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Community Development Department
City of San Rafael
1400 5th Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Subject: **380 Margarita Drive; Environmental and Design Review Permit for New Single-Family Home**

Dear sir or madam:

We are longtime property owners and residents of 366 Margarita Drive (the "Piano House"), which immediately abuts the vacant, hillside property at 380 Margarita Drive. We have had an opportunity to review the proposed plans and studies prepared for the development of a new single-family home on this neighboring lot. We also attended the City's Design Review Board (DRB) meeting held on November 8, 2022. While we are not opposed to development of this property, we would like to express our concerns about the current home siting and design proposed for this vacant property. Our concerns are based on our own intimate experience with living in this steep hillside area, as well as the development and construction process that we undertook to complete major improvements on our property.

By way of background, we purchased our home at 366 Margarita Drive in 1998 Prior to the purchase of our property, we were well aware of the history of the steep hillside area upslope of Margarita Drive. Nonetheless, we chose to purchase this home because of the natural beauty of the area and the stunning views. The hillside area is known for its geologic instability, is vulnerable to fire hazard, and is difficult to access. As a result of the famous storm event of January 1982, at least a dozen landslides on this hillside were activated spewing mud and vegetation debris downward toward and over Margarita Drive. Some of this occurred again during a similar storm event in 1986. More recently, the hillside area was the subject of a number of grass fires, which are difficult for fire fighters to access due to the steep slopes and the narrowness of Margarita Drive.

In 2007, we pursued permitting and construction of major improvements to our property, which included the development of a new driveway and large parking terrace area. The improvements required substantial grading and the construction of tall, engineered retaining walls. We were required to commission numerous studies to assess the slope stability, location of landslides, groundwater conditions and drainage. Because our driveway exceeded 350 feet in length, we were also required to install a "hammerhead" at the terminus of the driveway (adjacent to the parking area) to accommodate a turnaround for emergency vehicles (fire vehicle and equipment). The engineering design costs were expensive and complicated as they had to address the challenged conditions of the hillside area adequately and safely. Even with all the safeguards in

place, we experienced mudslides and hillside fire during the site grading and construction process.

It took us several years to complete this project, which was largely attributed to seasonal restrictions on earth movement and retaining wall installation. As a result, during the rainy season, we experienced further earth movement and sliding even though site winterization measures were in place. Our personal experience has left us cautious and leery of major construction in this hillside area.

From what we learned from our personal experience, we offer the following comments and concerns about the site design and studies that have been prepared for the 380 Margarita Drive development:

1. Mudslide/landslide risk. There are two large mudslides within very close proximity of the proposed site. Both mudslide scars are at least 10 feet deep & 100 yards long. The geotechnical investigation prepared for this site is limited to three soil test borings that are specifically in the area of the proposed residents and ancillary improvements. Additional test borings should be conducted upslope and downslope from the proposed residence, pool, and driveway to determine the stability of the slopes and to document any landslides.

2. Fire truck and emergency vehicle access. Margarita Drive is extremely narrow and steep, which is challenging for fire truck and emergency vehicle access. Along this public road, there are few places to park a vehicle and the turning moves are extremely tight. Because of this condition, driveway access to individual lots has to be carefully designed to ensure safe and efficient travel for emergency vehicles and adequate off-street parking. For the proposed driveway access, the turning radius at the entrance appears to be too narrow for a fire truck. As part of the design process for our driveway, our geotechnical engineer was required to provide test borings of soil samples every seven lineal feet to demonstrate that we have sufficient bedrock to support the driveway. This type of soil testing should be required of this applicant.

3. 17-foot-tall retaining wall supporting the proposed swimming pool. The hillside is questionably steep to support the weight of a swimming pool and a 17-foot-tall retaining wall that is proposed to support the pool. The proposed retaining wall is only a few feet away from our property, so we are concerned that if the slopes fail, our property and improvements (as well as other properties downslope from this site) are at risk.

4. Overrun vegetation – fire hazard. Sections of the 12 acres are severely overgrown with scotch broom & pampas grass. The subject property is the only property around us that does not regularly remove or manage vegetation. The Country Club will continue to have a higher fire risk profile until the excessive vegetation is removed on a yearly or bi-yearly basis.

We understand that these issues are planning and environmental matters that will ultimately be addressed by the Planning Commission when this body reviews the permit application. However, some of these issues are critical to the siting and design of the proposed single-family dwelling for which the DRB will provide advice and a recommendation. Therefore, it is requested that this technical information be afforded to the DRB, so that the Board is aware of the site conditions and constraints that greatly influence site design and safety.

In closing, we would like to reiterate that we are not opposed to the development of this site. In fact, we support the approval and development of a safe and well-designed home. . .and, more importantly, we welcome our new neighbors. Our concern is with the unique constraints and challenges that come with development of this hillside property. We look forward to your considering and addressing our concerns, as well as our continued participation in the Design Review process.

Sincerely,

Sasan Faramazi

Theresa Campbell