



SAN RAFAEL
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

Community Development Department – Planning Division

Meeting Date: July 18, 2023
Case Numbers: PLAN21-039, ZC21-001, UP21-007, ED21-024, TS21-002, IS21-002 & DA21-001
Project Planner: Heather Hines, Project Manager
Jeff Ballantine, Senior Planner
Alicia Giudice, CDD Director
Agenda Item: 2

REPORT TO THE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

SUBJECT: Northgate Town Square Project. 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 Vesting Tentative Subdivision 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 two-phase mixed-use development including a total of approximately 220,000 square feet of retail and 1,422 residential units on the 44.76-acre site. APNs: 175-060-12, -40, -59, -61, -66 & -67; General Commercial (GC) District; Merlone Geier Partners, owner/applicant.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROPOSED PROJECT

The applicant is seeking Zoning Amendments to rezone the site to a PD zoning; Vesting Tentative Subdivision Map to create 6 parcels for new residential or mixed use buildings and 18 parcels for existing and new commercial buildings and existing parking lots; Master Use Permit to program the uses of the site with a mix of uses; Environmental and Design Review Permit overall site plan, building architecture, landscaping, and other site improvements for the project; Master Sign Program; and Density Bonus which allows the applicant flexibility on development standards.

The proposed project includes a comprehensive redevelopment of the existing Northgate Mall into a phased mixed-use development. The two primary phases of the project consist of the 2025 Master Plan and the 2040 Vision Plan with proposed development for each phase is generally summarized as follows:

2025 Master Plan (Sheet SD-10):

- Demolition of 337,446 square feet of existing retail
- Construction of 44,380 square feet of new retail
- Development of 922 residential units inclusive of 96 affordable units
- Creation of 48,075 square foot town square and 12,934 square foot bike hub with amenities

2040 Vision Plan (Sheet SD-14):

- Demolition of 339,861 square feet of existing retail
- Construction of 55,440 square feet of new retail
- Development of 500 residential units inclusive of 51 affordable units
- Elimination of an existing 25,725 square foot open space area

In total the full redevelopment project results in 1422 residential units, inclusive of 147 lower income affordable units, and 217,520 square feet of retail.

BACKGROUND

To date the Northgate Town Center Project has received multiple rounds of feedback from both the Planning Commission and Design Review Board as well as community input through the applicant's community engagement efforts. The applicant has continued to refine the project to respond to feedback and to comply with the City's adopted policies and regulations. Most recently, the Planning Commission held a study session in November 2022 at which time the Commission expressed overall support of the project and the site plan and layout of the proposed project. Detailed background information on the project site and the project application is available in the November 29, 2022 Planning Commission staff report. The Planning Commission did not recommend significant alteration to the site plan or mix of uses. However, the Planning Commission provided the following feedback on specific components of the project:

- **Size and Location of Town Square:** The Commission voiced concern that the size of the town square may not be adequate to serve both the new residential density within the project and the surrounding community. They also suggested particular attention to ensure adequate connection between the square and the commercial components of the project to ensure viability and vitality.
- **Mix of Housing Types:** The Planning Commission was in general agreement that the mix of housing types proposed had improved in response to comments from the last study session, including the addition of ownership units. The Commission suggested looking at adding smaller ownership units.
- **Location and Phasing of Affordable Housing:** A majority of the Planning Commission understood the benefit of partnering with an affordable housing developer to provide the lower income units in a separate component in Phase 1.
- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections:** The Commission requested particular attention be paid further improvements to the connectivity of the multi-modal pathways to and through the site.

Since that study session the applicant has continued to refine the project as illustrated in the revised plan set submitted in May 2023. Refer to Exhibit 2 for applicant narrative outlining revisions. The project as proposed furthers many of the City's guiding principles, including the construction of more housing, increasing housing choices, improving housing affordability, improving bicycle and pedestrian modes and enhancing public transit, creating great public spaces, and supporting the creation of a positive business climate.

The DRB has also reviewed and provided feedback on the Northgate Town Square Project at two previous study sessions as discussed in the Background section below. A summary of comments provided by the DRB and by the Planning Commission during previous study sessions for this project are included in Exhibit 4.

PURPOSE OF REVIEW

In response to comments provided by the Planning Commission on November 29, 2022 and by the Design Review Board on May 17, 2022, the project applicant provided a full set of revised plans on May 9, 2023 (Exhibit 1). Additionally, a narrative describing the revisions is included as Exhibit 2.

Due to the overall size and complexity of the proposed project, staff is recommending that the DRB focus on the four topic areas listed below. The July 18th meeting will focus on providing the DRB with an information report on the overall site plan, the bicycle and pedestrian network, the overall landscape plan, and the architecture of the commercial development. This will allow the DRB to receive information on these elements of the project and provide opportunity to ask staff and the architect questions to gain clarity. If the DRB needs additional discussion and review on these items prior to making their

recommendation or feedback, staff recommends the item be continued to a date certain to continue discussion of these items at the August 8th meeting. Discussion on the residential architecture will be presented at a separate meeting for the DRB's recommendation and feedback.

Each of the four items for review at the July 18th hearing is discussed in detail below, including restating previous feedback from the DRB and Planning Commission, subsequent revisions made to the plans, and relevant policy/regulatory guidance.

1. Overall Site Plan

The applicant made minor modifications to the overall site plan and project layout as part of the May 2023 revisions given the overall support from the Planning Commission during their review of the project in November 2022. Primary changes stem from the increased density on Residential 6 and the change in the footprint of Residential 5 to create a wider more defined project entry from Merrydale. These changes were directly responsive to previous DRB feedback to consider densification the area around the parking garage with residential development or a taller parking garage and create a strong "sense of arrival" with features that emphasize pedestrian and bicycle connections and promote a distinct sense of place.

Town Square

Both the Planning Commission and DRB have previously provided feedback about the proposed Town Square seeking to create a viable and community-oriented Town Square as part of the initial phase of the project with amenities, gathering places, and easy accessibility by pedestrians and cyclists. Over several rounds of plan revisions, the size of the town square increased to the current size of 48,075 square feet along with the adjacent 12,943 square foot bike hub and the inclusion of retractable bollards to allow use of the parking area between the two for special events.

The town square is proposed as part of Phase 1 to ensure that the community amenity for both new onsite residents and the larger community comes online as part of the initial redevelopment phase. The town square is designed with a range of amenities, including lounge seating under the pavilion, a children's play area, a fenced dog park, a stage, and open lawn area. The large outdoor screen has been relocated from the façade of the cinema building to the east facing side of the pavilion to facilitate watch parties on the open green. In response to DRB feedback the location of the dog park has moved to the edge of the town square and the range of amenities has increased to incorporate functional amenities for all ages. Opposite the west side of the town square are proposed locations for a community meeting room and a new satellite library. The police substation will be provided in Shop Building 2.

At the most recent Planning Commission study session in November 2022 the applicant team was once again asked to consider increasing the size of the town square and reducing parking to the west of the pavilion. This echoed the DRB's comments from the May 2022 study session to consider replacing the parking area to the west of the Town Square with open space or other active use. Although the applicant team made additional refinements to design and amenities in the Town Square as part of their May 2023 revisions, the applicant did not increase the overall size of the community space and indicated that the parking in Lot 6, west of the Town Square, is crucial to the success of the cinema and other commercial shop areas facing the interior of the development. However, the applicant has utilized a different paving design around the Town Square, including the adjacent parking areas to define the area as different and increase drivers' awareness that they are in an amenity area with increased pedestrian activity, detailed on Sheet L-20 and the corresponding paving schedule on Sheet L-L-7. The pattern and color of the stamped asphalt is notes as to be determined.

There is no specific open space requirement for commercial properties against which to require more square footage. Chapter 4 of the San Rafael General Plan identifies the importance of the Northgate Mall as a community hub and gathering space in North San Rafael and includes policy and programs that call for “additional outdoor public spaces that support public gatherings and public art” and “continued community services, which may include an expanded public library”. Programs NH-4.2B and NH-4.2D call for outdoor gathering spaces that support community activities such as children’s play areas, teen-centered spaces, and outdoor seating and creation of a Farmers Market to the town Center as a permanent feature. Program CDP-3.1E encourages development of public art, publicly accessible plazas, and other activated spaces in new and redeveloped projects, especially in the Northgate Mall/North San Rafael Town Center area.

The location, size, and design of the town center as proposed appears to meet the policy direction to support the provision of enhanced community space to both support the redevelopment of the project itself and to provide a community hub for the surrounding community. The specific programming of the space to include community activities such as summer concert series, movie nights, watch parties, and farmers market will also be an important aspect of the project. In response to community input, there will be a specific condition on ultimate project approval to ensure final construction plans for the town center include a toddler play area. Additionally, given the references to facilitating public art as part of the community spaces in this area, staff recommends a condition of approval requiring incorporation of public art into the final design of the Town Square to be approved through the San Rafael Public Art Review Board.

Transit Hub

A comment from the DRB at their May 2022 study session asked the applicant to consider providing a transit hub within the site. In response to this comment the applicant team met with Marin County Transit to explore options for expanding transit service into the site. Marin County Transit indicated that they did not want to expand the existing route into the Northgate project but did request upgrades to the existing bus stop located on Las Gallinas near the Rite Aid. The revised plans include addition of the requested transit amenities at the existing bus stop, including the addition of a waste receptacle, installation of two bike racks, and installation of two bike lockers as shown on Sheet L-29 and corresponding notes on Sheet L-7.

Street Sections

Sheet L-30 in the revised plan set includes reference to the street sections created as part of the redevelopment of the site. The associated street sections included on Sheets L-32 to L-35 provide a comprehensive look at the layout and prioritization of each of the new streets interior to the site. Likewise, Sheet L-56 to L-58 show sections for the new streets added as part of the 2040 Vision Plan phase of the project.

Each of the street show proposed planter/storm water detention areas and walk zones in relation to exterior active space. Looking specifically at Sections 5 specifically illustrates the layout of interior drive between the bike hub and the Town Square, the area that is designed with retractable bollards to use as expanded community space for special events. On either side of the travel/parking lanes is planter area and walk zones to create a more robust pedestrian-oriented streetscape.

Parking Areas

The DRB had previously provided feedback that the existing parking garage could be better utilized by potentially increasing the capacity and/or height of the existing structure. The applicant has indicated that the existing structural capacity does not allow additional load prohibiting the addition of a third or fourth story. The applicant team has added functional and aesthetic design features to the existing structure, including the entry tower and solar installation to better utilize the garage and improve the appearance within the overall project.

The [City's Design Guidelines](#) offer suggestions to address parking lots in an effort "to enhance its environs and achieve community values of pedestrian friendly and people-oriented design". The following guidelines were considered as part of the project review:

- A logical sequence of entry and arrival as part of the site's design should be provided.
- Where possible, design entrances from the street to direct views towards the building entry.
- Parking should be distributed to provide easy access to building entrances.
- Where possible, parking should be located to the rear or side of a building in order to reduce the visual impact of parking areas.
- Design for adequate vehicle maneuverability in parking areas. Vehicles should not back out from a parking space onto the street.
- Parking areas should be screened from the street with hedges, walls, fences or berms, subject to security considerations.
- On major arterials, where possible and appropriate, consolidate curb cuts and reduce entry and exit conflicts.
- Auto and pedestrian entrances into the development should be easy to find. For example, special entry treatments, such as colored concrete, special planting and signage should be located at the entries to the site.
- Shade trees should be provided in parking lots per the zoning ordinance.

Overall, the project layout appears well thought out to provide needed revitalization of the Northgate Mall, with the addition of needed housing, reinvestment in commercial activities, and creation of a community gathering space. The overall site plan is designed to carefully consider the success of the mix of uses on site and minimize impact to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Some outstanding questions include:

- Appropriate pattern and color of the stamped asphalt around the Town Square to create the desired design impact?
- Where the appropriate placement or type of public art for the Town Square should be?

2. Bicycle and Pedestrian Network.

The bicycle and pedestrian network are an essential element of the Northgate Town Center project and vital to the overall success of the center into the future. Previous comments from both the Planning Commission and Design Review Board focused on strengthening access to and through the site to encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation and build connections with the larger transportation network.

Marin County Bicycle Coalition and WTB-TAM co-authored a public comment letter submitted for consideration as part of the November 2022 Planning Commission study session (Exhibit 6). The letter includes the following request for revisions in an effort to create a modern redevelopment project "where people are walking and biking for a large number of trips, and driving is safe and still common but not required for all travel":

- Expand sidewalk width (>5 ft) to create a more comfortable pedestrian experience.
- Reduce the curb radius where internal streets meet an external road to enhance pedestrian safety.
- Introduce traffic calming measures to the internal circulation, including raised crosswalks.

- Revise the width of automobile lanes to less than 10 feet to reduce speeds and increase pedestrian safety.
- Straighten the multi-use path from Merrydale to reduce the meandering design and provide more direct access to create clear straight lines for bicyclists.
- Create bicycle accommodation to the site from the west and reduce vehicle lane width at Lot 9 to reduce speeds and provide safe bicyclist access.
- Pull back the crossing of the multi-use path from vehicular intersections to increase visibility for cyclists (Merrydale Road driveway and Street B).
- Replace Class 2 on street bicycle lanes with separated multi-use paths.
- Reduce onsite parking for project to encourage use of alternative modes of transportation.
- Consider replacing excess parking with increased public amenities.
- Provide improved connection to the SMART multi-use path and Civic Center SMART station.

The applicant team met with Marin County Bicycle Coalition and WTB-TAM and made a series of responsive revisions included in the May 2023 resubmittal. Changes include reduction of the interior street maximum width of 26 feet to maintain required fire truck access; extension of the multi-modal Class I path along Northgate Drive to El Faisan Drive; improved access to the project from the west and northwest corners; and added bicycle parking facilities. MCBC indicated overall support of the project based on the changes that the applicant has made to address comments.

The applicant did not reduce onsite parking per recommendations from MCBC and WTB-TAM. The City does not have parking maximums to require reduction in the proposed onsite parking.

Sheet L-3 provides an overview of the proposed bicycle connectivity plan for the 2025 Master Plan. Enhanced connectivity is shown within the project and include a range of facilities depending on the surrounding land uses. Sheet L-38 shows incremental changes in the bicycle network as changes are made during Phase 2 of the project implementation, including demolition of the existing Macy's building.

Merrydale Promenade

The project plans provide a multi-modal site connectivity map (Sheet SD-5) demonstrating how the Northgate site connects to existing and proposed multi-modal facilities in the vicinity. This includes reference to the proposed bike lane and Class I multi-use pathway on Merrydale to connect to the Civic Center SMART station. The project itself does not propose to complete the necessary off site improvements to complete this connection, but instead the applicant has proposed a payment to the City for a portion of the anticipated cost of constructing the North San Rafael Promenade which was initially 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. Proposed 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 calls for improved 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. Corresponding Program NH-4.4A provides that the City

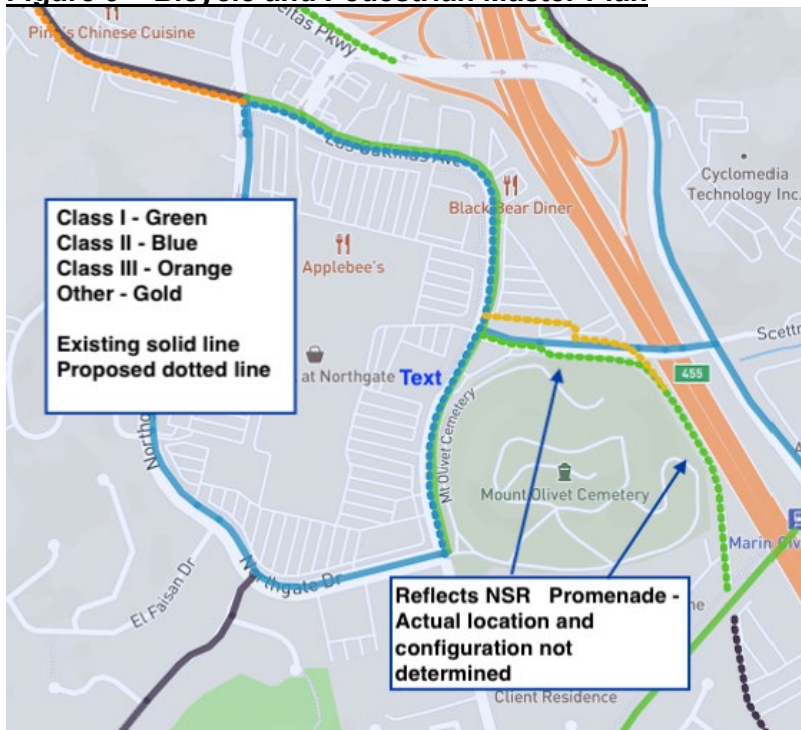
should use the development review and capital improvement program process to complete the North San Rafael Promenade through the Town Center. Considerations include:

- 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.

Additionally, Program NH-4.4B calls for support to redesign 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



While the Northgate Town Square Project does not include offsite improvements to the Promenade, plans do include a Class I multi-modal path extending west to the town square, consistent with the

policy direction. The project will also provide a Class I pathway to the south and north on Las Gallinas extending to Northgate Drive to at the northwest corner of the site and to the intersection of El Faisan Drive at the southern boundary of the site.

For a western connection to Northgate Drive, such improvements are constrained by grade differences between the project site and Northgate Drive, though a Class II connection is provided to the west in two locations within the site.

Bike Facilities

Sheets L-3 and L-38 illustrate bike parking distributed throughout the site. All residential buildings are designed with interior bike rooms and 84 bike lockers are provided in the parking structure. Additional bike racks are distributed across the site, with particular emphasis on ensuring that there is bike parking near all commercial uses and conveniently located for all residential buildings. As noted above, this includes the provision of both bike racks and bike lockers at the existing bus stop near the Rite Aid building to provide improved amenities for transit ridership.

An approximately 12,934 square foot area in front of the Cinema and directly across from the Town Square provides a bike hub with fix it facilities for bicyclists. This area includes benches, picnic tables, lounge seating and umbrellas. Additionally, there is a small overhead proposed for a coffee or juice shop and a larger overhead container for bike storage and repairs. (Sheet L-60).

The [City's Design Guidelines](#) provide suggestions for pedestrian circulation for application to the project as appropriate, including:

- Consider pedestrian orientation when designing building entries, windows, signage and doors.
- Include a well-defined pedestrian walkway between the street and building entries.
- Clearly define pedestrian movement through the parking lot. For example, provide changes in pavement or separate landscaped walkways.
- Where appropriate, pedestrian walkways should be provided between adjacent lots.
- Special design elements should be included, such as bollards, pots, benches, trash cans, unique paving, tree grates, tree guards and pedestrian lighting to add visual richness to areas designed for pedestrian access.
- Where appropriate, include outdoor gathering places and seating for the public.
- Adequate facilities should be provided for bicycle parking, consistent with zoning requirements.

The applicant has made significant changes to the overall bicycle and pedestrian connectivity within the project site and to access neighboring facilities. The addition of expanded landscape design also lends to the enjoyment and success of these connections in providing a safe and enjoyable facilities that encourage the use of active transportation.

Some outstanding questions include:

- Should the applicant refine pedestrian access within the surface parking areas to better define safe pedestrian movement, such as additional defined pedestrian walkways and/or increased parking lot landscaping?
- What are the additional improvements that should be considered to ensure successful implementation of the Merrydale Promenade?
- Should raised crosswalks within key areas within the project, such as around the town square, be further explored to enhance safe and inviting pedestrian access?

3. Overall Landscaping Plan.

Revised plans present a robust planting palette designed for beautification, shading, and screening. Trees are used to enhance streetscapes, provide shade in parking areas, and ring the town square. Larger specimen trees are proposed to be planted as 48-inch box trees in strategic areas and most street trees are proposed to be planted as 36-inch box trees. While landscaping was not specifically called out in the previous DRB study sessions, the landscape design supports the success of many important aspects of the projects, including facilitation of walking and biking, creation of strong gateways into the project, promotion of sustainability, and creation of inviting community gathering areas.

General Plan policy NH-4.3 calls for aesthetically pleasing design, including upgrading of landscaping and more specifically Program NH-3.A calls for creating landscaped walkways to support pedestrian friendly design. More generally, Policy CDP-4.10 recognizes the importance of landscaping that conserves water, contributes to neighborhood quality, complements building forms and materials, improves stormwater management and drainage, and enhances streetscape.

The [City's Design Guidelines](#) for non-residential development include the following suggestions for landscaping:

- Landscaped areas should be planned as integral parts of the development and to create a strongly landscaped character for the site.
- Unightly uses should be screened.
- Commercial signage or displays should not be hidden with landscaping.
- Trees should be planted in a variety of locations, such as along the side property lines, clustered in planting areas, or distributed throughout the parking lot, consistent with the zoning ordinance.
- Pedestrian areas should be made visually attractive with special planting and flowering trees.
- Where feasible, landscape the area between the building and the property line even when a building is located at the minimum required side or rear yard setback.
- Retain and maintain existing public street trees and add additional street trees where practical.

Landscaping has specifically been proposed as screening along the southern elevation of the Cinema, a large block structure that borders town home entries on the opposite side of the interior street. Is the proposed use of Fern Pines or Pin Oaks along this frontage appropriate given the height and massing of the cinema? Is there additional species that the DRB would suggest to increase appropriate screening in any specific areas?

The applicant provided additional detail on water usage for all landscaping proposed in the project's plant palette (Sheets L-1 and L-36) in addition to identification of which species are California native. This additional detail is provided at Exhibit 5 for the DRB's consideration. Are there species that the DRB believes are inappropriate to use or are not used appropriately for its intended purpose to enhance the project (shading, screening, etc.) The project will be conditioned to submit final landscape and irrigation plans to Marin Municipal Water District for final approval consistent with water efficiency standards.

The landscape sheets in the revised plan provide detailed enlargements for each of six areas in the 2025 Master Plan and four areas in the 2040 Vision Plan. These are also enhanced by site amenity details, a fencing plan, and street section views.

Some outstanding questions include:

- Are proposed tree species appropriate for the design and to achieve a strong landscape character?
- Are there areas where additional larger specimens would enhance use of area?
- Is the proposed landscaping along the rear cinema wall adequate to achieve desired screening adjacent to townhomes?

4. Commercial Architecture.

At their September 2021 study session, the DRB provided feedback that they were looking for cohesive and unifying architectural design and suggested avoidance of long blank walls, consideration of ground floor pedestrian passages, and provision of active pedestrian-oriented street frontages. Subsequently at their May 2022 study session the DRB commented that the architecture was not cohesive throughout the project and specifically the DRB questioned the use of red brick.

Revised plans have refined the architectural design and enhanced entries and adjacent outdoor areas in response to feedback. The cinema being one of the larger buildings, the applicant has focused on ways to break up the large wall expanses both through materials and colors and enhanced landscaping. Glazing has been added to a portion of the south elevation of the cinema to create interest at the ground level and further break up the large wall that faces the townhomes on Residential 2. An artistic relief has been incorporated into the east elevation of the cinema which faces Residential 4.

Ground floor storefront details have been added to create interest and human scale and outdoor dining has been designed to create a public realm throughout the revitalized commercial areas. Four pad buildings are proposed along Las Gallinas to create a more urban street edge and staff has encouraged four-sided architecture for each of these pads and the new pad building proposed on Northgate to ensure that the additional commercial structures do not turn their back to the public realm.

Building lighting has been included with the material cutsheets for each of the commercial buildings to respond to the DRB's previous request for lighting details. A final photometric plan will be required as a condition of approval to ensure that light intensity is limited and does not illuminate beyond the boundaries of the site. Design guidelines specific to non-residential lighting include the following:

- Limit the intensity of lighting to provide for adequate site security and for pedestrian and vehicular safety.
- Shield light sources to prevent glare and illumination beyond the boundaries for the project.
- Lighting fixtures should complement the architecture of the project.

General Plan policies specific to the Northgate Mall call for harmonious and aesthetically pleasing design and an upgrade of the appearance of existing buildings and landscaping. The Community Design and Preservation Element includes Policy CDP-2.1 to improve the appearance and function of mixed-use districts such as the North San Rafael Town Center and Program CDP-2.5A which calls for implementation of urban design improvements in commercial districts.

The [City's Design Guidelines](#) provide suggestions related to building form, entry ways, towers, arcades, awnings, and materials/color, including the following:

- Where appropriate, locate the building, or a substantial portion of the building along the front yard setback or street edge to create spatial enclosure in relation to the street.
- Consider the pedestrian experience when designing the ground floor of buildings.

- A continuity of design, materials, color, form, and architectural details is encouraged for all portions of a building and between all the buildings on the site.
- Consider the development's visual and spatial relationship to adjacent buildings and other structures in the area.
- A defined sense of entry with pedestrian orientation should be provided.
- Building entrances should be defined with architectural elements such as roof form changes, awnings or other architectural elements.
- If a tower is included in the design, it should perform a definite on-site function, such as delineating an entrance to a site or a building entry or emphasizing a display window.
- The tower should provide an attractive distinctive silhouette against the sky.
- Where appropriate, the visual bulk of the upper portion of the tower should be reduced to reduce its apparent bulk, for example with openings through it or with open latticework.
- Arcades may be used in shopping areas to provide weather protection for shoppers, add a sense of unity to a larger project and/or provide depth to the building.
- Arcades may be topped with a simple broad band for tenant signing. Internal illumination may be used to emphasize arcade forms at night.
- Where appropriate, provide well-designed awnings to enhance the design of the building, provide weather protection, and add liveliness, interest and a sense of human scale.
- Provide a uniform treatment of awnings on multi-tenant buildings.
- Awning colors may be varied and should be compatible with the colors of the building and of adjacent buildings.
- Signs may be provided on an awning, consistent with the zoning ordinance.
- Translucent, internally illuminated awnings are not encouraged.
- Minimum height above grade: 8 feet; 14 feet at alleys, parking lots or other areas with vehicular traffic
- Maximum horizontal projection (from face of building): 7 feet, or 66% of the distance between the building and curb, whichever is less
- Minimum distance to curb: 2 feet between the awning and curb
- Use articulation, texturing and detailing on all concrete exposed to exterior view.
- Exterior materials should minimize reflectivity.
- Use color to provide appropriate accents on a building.

Some outstanding questions include:

- Does the use color accents appropriately break up the massing of the cinema building?
- Is the mountain design relief on the east elevation of the cinema appropriate to soften the impact of the expansive wall?
- Is the tower element on the parking garage provide an attractive and functional design modification to the existing parking structure?
- Do the storefront refinements create the appropriate human scale to the new shop buildings and create defined sense of entry?
- Do the four proposed pad buildings along Northgate and Las Gallinas provide appropriate four-sided architecture to engage both with the Northgate project and create a strong edge along the existing streetscapes at the edge of the property?

Next Steps

Staff is seeking the Design Review Board's recommendation and feedback for refinement on the four focus areas outlined above. After accepting staff's report and presentation, the applicant's presentation, and receiving public input, if the DRB needs additional time for discussion on these items staff recommends that the Design Review Board continue the meeting to a date certain of August 8, 2023. In

that case, staff would provide a summary report on August 8th and ask the DRB to deliberate and provide recommendations on the 4 topic areas listed above.

The DRB's review and recommendation on the residential architecture will be scheduled for a subsequent and separately noticed public hearing.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public Notice for this Design Review Board meeting was provided at least 15 days prior to the Planning Commission meeting date in the following ways:

- Public Notice in the Marin IJ published 15-days prior to the meeting day.
- Public Hearing posters were installed on the Northgate site. Five posters were placed at various locations along the property announcing the date/time and identifying the item as 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 Distribute to all Homeowners Association and Neighborhood Association and individuals and organizations on the City's interested parties list.
- Email notice 1100+ emails from a online notification list
- Notice of was advertised on Snapshot.
- The project website was updated to inform visitors to the site that a public meeting is scheduled for July 18, 2023.
- Post on social media, including, Nextdoor and Facebook

Staff have received comments throughout the review process. Comments received subsequent to mailing of the above notice are attached to this report as Exhibit 6.

To date, the Northgate Town Center Project has been considered at four public meetings hosted by the City of San Rafael, including:

- [PC & DRB Study Session September 14, 2021,](#)
- [EIR Scoping Meeting – January 11, 2022,](#)
- [DRB Study Session – May 17, 2022,](#)
- [PC Study Session – November 29, 2022,](#)

In addition to the four City sponsored meetings outlined above, the applicant team has sought to get community feedback separately from the following organizations:

- Responsible Growth Marin
- Mont Marin/San Rafael Park
- San Rafael Chamber of Commerce
- Public Presentation to Community
- Villa Marin Town Hall
- Terra Linda Neighborhood Association
- Marin Organizing Committee
- Terra Linda Neighborhood Association
- Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Mt. Olivet Cemetery
- Miller Creek School District

- Housing Crisis Action
- Alma Via
- WTB-TAM
- Marin Transit
- League of Women Voters
- Marin Environmental Housing Collaborative
- National Night Out
- Greenbelt Alliance
- YIMBY Action
- Marin County Bicycle Coalition
- Community-Wide Open House
- Canal Alliance
- Bay Area Council
- Gallinas Watershed Council

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Design Review Board accept this report and staff's presentation, receive a presentation from the applicant team, and receive public comment and continued to a date certain of August 8th for further deliberation.

EXHIBITS

1. Project Plans, 5/9/2023, on project webpage:
<https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square-rev/>
2. [Resubmittal Narrative, 5/9/2023](#)
3. [Project Description, 5/9/2023](#)
4. [Northgate PC and DRB Study Session Comments](#)
5. [Plant Palette, 7/11/2023](#)
6. [MCBC and WTB-TAM Comments, 11/29/2022](#)
7. [Public Comments](#)

July 18, 2023

To: San Rafael Design Review Board

Re: Northgate Town Square Project, 5800 Northgate Drive, San Rafael

Dear Design Review Board members,

As an advisory body to the San Rafael Planning Commission, this evening you will discuss making recommendations to the Planning Commission regarding the Environmental and Design Review Permit for the Northgate Town Square Project. I request that you consider the following items in crafting your recommendations to the Planning Commission regarding this project.

San Rafael's Municipal Code specifies the specific purposes (14.25.010) and review criteria (14.25.050) for Environmental and Design Review Permits.

Among the purposes are: "C. Maintain and improve the quality of, and relationship between, development and the surrounding area to contribute to the attractiveness of the city" and "D. Preserve balance and harmony within neighborhoods".

Among the review criteria are: "B. Consistency with Specific Plans. 1. In addition to the criteria listed below, development will be evaluated for consistency with applicable neighborhood and area design plans. Adopted plans which include design guidelines include: Hillside Residential Design Guidelines Manual, San Rafael Design Guidelines, the San Rafael General Plan 2040, specifically the neighborhoods element, and community design and preservation element, and any design guidelines or amendments that are adopted by resolution."

While the applicant has substantially revised project plans to be consistent with North San Rafael's neighborhood plan, the North San Rafael Vision 2010 (NSRVision), and San Rafael's General Plan 2040 (GP2040), as well responding to the current need for housing in San Rafael, the proposed Northgate Town Square Project is still inconsistent with these plans in major areas and does not meet the stated purpose and review criteria.

- 1) Complete Community--Including Essential Services in New Residential Community. The proposed project will add 922 new residential units (approximately 2300 new residents) in 2025 and an additional 500 residential units (approximately 1,250 new residents) in 2040.

Where will these new residents buy their weekly groceries? Where will they go to find personal services, such as dry cleaning, haircuts, nail salons, etc.? Existing services in the surrounding neighborhood are already functioning near capacity. There is opportunity in this project to provide these services onsite, so new residents will not need to get into cars and drive to get what they need (such as at the full-service Safeway in Ignacio). However, there are no conditions in the proposed plans to provide a food market and personal services onsite. Specified retail spaces are too small to provide a substantial food market.

This is inconsistent with GP2040 policies for Complete Communities (Land Use Element, p 3-4) and for supporting lifestyles which rely less on carbon-based transportation (Housing Element, p. 43).

Project plans need to be modified and/or conditions specified in the entitlements and development agreement to ensure the Northgate Square project will be a complete community that reduces reliance on carbon-based transportation.

- 2) Gathering places in Town Center—A major component of the North San Rafael Vision 2010 (1997) was to "create a heart to North San Rafael in the Northgate shopping area..." (NSRVision, p. 4), a 'there...there' that would be a central focal point for the entire North San Rafael community.

While the applicant has substantially revised project plans to include a 1.1 acre town square with lawn, multi-age play areas, and performance stage, an adjacent 0.3 acre bike hub and an existing 0.6 acre public green space, this falls short of the size of public open space appropriate for such a large, intense development and lacks amenities needed by the surrounding community. The project actually proposes to decrease the public town center in Phase II by taking away the 0.6 public green space. In community meetings, the applicant initially stated that parking for the improved IMAX theater would be accommodated in the existing parking structure, that street-level parking west of the Town Square was required under Macy's lease, and that if/when Macy's leaves, the property will have more parking capacity than needed.

- a) In order to not be inconsistent with the intent of both the NSRVision and GP2040 for the Town Center to be a primary gathering place for the entire North San Rafael community, *the project must be modified to retain the .6 acre green space in Phase II. This needs to be a condition for entitlement approval*
- b) *Additional creative parking solutions need to be investigated for increasing onsite public space in the center of this project.*
- c) Since the departure of Taste of Tyrol (in Northgate One) and Panera bakery, North San Rafael does not have a café with adequate indoor and outdoor seating where individuals can meet for a cup of coffee or light meal. There is unmet demand to have this type of gathering place locally available; currently residents drive out of North San Rafael to find a comfortable place to meet for coffee. (To see a vibrant café culture, visit Corte Madera's Town Center Shopping Center.) Both the NSRVision (p. 12) and GP2040 (Neighborhoods Element p. 4-57) recognize a variety of restaurants and cafes with outdoor eating areas as necessary components of the central gathering place of the North San Rafael Town Center. Providing this amenity onsite will be consistent with GP2040 policies to decrease carbon-based transportation. *The project needs to specify inclusion of one or more adequately-sized indoor-outdoor cafés.*
- d) The proposed drive-through restaurant (now on Building Pad 2) incentivizes vehicle trips and is inconsistent with San Rafael's goal of reducing greenhouse gases. (GP2040 Conservation and Climate Change Element, p. 6-38). It is also inconsistent with the character of the surrounding community, which does not contain drive-through restaurants and therefore not consistent with Environmental and Design Review purpose C (see above).

Project plans need to be modified and/or conditions specified in the entitlements and development agreement to utilize creative management of street level parking to retain and potentially increase the size of public outdoor recreation space, to include one or more cafes and restaurants with outdoor seating in the Town Center, and to replace the planned drive-through restaurant with an onsite restaurant or other retail.

- 3) Transit-Oriented Development and the NSR Promenade on Merrydale Road. Given the City's longstanding commitment to the conceptual plan for the North San Rafael Promenade from the Terra Linda Community Center to the Marin County Civic Center and given this project's categorization as a transit-oriented development, with the accompanying density, parking, and other benefits, staff's question is very pertinent: "What are the additional improvements that should be considered to ensure successful implementation of the Merrydale Promenade?" What responsibility does the applicant have, in exchange for transit-oriented status, to ensure that safe, convenient access to the SMART station is actually completed? *Project conditions need to specify a sufficient contribution by the applicant to the Merrydale Promenade to ensure its final design and completion.*

According to the San Rafael Municipal Code (14.25.020), the Planning Commission has authority to approve, conditionally approve, or deny applications for environmental and design review permits. Please remember that, particularly with a project of as long duration and as large as this one, the City can include requirements in a development agreement beyond what can be mandated by ordinances. I suggest that you recommend that the Planning Commission give conditional approval of the Environmental and Design Permit for this project, specifying the above conditions be included in the entitlements or the development agreement for this project so that it is consistent with the neighborhood plan and San Rafael's General Plan 2040.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Shirley Fischer [REDACTED]

North San Rafael Vision Steering Committee, 1996-1998

North San Rafael Vision in Action Committee, 1999-2005

North San Rafael Promenade Conceptual Plan, 2002

San Rafael Department of Public Works (DPW) Promenade on Merrydale Advisory Committee, 2016-2019

San Rafael DPW GP2040 Mobility Element traffic methodologies advisory group, 2020-2021

Responsible Growth in Marin, 2019-present

Public Comments

Submitted after DRB Packet Distribution

7/17/2023

Gina Fromer

I support this anchor space in San Rafael I moved out of San Rafael to be closer to an area that would meet my shopping needs in Novato. However, I continue to come down to this space to shop. It's an amazing space and we miss the restaurants.

It's sad to see the closed stores and lack of investment. Neighbors are getting used to the quiet when in reality this place should be a robust and bustling area. It's what it was zoned for and what it should remain. Converting to this new multi use space brings us back into the times. And over time the neighbors will love to have it. I support the print at and May move back to San Rafael.

Gina Fromer, PhD
23 year resident Marin

Nina Lilienthal-Murphy

Mr. Ballantine if you would please read my comment below at the Tuesday, July 18th, 2023 DRB meeting:

Mr. Ballantine, I feel the proposal for the Northgate Shopping Center (where the Sears & Macy's are located) is a huge mistake. It will add a minimum of 3,000 cars to the area, making every day a Christmas holiday, not to include the noise. The traffic alone will be a nightmare for all surrounding residents and every person who wants to visit this area. This be beyond insulting. I wish the proposers would consider the residents, like me who have lived here 42 years, and are not ready to continue the traffic nightmare our Mayor has created for us over the past 3 years, NON-STOP!!!! We the people need a break!!!!

thank you,
Nina Lilienthal-Murphy
President & Co-founder of the
Lincoln-San Rafael Hill Neighborhood Assoc.

Michele Chambers

I have been a resident here my whole life I'm 52 my grandparents moved here from Brooklyn with my mom and two aunts . It is a great area but with all the buildings going on and more homes being built and prices of homes going up which let me tell you are not worth the selling prices . The mall used to be great when it was an outdoor mall and to put it not so delicately it stinks! It has for some time nothing there old theater no stores no restaurants. The thing is your plan is no better way too many homes too tall I mean 7 story? Really we are a small area not enough space for all this development. Traffic will be awful school overflow . Why ? There is nothing for kids to do here and for adults . Maybe a nice bowling alley or a place for kids to go like a park not a small one either . Homes on top of homes and more outdoor areas . Plus Home Goods and rite aid will probably go eventually and those stores are needed . Especially rite aid for the elderly who rely to get medicine or other items . It's terrible that it's all about dollar signs \$ and don't say that it's not and you guys care about community. You will only have

the amount of low cost houses that is required but why not make more low cost available than you need instead of homes for the rich. I personally rather have had a Costco instead at least people shop and go home . Now people will live here and it will be so congested. Make some nice restaurants not these fast food chains like BJ and Applebees used to be . Actual real food not grease. If the mall is redone at least at xmas decorations would be nice . The old mall had decorations in parking lot and in stores not those so called poinsettia in mall now you barely see . We used to have an outdoor train for kids to go around mall .at xmas . Have a bakery and outdoor area not indoor mall . Like town center it's nice there to sit on a nice day and even with rain people will find a place to go to eat and get out of the cold weather . We used to have a fountain at mall . You guys will do what you want and most likely won't get back to me and my words will be swept under rug , and maybe you don't care how big Terra Linda gets because you don't live here or you somehow think it will be good and create jobs ... but look at this area . It's not big it will only get smaller . Just because there is open space and land doesn't mean we have to build on it . Leave it be that's the beauty of this area the mountains . Not looking at home after home . I'm sure people wil rent or buy those places but I wouldn't who wants to overlook a cemetery and a bank and shopping malls . This project wont be don't in 2028 so many things can happen when building a big project , delays and weather. 5 stories is no good but better than 7 . Just re do mall forget homes is what I'd do . Terra Linda residents don't want to be a big city the small and beautiful scenery is what most people I think like and liked about moving here especially the ones who have lived her many years . So count your money once you do want your going to do regardless of we say and want , but remember money is not everything you can't take it with you.



IN YOUR CORNER

July 17, 2023

City of San Rafael Planning Commission

Shingai Samudzi

Kelli Shalk

Aldo Mercado

Jill Rodby

Samina Saude

Jon Haveman

Jon Previtali

RE: Community Action Marin Statement in Support of 5800 Northgate Drive, Northgate Town Square Environmental and Design Review Permit

VIA EMAIL: to PlanningPublicComment@cityofsanrafael.org

Dear Members of the City of San Rafael Planning Commission:

I'm writing on behalf of Community Action Marin, the largest nonprofit human services provider in Marin County. We serve over 7,000 households each year with a focus on addressing the causes and consequences of poverty. The agency operates high-quality, free and affordable early childhood programs for families of low income, providing critical services to residents of Marin County across a crisis-to-thriving continuum. Our 200+ staff also provide safety net services such as rental and utility assistance, outreach to our unhoused neighbors, workforce development, and financial coaching to support everyone in pursuing their dreams in our community.

Community Action Marin stands in strong support of the Northgate Town Center Project and seeks to expand its potential. This project is a critical investment in local infrastructure with its commitment to affordable housing to serve the needs of the diverse children and families who call San Rafael home. ***We believe that it will have tremendous community benefit and we will work with the City of San Rafael and others to ensure that childcare is considered as part of the development project.***

Children & Family Services

Early Childhood Education

Home Visiting Program

Family Childcare Network

Learning Gardens

Safety Net

Rent & Utility Assistance

Emergency Family Needs

Homeless Outreach

Food Security

Tax Help

Economic Justice

Financial & Credit Coaching

Careers & Workforce Training

Resource Connections

Food Justice

Commercial Kitchen

Healthy Meals

Production Farm

Apprentice Program

Equity Initiatives

Mental Health & Well-being

Housing Justice

There is not enough childcare locally to meet the need

Community Action Marin is the largest provider of childcare to families of low income in Marin County, with capacity to provide free and affordable childcare to over 500 children. Many of those we serve are essential workers in our community. We maintain waitlists across all of our sites, including those in San Rafael: 215 Mission Street, 1123 Court Street, 251 N. San Pedro Road, and 498 Point San Pedro Road. Our current waitlist is approximately double our current capacity, with particular need for infant and toddler slots.

Classroom space is a barrier to childcare expansion to meet community needs

The availability of appropriate classroom space is a significant barrier to expanding child care options to meet the need. Providers across Marin County are not able to take advantage of state funds for desperately needed childcare expansion because they are struggling to maintain existing classroom space that is being reclaimed by school districts, or there is a lack of other classroom options. Increased availability of appropriate classroom space is needed to expand local childcare capacity to meet tremendous need.

Sound environmental and design review should include assessment of childcare to ensure a community multiplier effect

We know that child care makes many things possible: children's healthy development and early learning, school readiness, employment support for working parents, a community where essential workers and their employers can count on stable care arrangements, and more to benefit San Rafael and our larger community.

This project is a unique opportunity to increase the availability of childcare classroom space. It will allow childcare resources to support the local workforce and economy. It will support the affordable housing residents and families at Northgate Town Center.

We urge your consideration and support. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Chandra Alexandre
Chief Executive Officer