



**REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION**

SUBJECT: **Northgate Town Square Project.** Study Session to solicit focused feedback on the proposed Northgate Town Square Project which includes requests for a Rezone to the Planned Development (PD) zone, a Use Permit, an Environmental and Design Review Permit, a Tentative Map, a Development Agreement, State Density Bonus, and a Master Sign Program to allow a comprehensive redevelopment of the existing mall at 5800 Northgate Drive into a phased mixed-use development with approximately 225,000 square feet of retail and 1,320 residential units with an option up to 1,422 residential units on the 44.76-acre site. APNs: 175-060-12, -40, -59, -61, -66 & -67; General Commercial (GC) District; MerloneGeier Partners, owner/applicant.

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is being prepared for this project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

PURPOSE OF STUDY SESSION

The purpose of the November 29th Planning Commission study session is to provide an opportunity for early public and Planning Commission feedback on specific land use and policy questions associated with the Northgate Town Square project as revised by the applicant in response to the prior Planning Commission/Design Review Board Study Session. This study session is not intended to result in any decisions regarding the project merits or official action on the project, but rather will allow the public and Commission to provide preliminary feedback on specific elements of the project. The study session is focused on specific elements of the current proposal in order to allow the Planning Commission to give feedback to the applicant to help refine the project. The project will be presented to the Planning Commission at a future noticed public hearing when the project in its entirety and the EIR are brought forward for action, as a recommendation to the City Council. At that time, the Commission and members of the public will have the opportunity to review the full packet of technical analyses and recommendations to inform their feedback and action. For the purpose of this study session, the focus will be on the following four key major topics, each of which is discussed in detail under *Discussion Items*, below:

1. **Size and Location of the Town Square Open Space and Amenities:** Community members continue to express concern about the size of the Town Square. Staff is looking for Planning Commission input regarding the size of the Town Square and the applicant’s representation regarding opportunities for flexible use of the parking area.
2. **Mix of Housing Types:** Staff seeks Planning Commission concurrence that the proposed mix of housing units meets the intent of LU-3.3.

3. **Location and Phasing of Affordable Units:** Staff seeks feedback from the Planning Commission regarding the affordable housing plan and confirmation that the applicant has adequately addressed the previously expressed Planning Commission concerns.
4. **Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections:** Staff seeks Planning Commission feedback on the changes made by the applicant and guidance regarding the additional connections from the north and west sides of the site.

PROJECT HISTORY

The 44.76-acre project site is located in the North San Rafael Commercial Center, and is comprised of five parcels, including three individual department store lots.

The Mall was originally developed in the 1960's. The mall was constructed with building heights that exceed the 36-foot height limit (Macy's-57', Kohl's-43' and Restoration Hardware-56') and included an open-air design with walkways between anchor buildings. A Master Use Permit and Design approvals were granted in 1986 which included the enclosure of the walkways and building additions that resulted in the current gross building area.

In the 1990's, the City approved amendments to the project entitlements which allowed conversion of approximately 45,000 square feet of retail space to a 2,600 seat, 15-screen theater within a portion of the existing Mall. The Mall has since been through a number of renovation projects including but not limited to the following:

- Demolition of the former buildings.
- Creation a new outdoor plaza public gathering space.
- Construction of a 2,300 linear foot portion of the North San Rafael Promenade along the property frontage.
- Development of architectural guidelines and sign program for future re-tenanting of mall tenants.
- Reduction in parking standards from 4 spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross building area to 3.8 spaces per 1,000 square feet for the regional shopping center.

In addition, amendments to the original project approval included a total of 18,634 square feet of floor area that were never constructed. The current inventory of the existing and entitled buildings on the site is composed of:

Table 1 – Inventory of Existing and Entitled Mall Floor Area

Building	Floor Area (square feet)
Restoration Hardware	134,976
Kohl's Department Store	81,340
Macy's	254,015
Mall Gross Leasable Multi-Tenant Building Areas	243,881
Rite-Aid Drug Store & Drive-Through	17,340
Home Goods pad retail building	29,538
Entitled and unbuilt Future Pad Building	18,634
Total (Entitled)	779,724
Total (Existing/Built)	761,090

MerloneGeier acquired the project site in 2017 and filed an application for the redevelopment of the Mall in March 2021, with a revised project in June 2021. The March and June submittals were very similar, with minor changes to the unit count and more detailed plans.

The June 2021 application proposed a substantial renovation of the existing Northgate Mall site that would occur in two phases over a 20-year period as described below. Note that the following is the original proposed project that has been revised as of March 2022.

Phase I:

- Demolition of approximately 311,946 square feet of exiting retail space.
- Construction of 72,200 square feet of new retail space.
- Construction of 911 residential units with construction of affordable housing on Residential Parcel 1 consisting of 96 units.
- Renovation of a portion of the existing Mall structure west of Macys with a Major 2 retail store.
- Retention of the existing Macy's and existing Kohl's and adjacent small shops and restaurants.
- Retention of the existing parking garage and landscaping and parking in the north area (north of Macy's).
- Addition of a 26,000 square foot park in the vicinity of the Kohl's building, and preservation of a portion of the Mall pavilion as a focal point.
- Addition of new restaurant pads on the north end of the site adjacent to Las Gallinas Avenue.

Phase II includes

- Demolition of the Macy's, Kohl's and "Shops 1" buildings.
- Construction of 61,300 square feet of new retail including replacement of anchor, shops, and stand-alone restaurant pads.
- Construction of 409 housing units.
- Construction of additional retail pads along Las Gallinas Avenue.
- Addition of a 35,000 square foot Town Square; eliminate park in front of Kohl's.

PROJECT ENTITLEMENTS

The applicant is requesting the following entitlements:

- Zoning Amendments – A Zoning Map and Zoning Text Amendment to the Planned Development (PD) Overlay Zone that outlines allowable land uses, development standards, and a development plan for the proposed project.
- Development Agreement – A Development Agreement to set forth development terms between the applicant and the City.
- Vesting Tentative Map – A Vesting Tentative map to divide the property into 18 parcels.
- Use Permit - a Master Use Permit for a mix of uses and the phasing plan.
- Environmental and Design Review Permit – An Environmental and Design Review Permit to approve the overall site plan, architecture, landscaping, building design and other site improvements for the project.
- Master Sign Program – A Sign Program to specify the property name, logo, taglines, fonts, colors, and sign design used on all freestanding and building attached signs.
- Density Bonus -- An incentive/concession/waiver to increase the height limit for project buildings across the property to 78 feet, including elevator penthouses and other projections of up to 12 feet above the 78-foot height limit. The applicant has indicated that it is making this request for an incentive/concession/waiver, in part, to enable current plans to include 85 lower-density townhomes along the southern edge of the Property. Previous plans included multi-family

residential apartments of moderate height in this location. In response to City requests that the project include a buffer next to existing residential uses, the project applicant replaced apartments with townhomes to reduce heights significantly in this area.

JOINT PLANNING COMMISSION AND DESIGN REVIEW BOARD STUDY SESSION

On September 14, 2021, the Planning Commission (PC) and the Design Review Board (DRB) held a joint study session to provide early feedback on the proposed redevelopment. Feedback from both the Planning Commission and Design Review Board is outlined below and was the basis for applicant revisions which were submitted on March 14, 2022.

Planning Commission-Policy Items

The Planning Commission provided the following policy related comments:

- A. The PC commented that the project should incorporate a viable and community-oriented Town Square in Phase I of development. The Town Square should be a keystone for the Terra Linda community with visible amenities, gathering places and easy accessibility by pedestrians and cyclists.
- B. The PC expressed an interest in seeing a mix of for sale and rental housing. The PC also expressed support for the densities proposed (one Commissioner suggested maximum density allowed).
- C. The PC expressed support for the location of the affordable housing parcel, provided the remainder of the affordable housing be demonstrably dispersed throughout the project.
- D. Include internal and external bicycle and pedestrian connections.
- E. Incorporate strong sustainability elements. Provide plan details demonstrating a high level of sustainable elements for energy and water efficiency, and low impact development standards.
- F. Consider a reduction in parking.

Design Review Board – Design Related Items

The DRB made the following design-related comments:

- A. Concurred with PC comments on the Town Square.
- B. Encouraged the applicant to find a solution that reduced the amount of parking surrounding the park.
- C. Ensure that the architectural design is cohesive and unifying. Avoid long blank walls, consider ground floor pedestrian passageways, and ensure active, pedestrian-oriented ground-floor frontages.
- D. All entryways should have a strong “sense of arrival” with gateway features that emphasize pedestrian and bicycle connections and promote a distinct sense of place.
- E. Agreed with the Planning Commission comments regarding sustainability and including the use of low impact development standards.
- F. The North San Rafael Promenade should extend directly into and through the site.

REVISED PROJECT

In response to the comments received at the 2021 joint study session, the applicant submitted modified plans and an updated project description on March 14, 2022. Figures I and II illustrate the revised proposed project, with letters in the figures corresponding to the descriptions below. The application has not been deemed complete. A full set of the revised plans can be viewed on the City Major Project webpage: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square/>.

Figure I – Revised 2025 Proposed Site Plan



A. Town Square. The original plan included a 35,000 square-foot Town Square that would be constructed as part of Phase II. The applicants have increased the size of the proposed Town Square by 15,000 square feet. The Town Square is now 50,000 square feet and is proposed to be constructed in Phase I. This Town Square would serve as a focal point and as a community gathering area. **Labeled A in Phase I.** The Town Square would be owned and maintained by MerloneGeier and would include the following amenities:

- Anchored by a repurposed pavilion structure, similar to the 2021 plans.
- Community gathering area for outdoor concerts and movies.
- Fenced dog park.
- Children’s nature playground.
- Flex space for larger special events with raisable bollards.
- Library space and a community room that will face onto the Town Square.
- Textured, colored paving and traffic calming in driveways surrounding the Town Square

Phase I also includes a 26,000 square foot open space area in front of Kohl's that will be eliminated in Phase II.

Figure 2 – Detail of Town Square



Figure 3 - Rendering of Town Square



B. Mix of Unit Types. The original plan proposed construction of 911 rental units located within four parcels as part of Phase I and 409 additional units within two parcels as part of Phase II. In response to Planning Commission feedback, the revised plans now include 85 three-story, for-sale townhomes along the southern portion of the project site (Residential Parcel 2). This parcel previously included 309 five story multi-family units. A total of 124 of those units are now proposed to be combined with Residential Parcels 3 and 4 along Los Ranchitos/Las Gallinas Avenue. As a result, the height of buildings on Residential Parcel 2 has been decreased by 2 stories; the height of the residential building on Residential Parcel 3 has increased by one story; and the height of the residential building on Residential Parcel 4 has increased by two stories. The project includes a request for a density bonus, including a concession, incentive and/or waiver for building height, which will be reviewed under State Density Bonus Law as part of the overall project analysis. ***Labeled B-1 in the 2025 Plans and B-2 in the 2040 Plans.***

Both the original plan and the current plan propose 1,320 dwelling units which translates to an overall density of 29.5 units per acre, consistent with the General Plan density of 43 dwelling units per acre. The number of units in Phase I decreased from 911 to 907, and the number of units in Phase II increased from 409 to 413. The change to townhomes on Residential Parcel 2 resulted in a need to modify the total units proposed for each phase of the project; however, the total number of proposed units and the total proposed density at project buildout remains unchanged. The applicant proposes that the project also include an option for the applicant, in its discretion, to include up to an additional 102 multi-family residential units for a total of 1,442 dwelling units at a density of 31.7 dwelling units per acre. Table 2 below summarizes the proposed number and mix of housing units:

Table 2 - Summary of Proposed Housing

Type of Housing	Number of Units	Number of Bedrooms	Size	Height
Phase I				
Residential Parcel 1 - Affordable Rental Units	96	Studio – 24 units 1 bd – 24 2bd – 24 3bd - 24	430-995 sf	Four-story over podium 60 ft
Residential Parcel 2 - Townhome Ownership Units	85	2 bd – 42 3 bd – 36 4 bd – 7	2,130-2,620 sf	Three-story 35 ft
Residential Parcel 3 – Rental Units	280	Studio – 63 1 bd – 164 2 bd - 53	620-1,655 sf	Six-story 68 ft
Residential Parcel 4 – Rental Units	446	Studio – 25 1 bd – 305 2 bd – 116	620-1,970 sf	Seven-story 78 ft
Subtotal Phase I	907			
Phase II				
Residential Parcel 5*- Rental Units	266	Studio – 50 1 bd – 157 2 bd – 59	620 – 1,150 sf	Five-story 60 ft
Residential Parcel 6*- Apartments	147	Studio – 18 1 bd – 112 2 bd – 17	620 – 1,150 sf	Five-story 60 ft
*42 Affordable units dispersed throughout.				
Subtotal Phase II	413			
Total for Project**	1,320			
Total Affordable Units	138			
**Applicant is requesting a maximum of 1,422 units as part of the entitlements to provide for future flexibility				

Figure 4 – Revised 2040 Proposed Site Plan



C. Affordable Housing. The original plan proposed 96 affordable housing units contained within a 1.91-acre parcel as part of Phase I. The PC expressed support for this proposal, provided that the additional affordable units would be dispersed throughout the development. Since that time, EAH Housing has joined the applicant team. The applicant proposes to donate the site to EAH who will develop the site in Phase I with affordable housing at varying income levels and will provide on-site support services. **Labeled C in Phase I.**

Phase II will include an additional 42 affordable units distributed throughout the market rate housing parcels. Affordable units in Phase II were not specified in the original plans.

D. Site Connectivity. The original plans submitted in 2021 did not include a clear proposal for multimodal pathways that connected the external pathways to the interior of the site. In response to PC comments, the applicant is now proposing multimodal pathways that have been integrated throughout the interior of the site. **Labeled E in Phase I.** (see Figure 5 below).

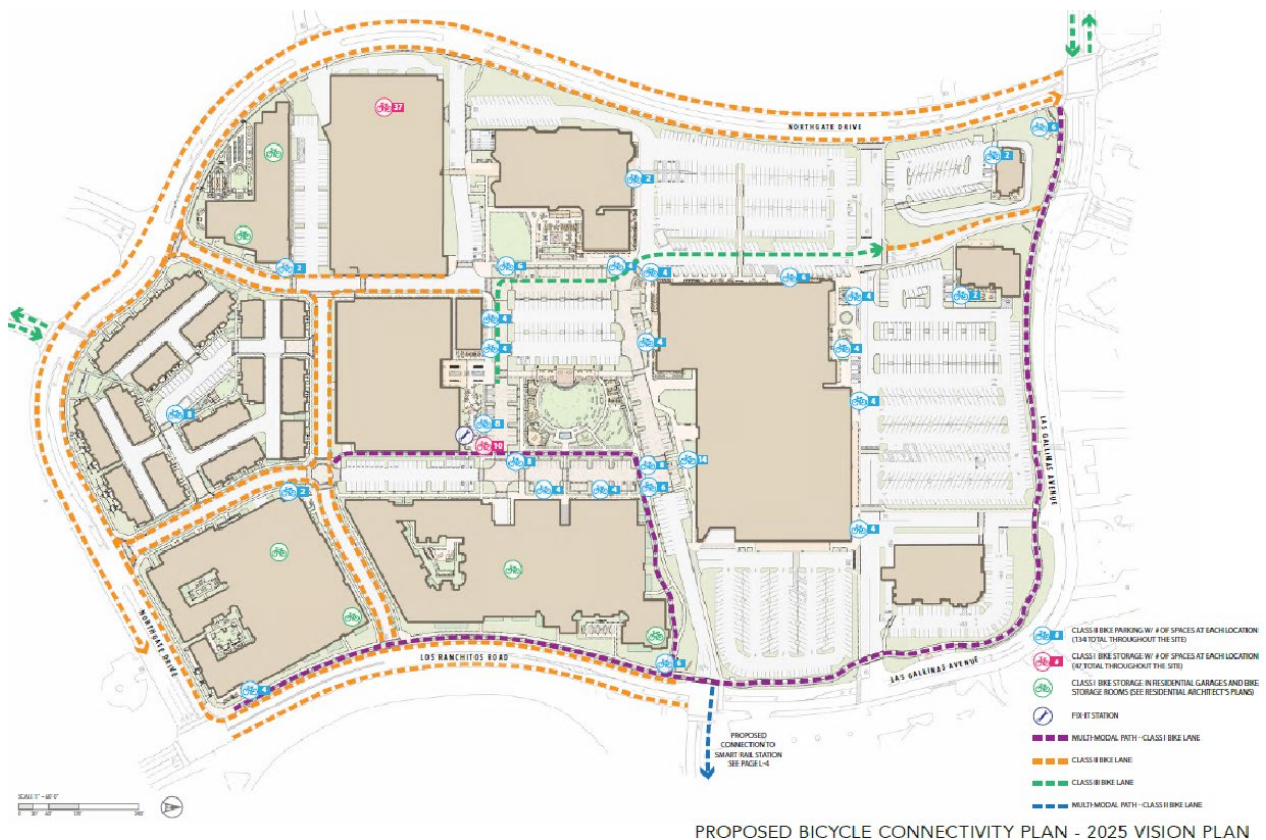
The existing multi-modal Class I path along Los Gallinas Avenue and Los Ranchitos Road (part of the North San Rafael Promenade) will be supplemented by a Class I path into the project at the western major entrance and extending into the Town Square. Class I paths are exclusive for pedestrians and bicyclists and separated from vehicular traffic, as shown in purple in Figure 5. In addition, Class II bike lanes will be provided throughout the residential portion of the project. Northgate Drive and Los Ranchitos Road currently have Class II bicycle lanes. Class II are lanes for bicycle use separated by striping from vehicular traffic and shown in gold in Figure 5. The green line in Figure 5 represents Class III bikeways that are signed as bikeways but not striped. Bicycle parking is provided throughout the site.

The blue circles on Figure 5 are Class II bicycle racks and the magenta circles show Class I bike storage facilities. In front of the cinema, a 14,000 square foot “Cycle Center” is proposed, as described below.

For pedestrian circulation, sidewalks are provided throughout the project. In the Town Square, sidewalks are generally six feet wide, with a 12-foot pedestrian paseo extending north-south in conjunction with the pavilion. In the residential area, five-foot wide sidewalks are separated from the street by a landscaped buffer.

E. Bicycle Amenities. Between the Town Square and movie theater, the project proposes a Cycle Center with a 9,000-square-foot outdoor area. This area was added in response to community input. The 9,000 square foot outdoor area will feature a boutique bicycle repair shop, abundant on-site bike parking facilities, a shipping container café/bar, and lounge seating areas with fire pits. *Labeled D in 2025 Plans.*

Figure 5 – Bicycle Network



F. Sustainability. In the original plans submitted in 2021, the applicants did not have clear sustainability goals or elements identified. The revised project now includes all of the residential buildings to be 100% electric, consistent with the goals of the City’s Climate Change Action Plan 2030. In addition, solar panels would be installed on top of all residential buildings and the parking structure, and all other new buildings would be made ready for installation of solar panels.

G. Community Uses. While not part of the PC feedback, the applicants are proposing the following community uses that were not previously proposed:

- a. New location for the City's existing satellite public library with a proposed expansion space to include a public meeting room for use by local community groups. **Labeled F in Phase I.**
- b. Maintain the existing police substation.

H. Revised Elevations. In addition to the above, the applicant revised elevation and landscape drawings. As mentioned above, the DRB will provide feedback and recommendations on the proposed design to the Planning Commission at a future date. Complete project plans can be viewed on the City's major projects webpage at this link:

<https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square/>

Figure 6 - Aerial View 2025

This image is an aerial view looking from the south to the north showing the overall scale and massing of the project. This image provides the viewer context on the interrelationships between the on-site buildings.



Figure 7 – View of Residential 4, Seven-Story Apartments

This view shows the seven-story apartments (Residential 4) looking easterly from the Town Square.



EIR STATUS AND SCHEDULE

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is underway for this project. A Notice of Preparation was issued on December 9, 2021, with a 35-day public comment period. Technical studies, such as transportation and water supply, among others, are underway. It is expected that the Draft EIR will be released for public review in early 2023. Staff is not requesting any Planning Commission feedback on elements of the EIR at this time.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Following is an analysis of the topics for Planning Commission discussion at the study session.

Size and Location of the Town Square Open Space and Amenities

General Plan Policy NH-4.2 provides the framework for a Town Square. In addition, Program NH-4.2B states:

“Include outdoor public places that support community activities and entertainment such as a public plaza for periodic arts and cultural events, outdoor cafes with music, restaurants with sidewalk or patio dining, children’s play areas, teen centered spaces, and other uses that provide outdoor seating. Design of retail spaces should be flexible enough to support these types of activities in the future.”

The applicant modified the size of the Town Square from the original plans submitted in 2021. The Town Square is now proposed as a 50,000 square foot park (adding 15,000 square feet from the original plans). Staff supports the 15,000 square feet of added space to the Town Square and level of amenities to create a vital and lively gathering place for both the on-site residents and the community at large. Additionally, this achieves the objectives in Program NH-4.2B. Comments from community members have been received that the Town Square should be larger and not include the parking on the west side. The applicant has expressed concerns about eliminating the parking in this area as it provides convenience to customers, noting that they do not believe it detracts from the overall functionality of the Town Square. Additionally, the applicant has indicated that the parking area can be used for larger community events by opening the bollards and roping off the parking area to create expanded pedestrian gathering space.

Discussion for Commission: Community members continue to express concern about the size of the Town Square. Staff is looking for Planning Commission input regarding the size of the Town Square and the applicant's representation regarding opportunities for flexible use of the parking area.

Mix of Housing Types

As described above, the mix of housing types includes apartments, affordable apartments, and ownership townhomes. General Plan Policy LU-3.3 informs this discussion:

Policy LU-3.3: Housing Mix

Encourage a diverse mix of housing choices in terms of affordability, unit type, and size, including opportunities for both renters and owners.

Staff supports the total number of units and the proposed mix of unit types. Staff also supports the proposed change in the mix of unit types (including the affordable units) that provides a range of housing opportunities including rental and ownership.

Discussion for Commission: Staff seeks Planning Commission concurrence that the proposed mix of housing units meets the intent of LU-3.3.

Number and Location of Affordable Units

On February 16, 2021, the City Council adopted an amendment to Affordable Housing Ordinance 1990 and associated Resolution 14890 amending the affordable housing obligation for residential projects and Resolution 14891, which provides the density bonus and concessions and waivers available to affordable housing projects. Resolution 14890 requires a "Primary" and "Secondary" affordable housing obligation for new developments of 16+ units. The applicant must dedicate five percent of the proposed units to be affordable to low-income households as a primary requirement and the units must be located on site. The secondary requirement allows developers to provide an additional five percent affordable units in the following ways:

- Additional On-Site Affordable Units.
- Payment of In-Lieu Fees.
- Construction of Off-Site Affordable Units.
- Donation of Land to the City.

The number of affordable units complies with the City's Affordable Housing Ordinance and Council-adopted policy guidance in that 10 percent of the units will be affordable to lower-income households. All affordable units will be provided on-site.

Section C of Resolution 14890 states the following regarding location and design of affordable units:

C. Location and Type of Affordable Housing Units. Affordable housing units shall be dispersed throughout the residential development project. Units may be clustered within the residential project when the city determines that such clustering furthers affordable housing opportunities. The affordable housing units shall be of a similar mix and type to that of the residential development project as a whole, including, but not limited to:

- 1. The same or substantially similar mix of unit size (e.g., number of bedrooms, square footage).*
- 2. Compatibility with the design, materials, amenities, and appearance of the other developed units.*

The project provides both clustered and dispersed affordable housing. Providing 96 affordable units in one community and partnering with an affordable housing developer during Phase I is a very effective way to provide the affordable units. As a provider of affordable housing, EAH has access to funding mechanisms to ensure the project gets built. Further, clustering the affordable units in one community provides the opportunity to provide needed support services to residents. The remaining 42 units will be dispersed throughout the market rate units.

The proposed 96 affordable units on the EAH site will have a substantially similar mix of unit sizes and bedrooms as other apartments in the project. The affordable units will include studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom units, 430-995 square feet in size. The market rate apartments include studio, one- and two-bedroom units, generally 620 –1,150 square feet in size (some units have lofts with additional square footage). The affordable apartments are split evenly between studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom units. The market rate apartments include 60-70 percent of the units as one-bedroom, as outlined in Table 2 above. The affordable portion of the project will be compatible with the design, materials, amenities, and appearance of other apartment units. Information about the size of the 42 units dispersed throughout market rate apartments in Residential 5 and 6 has not been provided.

Staff believes the proposed affordable housing plan meets City objectives and is a desirable way to provide needed affordable units, opportunities for a deeper level of affordability and complies with the Planning Commission request for dispersal of the additional affordable units.

Discussion for Commission: Staff seeks feedback from the Planning Commission regarding the affordable housing plan and confirmation that the applicant has adequately addressed the previously expressed Planning Commission concerns.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections/North San Rafael Promenade

The project has been revised to provide a more robust pedestrian and bicycle network and to support the implementation of the North San Rafael Promenade. The Promenade concept was adopted by the City in 2002 with the goal of providing pedestrian/bicycle linkages into a linear parkway that connects the Terra Linda Recreation Center to Lagoon Park at the Marin County Civic Center. The improved walkways and bicycle lanes create the “spine” of this plan and provide the context for new amenities, such as plazas, public art, landscaping, cultural/historical markers, and public park improvements.

General Plan Policy NH 4.2.h calls for “Completion of the North San Rafael Promenade through the site,” and further states that “Promenade improvements described in the *North San Rafael Promenade Conceptual Plan (2002)* should be included in any substantial rehabilitation or expansion of the Mall.” Additionally, Policy NH-4.4 states:

Policy NH-4.4: Transportation Safety and Accessibility

Improve access and bicycle/pedestrian connections between Northgate One, the Mall at Northgate, Northgate Three, the Civic Center SMART station, the Civic Center, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Program NH-4.4A: Promenade and Other Improvements. Use the development review and capital improvement program process to complete the North San Rafael Promenade through the Town Center. Considerations include:

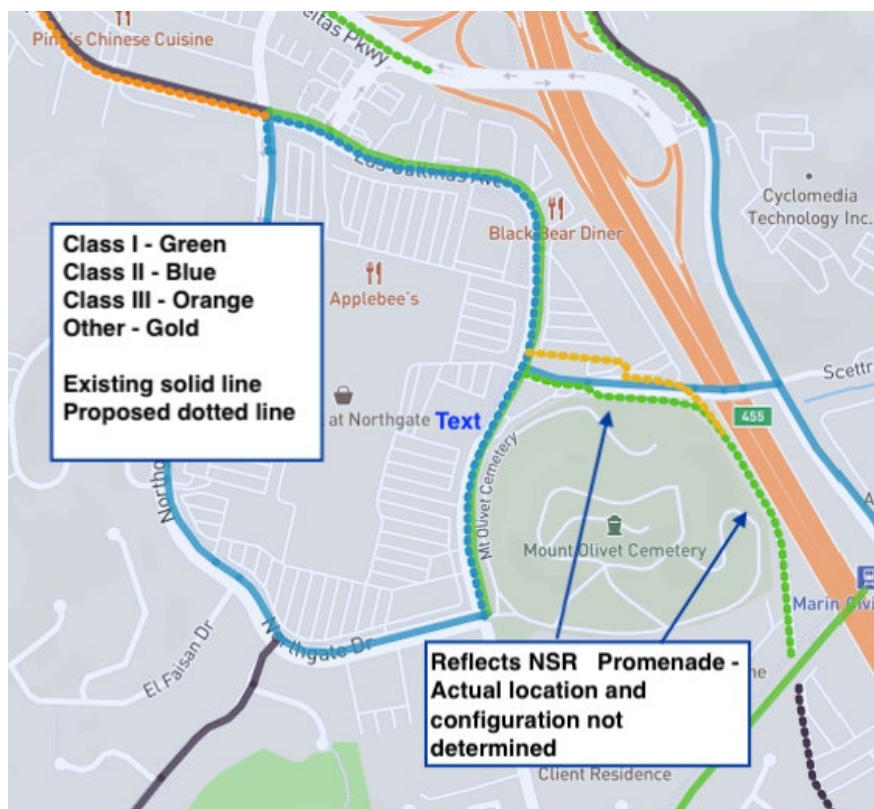
- a) *Routing of the Promenade to include safer crossings from the Civic Center and along Freitas Parkway. Consistent with the 2013 Station Area Plan and more recent community input, this also includes long-term improvements along Merrydale (on the east side of Mt. Olivet Cemetery) and through the Northgate III site in the event that site is redeveloped.*
- b) *Implementing Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2018) improvements through the Town Center area, including increased availability of bicycle racks.*

- c) *Increasing public transit to and from the Town Center and making it safer and easier to access bus stops. This includes possible shuttle service to Civic Center station.*
- d) *Implementing traffic calming on parking lot access roads, and redesigning traffic flow to minimize conflict between vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians.*
- e) *Designing any new parking structures to provide safe pedestrian access and reduced traffic conflicts.*

Program NH-4.4B: Improved Entrance to the Mall. Support redesign of intersections along Las Gallinas, Northgate Drive, Del Presidio, and Merrydale to improve traffic flow and improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. Support realignment of driveways along Las Gallinas to form safer intersections and pedestrian crossings.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (BPMP) adopted in 2018 also provides guidance and implements the North San Rafael Promenade. The BPMP recognizes the existing Class II bike lanes along Northgate Drive and the need for a multi-modal path connecting to the SMART station along Merrydale Road.

Figure 9 – Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan



The analysis below focuses on the internal bicycle and pedestrian connections within the project.

Comments received to date focus on the North San Rafael Promenade extending directly into and through the site. As described above, the applicant will extend the Class I pathway into the project connecting the existing Promenade pathway to the Town Square. The plan also provides Class II and III pathways to the south and north. Other considerations are to extend stronger bicycle and pedestrian connections to the west connecting to Northgate Drive or to the north connecting to the Promenade pathway at the major entrance on Las Gallinas Avenue.

For a western connection to Northgate Drive, such improvements are constrained by grade differences between the project site and Northgate Drive, though providing a Class I or II connection to the west is technically feasible. To the north, providing a full Class I or II connection is feasible though it may require a significant reconstruction of existing parking and driveway configurations. While the proposed bicycle and pedestrian network provides significant benefits, staff believes that a more robust network can be provided by improvements to the north and west.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections: Staff seeks Planning Commission feedback on the changes made by the applicant and guidance regarding the additional connections from the north and west sides of the site.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Public Notice for this Planning Commission study session was provided at least 15 days prior to the Planning Commission meeting date in the following way:

- Public Notice in the Marin IJ published 15-days prior to the meeting day.
- Public Hearing posters on Northgate site. Five posters were placed at various locations along the property announcing the date/time and that the item is a study session.
- Public Hearing post cards were sent to property owners, tenants, and business owners within a 1000' radius of the project site.
- Public Hearing post cards were sent to individuals and organizations on the City's interested parties list.
- A project update was published in the "In Your Town" section of the Marin IJ for the week before the meeting.
- The project website was updated to inform visitors to the site that a study session is scheduled for November 29, 2022.

Staff received comments throughout the review process. Comments received subsequent to mailing of the above notice are attached to this report as Exhibit 2. The majority of the comments relate to items not part of the discussion at the study session, including height, noise, water supply, traffic, and light pollution. Comments related to the study session discussion items include:

- Number of units: Some commenters believe that the proposed number of units is excessive and recommend that the number be reduced to 200-300 units.
- Affordable housing: Some commenters believe that the proposed affordable community is too isolated and that the affordable units should be dispersed.
- Town Square: Some commenters believe that the Town Square open space is not large enough, and should be enlarged so that the size meets the project's park requirements, instead of the project paying in-lieu park fees. Commenters also believe that a children's playground and public restrooms should be provided, and that the firepits should be eliminated.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission conduct a study session, receive public comment, and provide direction to staff on the following items.

1. **Size and Location of the Town Square Open Space and Amenities:** Community members continue to express concern about the size of the Town Square. Staff is looking for Planning

Commission input regarding the size of the Town Square and the applicant's representation regarding opportunities for flexible use of the parking area.

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EXHIBITS

1. Project Plans, dated March 14, 2022 on project webpage:
<https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square/>
2. Public Comments (Comments submitted prior to 2PM November 22, 2022, attached).

Northgate Town Square FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Mon 11/21/2022 5:51 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org ;Planning Public Comment
<PlanningPublicComment@cityofsanrafael.org>

Cc: [REDACTED]

Honorable Commissioners,

The purpose of this email is to let you know that while I don't want the Northgate Mall property to be empty, I and my neighbors have the following concerns I want to share with you my serious misgivings about the Northgate Town Square Development Plans The City of San Rafael and the developer have a once in lifetime opportunity to build housing, entertainment, retail, and bring to life Northgate Please consider improving the plans by

Height

The developer's plan includes an enormous, large seven-story building along Los Ranchitos Road next to a six-story building on the corner of Los Ranchitos and Northgate Drive Buildings of this height and mass are completely out of character for the suburban Northgate area Housing in the area is mainly single story while commercial buildings close to the streets are three-stories at most.

The mall currently has buildings higher than three stories, but they are set well back from the streets and surrounded by parking lots The planned seven story building will be 77 feet high and the adjacent six story building 68 feet high This will result in an oppressive high wall of buildings for the entire length of Los Ranchitos between Merrydale and Northgate Drive. This is not appropriate across from Alma Via a senior community and it will be a horrible experience for all of us who leisurely stroll or bike along the North San Rafael promenade on Los Ranchitos.

The very large seven story building along Los Ranchitos Road, next to a six story building on the corner of Los Ranchitos and Northgate Drive are very close to the street This will create a

claustrophobic experience for walkers and cyclists using the North San Rafael promenade. The buildings are allowed to be this high under the law, but just because a developer is allowed to do something that benefits it at the expense of residents doesn't mean it should!

Main Entrance at Merrydale

The developer's plan shows that the main entrance opposite the Merrydale overcrossing will be bounded on the south side by a seven-story building, and ultimately on the north side by a five-story building. This will create a fortress impression and would be seen as nothing more than an entrance to a high-density housing project. Do you think this is an inviting entrance? If you don't know anyone who lives there, would you be motivated to enter? For the largest development in Marin, the developer and the City can and should do better. The entrance to Northgate Town Square will be dwarfed by two ugly tall buildings. It should be remembered that the town square is supposed to be a center for North San Rafael and should be welcoming for all Marinites. Making this entrance more attractive will better serve the shops and restaurant businesses by inviting more customers into the town square.

Open Space and the Size of the Town Square

The town square as proposed by the developer is only a little bit over 1 acre. This is supposed to be the central "town square" for all North San Rafael (NSR) as well as being the main outdoor space for the residents of the project. For 30+ years the NSR community has been asking for a central gathering place for the young and old and a place for events. The proposed amount of space allotted to the Town Square as outdoor recreation for several thousand new residents as well as the existing community is completely inadequate.

The overall amount of open space is tiny for such the thousands of new residents and does not meet the requirements of San Rafael's General Plan 2040. I understand that the developer will make "in-lieu" payments so that it is excused from providing the required amount of open and recreational space. However, this smacks of a powerful developer using loopholes to provide a

sub-standard quality of life for the people who will live there. I expect the Planning Commissioners to do right by the community and demand that the requirements of the recently written City of San Rafael General Plan 2040 be followed.

The Town Square Amenities

The developer touts the town square as being almost 48,000 square feet in size. This includes a dog park, rock walls, a nature play area, seating areas and a fountain. The open lawn area available for recreation or events is therefore much smaller than this. Additionally, there is no provision for dedicated children's playground or a separate seating area for use by older residents, and most importantly, there appears to be no provision for public restrooms.

The placement of the dog park is also less than ideal – right next to the open lawn area. A dog park, while welcome in the grand scheme, can be a noisy and smelly place.

Additionally, adjacent to the town square, the developer proposes an area including a bike repair station and firepits. No matter what type of fuel they use, fire pits pollute the atmosphere and are not "green."

In conclusion, the City has a responsibility to make this development an example of good planning and to abide by the principles of GP2040. Thank you for your consideration regarding this important project to our community.

The new Northgate can – and should – be a jewel in San Rafael's crown for decades to come. We must get it right now. Cutting corners, building out-of-place humungous apartment blocks that do not fit the surroundings, and skimping on recreational open space needed for thousands of residents does not achieve the required goal.

VAL HORNSTEIN & CYNTHIA PEPPER

Objection to the size and sustainability of the proposed Northgate Town Square

David Buccheri [REDACTED]

Tue 11/22/2022 11:23 AM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

Dear Ms. Stevens,

I am a retired senior who is very opposed to the size and the related impact of the proposed Northgate Town Square upon our Terra Linda neighborhood. In an age of climate change and severe drought, how can the enormous increase in water consumption from the size of this project be justified? We are asked to cut back and conserve water and at the same time being told that we are required by the government to further strain our supply of available water which makes no sense. I am also concerned about the increased demand this project will place on our electrical grid. Furthermore, it seems disrespectful and disruptive to build this enormous project in the direct vicinity of nursing facilities near Merrydale. The adjacent graveyard and guide dog facility deserve a more tranquil environment than this will bring. This community does not have anywhere near the road capacity to reasonably accommodate the influx of traffic this will create and will serve as a threat in the event of needed evacuations from fire. I can image seeing the streets around the Northgate area packed with cars, creating a parking nightmare for local residents. I can imagine a steady stream of cars and delivery trucks polluting and disrupting the tranquility of our neighborhood, 24 hours a day.

This whole project is way too big for this community. Our lawmakers need to show some common sense and political courage and scale this project back in a major way instead of speaking out of both sides of the mouth, preaching conservation and large scale growth in the same sentence. It cannot be taken back once it's built. The time is now to do everything possible to protect this neighborhood and its residents from the imprudent and reckless scale of this project.

Sincerely,

David Buccheri

[REDACTED]
San Rafael, Ca. 94903

Northgate Project

James Forsell 

Thu 5/19/2022 9:49 AM

To: Tricia Stevens <Tricia.Stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>

Hi Tricia,

I am wondering about water requirements for the new project as currently conceived. Could you provide me the water allotment for the existing 44 acres and the current use by the location. Also, I would like to see the projected water requirement for the new project. This is important as infrastructure needs to be addressed before the project is approved. Water is already being restricted and projections are that rainfall may become worse.

Thank you in advance,

James Forsell, Ph D

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows

Re: Northgate Town Square Project



Fri 5/20/2022 10:47 AM

To: Tricia Stevens <Tricia.Stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>

Hi Tricia,

My husband, Jim, and I just joined Responsible Growth in Marin since they seem to be on the same page as us. We are not against revitalizing that area. We just want the plan to be more in line with the existing community. What I saw at the meeting on Tuesday night was just too urban with not enough open space. It was not warm or inviting. This project can truly create a wonderful environment with a beautiful town center and lots of greenery (natives that don't need as much water, etc.). Also, 1441 units are just too many for that area and I would like that number to be reduced so the infrastructure can handle the growth without being a burden to our existing community. I also don't understand why there has to be a separate area for affordable housing. Why makes these people feel like second class citizens? Can't the affordable housing be integrated throughout the community? I truly hope that our voices can be heard and that these important issues are addressed.

My best,
Karen

--

Re: Northgate Merlone Geier project

Mayor Kate

Tue 7/5/2022 3:51 PM

To: [REDACTED] Leslie Mendez <leslie.mendez@cityofsanrafael.org>

Cc: Tricia Stevens <Tricia.Stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>; Rachel Kertz <Rachel.Kertz@cityofsanrafael.org>

Hi Candiece - Thanks for taking the time to share your thoughts and concerns about this project. As I've received a few other emails similar to yours, I'm sharing the same information with you all.

The Northgate Mall project is a significant project for the City and we are very grateful for all the community input that has been received and that we continue to receive. I encourage you to stay involved as the project goes through the public process - this process is what is used for all projects in San Rafael to ensure that the public has ample opportunity to participate. The City has a specific webpage for the project and you can learn more about the timing, etc here: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square/>

In addition, the San Rafael General Plan is the guiding document for planning in the City and provides the broader context for specific projects like Northgate Mall You can learn about and read this document here: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/departments/general-plan-2040/>

I have included the City planner as well as Councilwoman Rachel Kertz (who represents District 4) on this response so they can be aware of your input

Thanks again for taking the time to share your thoughts and caring about the future of San Rafael.

Warmly,
Kate

Kate Colin (she/her/hers)
Mayor, City of San Rafael



SAN RAFAEL
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

From: Candiece Milford [REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, July 2, 2022 7:35 AM

To: Mayor Kate <kate.colin@cityofsanrafael.org>; Leslie Mendez <leslie.mendez@cityofsanrafael.org>

Subject: Northgate Merlone Geier project

This project is way out of scale to the neighborhood. Buildings should be no taller than 3-4 stories at the most.

The traffic, light pollution, increased noise, privacy, and impact on the quality of life of a quiet community of mostly older adults will forever change the neighborhood and deflate property values.

Frankly, we will probably move because of this and I know we are not alone in abandoning a neighborhood we grew to love over the decades. 4,000 new residents?

And this is only one of about 5 projects in our neighborhood that already is gridlocked after 3 when Kaiser has a shift change and 4 when the high school is let out.

Please, please don't let this behemoth project get out of hand.

Sincerely,

Candiece Milford

sent from across the cosmos - please excuse typos

Re: Northgate Mall

Mayor Kate

Tue 7/5/2022 3:51 PM

To: Sophie Shehi [REDACTED]

Cc: Tricia Stevens <Tricia.Stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>; Rachel Kertz <Rachel.Kertz@cityofsanrafael.org>

Hi Sophie - Thanks for taking the time to share your thoughts and concerns about this project. As I've received a few other emails similar to yours, I'm sharing the same information with you all.

The Northgate Mall project is a significant project for the City and we are very grateful for all the community input that has been received and that we continue to receive. I encourage you to stay involved as the project goes through the public process - this process is what is used for all projects in San Rafael to ensure that the public has ample opportunity to participate. The City has a specific webpage for the project and you can learn more about the timing, etc here: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square/>

In addition, the San Rafael General Plan is the guiding document for planning in the City and provides the broader context for specific projects like Northgate Mall You can learn about and read this document here: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/departments/general-plan-2040/>

I have included the City planner as well as Councilwoman Rachel Kertz (who represents District 4) on this response so they can be aware of your input

Thanks again for taking the time to share your thoughts and caring about the future of San Rafael.

Warmly,
Kate

Kate Colin (she/her/hers)
Mayor, City of San Rafael



SAN RAFAEL
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

From: Sophie Shehi [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, July 1, 2022 8:18 PM
To: Mayor Kate <kate.colin@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: Northgate Mall

Mayor Kate-

The mall at Northgate redevelopment project in theory is a great idea. But-in practicality-it's a non starter.

Having a 7 story building with over 400 units. This will destroy the suburban feel of our beautiful neighborhood. It's an Eichler development. Eichler's entire vision was being in and living with nature. One story homes.

NOT a 7 story towering monstrosity dumped in the middle of our community. With over 1400 units. With very little green space.

Where is the water going to come from?

People need to have a place to gather and congregate.

Please reconsider your support for this plague on our community.

I am all for repurposing the mall.

Commercial and residential is a great mix. And something that will be an asset to the neighborhood.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of several hundred units over commercial space. No more than 200-300 units.

With shops and restaurants.

The owners of the mall say that malls are dead.

If this is true-then why does Marin have such successful malls?

Like:

Strawberry

The Village

Corte Madera Center

Vintage Oaks

Because they have thoughtful and caring property managers.

Again-I'm asking you to reconsider your support for this development as it stands.

Sophie Shehi

Sent from my iPhone

Northgate Redevelopment

Pat Eulberg [REDACTED]

Wed 7/27/2022 8:26 AM

To: Tricia Stevens Tricia.Stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

Good morning!

Our company owns and operates the Panera at Northgate Mall. From reading the available information online (<https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square/>), I cannot find a status update for the project that tells me the current status and the direction for the project's scope. For example, what is the likely blend of retail, residential and office? What is the likely timing for project approval? Any info you can provide will help and be appreciated.

Best regards,

Patrick J. Eulberg
Vice President – Real Estate

[REDACTED]
Independence, OH 44131

[REDACTED]
www.flynnrg.com

Re: Northgate Mall residential & commercial development project

Mayor Kate

Sun 10/16/2022 10:27 AM

To: Ed and Irmir [REDACTED]

Cc: Tricia Stevens <Tricia.Stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>; Diane Henderson <Diane.Henderson@cityofsanrafael.org>

Hi Ed and Irmir - Council moved to bcc to adhere to the Brown Act.

Thanks so much for taking the time to express your concerns and share your thoughts about the proposed development at Northgate. With an important project like this one, the City is committed to a robust outreach and dialogue with the community. The City has a webpage with key contacts and provides the opportunity for our community to stay up to speed on the public process. You can be assured that every aspect of this project will go through the public process and we appreciate you taking the time to email us. Here is a link to the page: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square/>

I have included the two key City contacts on this response so they can be aware of your concerns. Please feel free to reach out to them with any specific questions and we look forward to your ongoing engagement on this impactful project

Warmly,
Kate

Kate Colin (she/her/hers)
Mayor, City of San Rafael



SAN RAFAEL
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

From: Ed and Irmir [REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, October 15, 2022 10:21 AM

To: Mayor Kate <kate.colin@cityofsanrafael.org>

Cc: Maika Llorens Gulati <maika@cityofsanrafael.org>; Eli Hill <eli.hill@cityofsanrafael.org>; Maribeth Bushey <maribeth.bushey@cityofsanrafael.org>; Rachel Kertz <rachel.kertz@cityofsanrafael.org>

Subject: Northgate Mall residential & commercial development project

Dear Mayor Colin and City Council Member ,

The proposed development of Northgate Mall into 822 rental units and 85 townhouses, would be an absolute disaster for the quaint subdivision of Terra Linda. The increase in traffic would be unbearable for the streets as they are currently configured; and, since we are already on water rationing due to the ongoing drought, where is the additional water for these residents coming from? I've lived here since 1976, and the change to the character of Terra Linda would be enormous and catastrophic. The proposed housing development is totally out of scale to the surrounding environment. A smaller development would be more appropriate to maintain the small town character of Terra Linda.

I strongly urge you to reconsider the decision to more forward with this enormous development for Terra Linda !

Sincerely,
Irmgard Riss

Northgate Development Project

Linda Lang [REDACTED]

Wed 10/19/2022 9:34 AM

To: Tricia Stevens <Tricia.Stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>

Cc: Mayor Kate <kate.colin@cityofsanrafael.org>

Good morning, Tricia,

I am a long time Terra Linda resident and have only recently learned about the significant scope of the above project.

I was advised to contact you/ the planning committee by Mayor Kate after this week's city council meeting.

Please advise on when the next public meetings on this project will take place.

I am specifically interested in the plans to adequately supply the short- and long-term water needs required by so much new housing.

I'm not aware of anything specific on the website regarding water concerns. While traffic / transportation and open space issues are very important, water supply is more important. The severe drought in the West is certain to remain a serious concern and is likely to get worse.

Please advise on any upcoming live meetings on the Northgate project. I and my neighbors want to know more.

Thank you.

Regards,
Linda

Linda Lang
[REDACTED]

Re: Proposal for Northgate Mall

Mayor Kate

Fri 11/18/2022 2:59 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Tricia Stevens <Tricia.Stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>

Hi Mrs. and Mr. Haro - Thank you for taking the time to share your concerns about the proposed plan at Northgate Mall. I've added the City planner engaged with this project on this response so she can read your input. As this project is now moving through the Public Process, I encourage you to continue to engage and provide input. Here is a link to the city webpage with the updated information as to how you can participate: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square/>

I also wanted to provide a link to the city webpage that outlines our Housing Element which is the guiding document for the creation of housing in San Rafael. There is lots of good info that you can click through to understand more about the state housing demands and how San Rafael will continue to encourage the appropriate development in our city: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/housing-element-2031/>

Warmly,
Kate

Kate Colin (she/her/hers)
Mayor, City of San Rafael



SAN RAFAEL
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, November 15, 2022 12:06 PM

To: Mayor Kate kate.colin@cityofsanrafael.org

Cc: Maika Llorens Gulati maika@cityofsanrafael.org ; Eli Hill eli.hill@cityofsanrafael.org ; Maribeth Bushey maribeth.bushey@cityofsanrafael.org ; Rachel Kertz rachel.kertz@cityofsanrafael.org

Subject: Proposal for Northgate Mall

November 15, 2022

Dear San Rafael Mayor Kate Colin and the San Rafael City Council Members,

We are writing to protest the plan for increased housing at Northgate Mall. This mall area is bordered by single family homes, town homes, medical and dental offices and Northgate III. Adding over 900 units of housing will make this area look like a congested high rise city within the Terra Linda area. Five, six and seven story apartment buildings do not belong here and would be better suited for downtown San Rafael. A separate low-income building built by a different developer appears to me like you are isolating a group of people. People that qualify for low-income housing are often families where both parents work but at low-income jobs. They should not be segregated away from others in a building that probably does not look as nice as the rest of the development. We need affordable workforce housing in Marin. We are losing our middle-class families who want to live in the

community where they work but are forced to live outside of the county They include are our teachers, police and fire fighters, people who work in retail and restaurants who have become commuters because there is no affordable housing in Marin

Please consider housing that is 3 to 4 stories at most. Some retail will be needed and could be incorporated into the ground floors of some buildings Please don't allow the developers to reduce the open space or town square by paying in-lieu fees to avoid requirements. People need open space and attractive landscaping.

Infrastructure needs to be addressed in the plan. Roads here are very congested already. We have backed up traffic morning and afternoon with commuters going to work and home, and children being dropped off/picked up at school. Freitas Parkway is jammed, Nova Albion and Gallinas feed into Freitas Parkway. Nova Albion has Terra Linda High School, Vallecito Elementary School, and Kaiser Permanente Hospital Campus and clinics Gallinas has private medical and dental offices. Northgate 2 is also there, and Scotty's Market complex of stores and Post Office is just down the street on Freitas It does not matter how the intersections are reconfigured Traffic here is already gridlocked. Phase I of 900+ homes will not work.

Water? Where is all this additional water going to come from? MMWD has already announced the possibility of earlier conservation cuts next year as early as April Homeowners were not allowed to water their lawns last year

I hope wise decisions will be made about Northgate Mall in the future We need workforce housing but not this plan.

Sincerely,
Nancy Haro
Robert Haro


San Rafael

(No subject)

[REDACTED]

Thu 11/17/2022 6:21 PM

To: Tricia Stevens <tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>

Cc: 'Dick Atwood' <[REDACTED]>

Hi Tricia, Regarding the Northgate Town Square project:

I live at Villa Marin 100 Thorndale Dr. fourth floor, looking from my balcony and windows directly at the Northgate Mall nearby. Considering demolition, construction, traffic changes with many new neighbors etc, the one aspect that scares me is that the completed project will generate unacceptable noise from outside events which will spoil sitting on our balcony in the evening or other times. What can I do to be assured this will not happen? Thanks,
Richard Atwood

Northgate Redevelopment Project

Cynda Vyas [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 18/2022 7:19 PM

To: Planning Public Comment PlanningPublicComment@cityofsanrafael.org

Cc: Tricia Stevens <tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>

Hello,

I am writing about my concerns about the current Northgate Town Square Redevelopment Project. I support fully the idea of a revitalized mall with housing retail open space etc but feel that many modifications are needed before the plan moves forward.

1. The height and scale of the 5, 6 and 7 story buildings seem out of place. They will form a visual barrier at the perimeter and hide many of the inviting features of the new town center
Please move tall buildings back from the edge of the project so that the entrance at Merrydale is not overwhelmed by them. Is there is reason they can't be placed well back from the street?
2. Enlarge the Town Square so that it has room for both general visitor and on-site resident. The over-all amount of open space in the project is too small and not in keeping with the San Rafael General Plan 2040. It's inadequate and will be regretted in the future.
3. Include a children's playground and eliminate polluting fire pit

It is the duty of the Planning Commissioners and city officials not to bow down to developers who put profits first. Please see that citizen wishes and concerns are addressed. As a resident of Terra Linda, I am considering moving from my single family home to a Town Center apartment but will not do so if the current plans are carried out. Nor will I ever vote for anyone who was part of giving this oversized project the green light since I would question their judgement in other matters as well.

Let's make the most of this golden opportunity to make a Town Center that incorporates what citizens want. Meet the needs of the community, not the developers.

Thank you,
Cynthia Vyas

Northgate Town Square FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

M. Samantha Stearns [REDACTED]

Fri 11/18/2022 4:03 PM

To: Planning Public Comment PlanningPublicComment@cityofsanrafael.org

Cc: Tricia Stevens <tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>

Honorable Commissioners,

The purpose of this email is to let you know that while I don't want the Northgate Mall property to be empty, my neighbors and I have the following concerns

1. Height

The developer's plan includes an enormous seven-story building along Los Ranchitos Road next to a six-story building on the corner of Los Ranchitos and Northgate Drive. Buildings of this height and mass are completely out of character for the suburban Northgate area.

The planned seven-story building will be 77 feet high and the adjacent six-story building will be 68 feet high. This will result in an oppressive high wall of buildings for the entire length of Los Ranchitos between Merrydale and Northgate Drive. This is not appropriate across from Alma Via—a senior community—and it will be a horrible experience for anyone walking or biking along the North San Rafael promenade on Los Ranchitos.

The buildings are allowed to be this high under the law, but just because a developer is allowed to do something that benefits it at the expense of residents doesn't mean it should!

2. Main Entrance at Merrydale

The developer's plan shows that the main entrance opposite the Merrydale overcrossing will be bounded on the south side by a seven-story building, and ultimately on the north side by a five-story building. This will create a fortress impression and would be seen as nothing more than an entrance to a high density housing project.

It should be remembered that the town square is supposed to be a center for North San Rafael, and it should be welcoming for all Marinites. Making this entrance more attractive will better serve the shops and restaurant businesses by inviting more customers into the town square.

3. Open Space and the Size of the Town Square

The town square as proposed by the developer is only a little bit over 1 acre. This is supposed to be the central "town square" for all North San Rafael (NSR) as well as being the main outdoor space for the residents of the project. The proposed amount of space allotted to the Town Square as outdoor recreation for several thousand new residents as well as the existing community is completely inadequate and does not meet the requirements of San Rafael's General Plan 2040. I understand that the developer will make "in lieu" payments so that it is excused from providing the required amount of open and recreational space. However, this smacks of a powerful developer using loopholes to provide a sub-standard quality of life for the people who will live there. I hope the Planning Commissioners will do right by the community and demand that the requirements of the recently written City of San Rafael General Plan 2040 be followed.

The City has a responsibility to make this development an example of good planning and to abide by the principles of GP2040. The new Northgate can—and should—be a jewel in San Rafael's crown for

decades to come. We must get it right now. Cutting corners, building out-of-place humungous apartment blocks that do not fit the surroundings does not achieve the required goal

Thank you for your consideration regarding this important project to our community.

Sincerely,

Samantha Stearns

North San Rafael Resident

Northgate mall plans

VIVIAN SACHS [REDACTED]

Sun 11/20/2022 8:32 AM

To: Tricia Stevens <tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org>

How are we to combat this!?! it's an immense intrusion on our resources and quality of life. I am adamantly opposed 🙄

Sent from my iPhone

northgate

michael tulper [REDACTED]

Sun 11/20/2022 8:56 AM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

dear Ms.Stevens... as i read about the pending plan for northgate I just can not fathom what the planners are thinking... 1.How will the water supply all of a sudden increase to service the new residents?

2.What kind of a traffic nightmare will be created...in case u have not already experienced

what current traffic is like please check it out...It will be like Sir Francis Drake

3.Are there no other areas in Marin to help spread this new housiing...we will be coming to

wait til a point that will "feel" like L.A. AND if u think that traffic on 101 is fun now just

a significant number of new residents pile on to 101 trying to get to work

during rush hour

thank u in advance for considering these points

Michael Tulper
[REDACTED]

Northgate Mall redevelopment

Eileen t (Eileen Dervisevic) [REDACTED]

Mon 11/21/2022 7:31 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

Hello Miss Stevens:

I am writing to object to the current proposal of redevelopment. The city of San Rafael in the county of Marin need to do much more in terms of affordable housing for large developments like this. You currently only have 6% allocated to affordable housing, and it's not even clarified as to low income, very low income, or extremely low income. The housing situation for those who have lived here for a very long time is dismal! Those who have retired on fixed income, those with special needs, and other handicap factors living on SSI are being completely pushed out of this county since no developments are addressing these county residents.

You see how the homeless population has increased, many are working homeless people who can't afford market rents in this county. There are no restrictions to institutional investor developments, foreign developers, or anything else to protect the residents of this county.

Please do better when it comes to large developments like this and consider a 25% requirement of units to be for low income, very low income, and extremely low income individuals, many who have been residents in this county for decades.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Eileen Toal-Dervisevic

CA BRE #01197624
[REDACTED]

5800 Northgate Drive, Northgate Town Square Study Session

Kathi Ellick [REDACTED]

Mon 11/21/2022 7:41 AM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

The purpose of this email is to share with you my serious concerns about the Northgate Town Square Development Plans. As a resident of Los Ranchitos since 1976, I am aware of the changes Northgate has gone through. The proposed developer's design needs to be evaluated with thoughtful insight.

The developer's plan includes an enormous, large seven story building along Los Ranchitos Road next to a six story building on the corner of Los Ranchitos and Northgate Drive. Buildings of this height and mass are completely out of character for the suburban Northgate area. Housing in the area is mainly single story while commercial buildings close to the streets are three stories at most.

The very large seven story building along Los Ranchitos Road, next to a six story building on the corner of Los Ranchitos and Northgate Drive are very close to the street. This will create a claustrophobic experience for walkers and cyclists using the North San Rafael promenade. The buildings are allowed to be this high under the law, but just because a developer is allowed to do something that benefits it at the expense of residents, doesn't mean it should!

The developer's plan shows that the main entrance opposite the Merrydale overcrossing. I think the traffic needs to be considered. It will be such an awful entrance to see on the south side of a seven story building, and ultimately on the north side by a five story building. This will create a nothing more than an entrance to a high density housing project. Do you think this is an inviting entrance? For the largest development in Marin, the developer and the City can and should do better.

The developer says the town square will be almost 48,000 square feet in size. This includes a

dog park, rock walls, a nature play area, seating areas and a fountain. The open lawn area available for recreation or events is therefore much smaller than this. Additionally, there is no provision for dedicated children's playground or a separate seating area for use by older residents, and most importantly, there appears to be no provision for public restrooms.

Additionally, adjacent to the town square, the developer proposes an area including a bike repair station and firepits. No matter what type of fuel they use, fire pits pollute the atmosphere and are not "green." It is also a fire hazard. Who will be overseeing the safety?

You have a duty and responsibility to make this 20-year project, the largest in Marin County, an example of a forward thinking mixed used development that enriches the community, for years to come. Make the most of it!

In conclusion, the new Northgate can be a jewel in San Rafael's crown for decades to come.

We must get it right now. We have a change in climate that causes Marin to be in a drought, why would building out-of-place humungous apartment be a good idea. The traffic will be overwhelming!

Please carefully consider the plan and expect the developer to follow your guidance.

Thank you,
Kathi Ellick
Los Ranchitos

NORTHGATE MALL REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL for 2025:

Jessica Field [REDACTED]

Mon 11/21/2022 6:07 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

Good evening,

I am a resident and home owner in San Rafael 94903 and am greatly opposed to the redevelopment plan at Northgate for all the new housing. The schools and roads are not prepared for that many new residents, not to mention the very obvious lack of water.

Thank you,

Jessica Field

5800 Northgate Drive, Northgate Town Square

Asaf Ophir [REDACTED]

Mon 11/21/2022 6:12 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

Dear Tricia,

Thank you for being open to public statements
in regards to building residential units at Northgate Drive, my only concern is the roads between the new residences and the freeway. We are already seeing long lines onto the southbound on-ramp at Freitas Parkway every morning at rush hour, sometimes reaching as far back as Las Gallinas Avenue. If 1,422 new residential units are built in our neighborhood we will be seeing serious daily traffic jams if the roads AS WELL AS the ramps are not altered to accommodate the increase of cars. I lived in the East Bay for a couple of years, and I am only too familiar with ramps that take 45 minutes to traverse every morning (just the ramp itself). Neither those of us currently living in Terra Linda, nor any newcomers, would ever be interested in that kind of experience, much less on a daily basis.

Thanks and blessings to you,

Asaf Ophir

Terra Linda
[REDACTED]

Comment: Northgate Town Square

Chandra Alexandre [REDACTED]

Tue 11/22/2022 4:32 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

Hi Tricia,

I'm writing to provide comment to add to the upcoming planning meeting.

As the work continues to develop at the Northgate site, Community Action Marin as the county's official anti-poverty agency with a commitment to racial and economic justice, supports both inclusion of affordable housing and onsite childcare services—the latter to mean specifically below-market-rate childcare (affordable to low-income and low-to-moderate income families), as well as free childcare support for low-income families, which can be funded through Head Start. Community Action Marin is the county's Head Start and Early Head Start grantee recipient in Marin County and the largest county provider of state-subsidized childcare for families of low income. The continued presence of affordable housing units and the resources to support family well-being are critical to a fair and thriving Marin County. Thank you.

Chandra



Chandra Alexandre

Chief Executive Officer

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In favor of Northgate Housing

Lorrie Goldin [REDACTED]

Tue 11/22/2022 2:00 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

Dear Tricia,

Of all the housing proposals under consideration, I am especially excited by the development of Northgate Mall, especially if the site can be approved for 1400 units rather than whittled down to something that does not address the housing crisis in Marin. This is a careful thought out and exciting project that will be a vital hub for San Rafael, the county, even the whole region as a model for denser, transit-near, mixed size/income/use development we need.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lorrie Goldin

Pronouns: she/her/hers

[Airlift fund](#)

Personal blog: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Mall Plans

Laurey Greider [REDACTED] t>

Tue 11/22/2022 6:50 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org ;Planning Public Comment
<planningpubliccomment@cityofsanrafael.org>

11/22/22

Tricia Stevens, and to everyone concerned:

Thank you for being open to recommendations!

My suggestion is to create a new paradigm for a town center mall, with input from visionaries, like the Bioneers. There would be thoughtful housing, and attractive gardens, living walls, fountains, art, live but not loud music, local businesses, healthy food options, healing arts, and a dog park.

Some people have requested a skating rink, a live theater, comedy, and music venue, which could utilize the old sears building. A recreation center for all ages would be great, with pool tables, maybe bowling, craft/maker areas, music and multiple other lessons, yoga and dance classes, a fitness center...

I would ask Good Earth Natural Foods to come in, because people want to support that local alternative to Whole Foods/ Amazon - the conglomerate is not good for the local sustainable farms and economy.

This is not another place to put enormous buildings for thousands of new people to come into a quiet neighborhood to live, next to homes that are used to quiet beautiful nature and thoughtful planning, as it has been for the decades we've been here.

We are not for rampant consumerism above all else, we want our quality of life preserved, or better, restored. We want to create a more thoughtful approach to a town center mall, which could be quite a wonderful attraction, done right. Healthy food options, sustainable wonderful quality local businesses, it could be a privilege to be in this extraordinary mall, and which could set an example for other malls in the country.

There would be live/work spaces, and small affordable apartments for people who grew up here but cannot afford to live here, and disabled, veteran, and elders as well. 1400+ units is very excessive for our sweet neighborhood to take on, and it would be a tremendous impact to the quality of life, not only to those people who live in the neighborhood, but to the wildlife that call this their home, with the added noise, air, and light pollution, and traffic.

This could be a destination for tourists and locals, a uniquely themed mall, beautiful and healthy for the Earth, bring in Bioneers, put up educational walls, beautiful, soothing healing, crystal relaxing room, tea room, living walls, classes/groups for all ages to go, learn sewing, language, play table games, and have a break for their care providers who can shop the beautiful fair trade fair price sustainable and organic classic long lasting items, many made by craftspeople in Marin, to wear or put in their home.

We could have it be a Marin County made hub, with nature education from Marin county parks and the ggrra, marine mammal center and Wildcare! It could house a year round farmers market, the gem faire and other adjuncts to the civic center. Put in solar panels to run the malls lighting, and take advantage of passive heating. They did put in a library and I think it's wonderful!

At the old mall we used to have a local collective art gallery, an import store for home decor, an independent bookstore, a thoughtful independent toy store, and another import store for clothing, jewelry, and crystals. They all were run out to put in corporate chain stores with junk food and junk merchandise, that attracted thieves and repelled people who live here.

Put the chain stores in another community if you must, this is Marin, give us beautiful, thoughtfully made creative stores. I don't have any use for the junk stores, and I have to travel to get what I would like to find in my own mall.

Many of us would love good quality and design, a pleasant atmosphere, options that are good for me and the planet, are pleasant to look at, and are relaxing and beautiful enough to stay awhile.

Bring in organic coffee (they used to have a cart, but it was hidden away and no one knew about it), a healthy organic juice and salad venue like Urban Remedy, organic falafel/Thai/Indian/Mexican restaurants, fabulous restaurant/lounges for those of us who have nowhere to go around here. We have to travel to Corte Madera/larkspur/mill valley/point Reyes to find pleasant shopping and food options.

Please don't ruin the physical beauty by allowing multi-story buildings near the existing homes and streets. Please limit the number of housing units - the state is wrong to demand so many new units in our beautiful landscape. We have so many new developments going up, and they are unnecessary. We don't need more market rate homes, and low income homes should go to those who have special needs - vets, elders, disabled, young Marin adults who don't want to have to move away. We don't need more housing that will further tax our water and traffic.

Community services can be located in this place so people with mobility issues can easily visit the housing office, and other community services that are far flung and hard to access where they are now.

Profitability to the mall owners shouldn't be the high priority, and neither should jamming in way too many housing units...the mall folks could use the ideas offered to use the mall as it is instead of spending millions of dollars to create another poorly designed mall, with poorly designed housing since it has not been done before by these developers.

The mall needs to incorporate open space more than anything. As it is, wildlife and families use the parking lots for outdoor recreation and thoroughfares. Maybe a public Olympic sized pool would be a great addition. Maybe roof star gazing.

Please consider my recommendations, and please keep the best interests of the closest neighbors at heart as you make your decisions. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to make an extraordinary positive impact in the area, or to do a disservice and ruin a place that people have enjoyed and protected for generations. It is in your hands, do the very best you can for the neighbors and for nature.

Sincerely, Laurey Greider, neighbor and friend to wilderness in the neighborhood and beyond.

Northgate Mall Redevelopment Proposal

Heidi Hammon [REDACTED] t>

Tue 11/22/2022 9:47 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

This project should provide 50% affordable housing in total and should not be segregated to one building. That is racist. Marin County does not need more expensive housing for the rich and wealthy. They need more affordable housing for low and medium income individuals, and families and seniors.

When is Marin County going to wake up and only allow affordable housing development in this county once and for all for seniors, teachers, employees of the county, low income, medium income families and individuals.

Lastly, they should not be segregated to only one building which would mean low priced building materials and supplies used for them. That is extremely insulting and racist. They should be spread out through the whole complex.

A very concerned resident in Novato. Novato and San Rafael are the usual cities that have to supply affordable housing. This needs to change. Every city in Marin Co. (Sausalito, Tiburon, Belvedere, Corte Madera, Larkspur, Ross, San Anselmo, Fairfax, Lagunitas to name a few high priced cities) needs to provide housing to low and medium income housing.

Best,
Heidi Hammon-Turano

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

Please excuse any typos from my iPhone.

Northgate Town Center

Travis L. [REDACTED]

Tue 11/22/2022 1:19 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org

Cc: planningpubliccomment@citysanrafael.org <planningpubliccomment@citysanrafael.org>

Dear Ms. Stevens,

I am writing to you regarding The Northgate Town Square Planning Commission hearing scheduled for Tuesday, November 29th. As a longtime resident of this community, I'd like to express my concern and opposition to this project. This is the fourth such high occupancy proposal within a mile of each other, in a region being devastated by drought, energy shortages, and pollution.

There is currently development already underway on the Tallus Preserve on Lucas Valley Rd and 350 Merrydale, with further approvals granted for Northgate Walk and the Neighborhood at Los Gamos. That's thousands of new residences with many times that number of new citizens moving into a community already under duress with the current population. Lack of water, abundance of traffic, and increasing crime rates are just a few of the reasons our community does not need additional housing. With the ongoing climate crisis and drought, I would expect there to be a hiatus on any new developments. If new housing is truly as critical as it's being made out to be, perhaps converting some of the existing vacant commercial space would be a better solution.

At a time when all existing residents are being asked to conserve water and electricity it makes no sense to compound that problem with more consumers. I strongly oppose any new building developments until we can adequately address the already limited resources our region suffers from. Please consider alternative solutions to your proposed 1,422 residences.

Sincerely,

Travis

Public Comment re: Northgate Town Square

Rachel Zwillinger [REDACTED]

Mon 11/21/2022 9:07 PM

To: Tricia Stevens tricia.stevens@cityofsanrafael.org ;Planning Public Comment
<PlanningPublicComment@cityofsanrafael.org>

Dear Members of the Planning Commission:

I live about a quarter of a mile from Northgate Mall, and wanted to provide some comments regarding the projects in advance of your November 29, 2022 Planning Commission Study Session.

I am supportive of the concept of creating new housing at the mall. Our region needs additional housing and the mall needs a new life. Adding thousands of new residences to the neighborhood will certainly impact roads, schools, municipal services, and more. In light of all of these impacts, I would like to see a plan that at least matches the character of the surrounding neighborhoods and adds value for existing residents. The current plan does neither. My primary concerns include:

Building Height: Our neighborhood consists mostly of single story homes and small townhouses that are nestled into the hillsides. The existing buildings at the mall stand out as massive structures compared to their surroundings. They are enormously visible and imposing from nearby residents, our hiking trails, and from the highway. Adding seven story buildings, which would tower over the existing structures and nearby homes, would dramatically change the look and feel of the neighborhood. This change is unnecessary and unwanted. The same amount of housing could be accommodated with more reasonably sized structures if less of the parcel footprint was taken up by parking and buildings were lowered and spread out. The parking could be accommodated by taller parking structures and perhaps underground garages. Buildings should be no higher than four stories.

Affordable Housing: The proposal to create a separate building to accommodate the required affordable housing is contrary to the character and spirit of our neighborhood. Joseph Eichler intentionally designed neighborhoods to be welcoming and integrated. Segregating affordable housing into a separate building rather than integrating it throughout the structures will likely create divisions among residents and may leave some feeling stigmatized. Affordable housing units should be integrated throughout the residential buildings.

Town Square: In light of the number of residents being added to the neighborhood, the proposed town square is woefully inadequate. It is tiny and will not be able to meet the recreational needs of new and existing residents. The town square should be substantially expanded.

Location of Housing: If I am understanding the plans correctly, all of the housing that is proposed for Phase 1 is concentrated on the part of the parcel closest to Nova Albion. Realistically, Phase 1 may be the only phase that is ever completed. In light of this risk, the housing in Phase 1 should be spread out across the site so that the impacts (e.g., parking, traffic, etc.) are more evenly distributed. The residences, business, and roads closest to Nova Albion should not have to unnecessarily bear the full burden of the housing increase when it could easily be more equitably spread throughout the large parcel.

Pedestrian Safety: Under current conditions, crossing Northgate Drive at Nova Albion is extremely dangerous. The road is curved so visibility is limited and cars dramatically exceed posted speed limits. If we are going to add thousands of new residents and cars to the area, there will need to be changes made to ensure traffic proceeds more slowly and yields to pedestrians.

Thank you all for your service to our City and for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Rachel Zwillinger

