
- Pedestrian and bicycle connections have been integrated throughout the site.
- Meaningful sustainability features have been incorporated, including recycled water for landscaping and all-electric residential buildings.

The Northgate Town Square redevelopment is the right location for the proposed density and building heights. The reality is that the State of California is demanding that all cities create a considerable amount of new housing in the next housing cycle. In San Rafael, we are fortunate to have an underutilized site like Northgate Mall that can accommodate a sizable portion of our assigned housing units of 3,220 in the next eight years.

Under current State housing laws, some development projects are doing the bare minimum to obtain project approvals. With the Northgate application, Merlone Geier is voluntarily integrating a wide array of community benefits in addition to the housing. This is an opportunity that needs to be seized.

The support of the Design Review Board is an important step in making sure the project is a success as it proceeds through the approval process. The San Rafael Chamber encourages you to take this important step for the benefit of our entire City.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Joanne Webster, President and CEO