

# **Public Comments**

**9/6/2023**

## **Norm Levin**

As a 32-year resident of Terra Linda, I've found our neighborhood to be ideal for raising my family, conducive to home-based work and enjoying the scenic and accessible open space. Despite all the amenities of suburban living, even Terra Linda has had its shortcomings. The ongoing downslide of the Northgate Mall has been one of those. Unlike newer, more upscale malls to our south in Corte Madera, Northgate has always been somewhat behind the times. When Merlone Geier Partners purchased the property, I had hopes that it would finally be upgraded to better serve the neighborhood. And beyond.

They proposed removing listless retailers like Sears and Macy's, along with the interior row of teen-targeted stores like Forever 21. The movie theatre complex, too, needs an upgrade. More outdoor food and beverage providers were encouraged to join, such as Ounces. Outdoor summer concerts drew more people. Despite all these efforts, the mall continued to devolve. Merlone Geier courted Costco as the anchor retailer. This triggered much resistance among the neighborhood, fearing increased and unmanageable traffic. Bye-bye Costco!

Now the newest proposal, well on its way to being approved, would almost completely remake the mall into a mixed use retail/high-density residential complex. The plan would eventually build 1,422 residential units on the 44.76 acre site. Indeed, there's a need for more "affordable" housing in Marin. Yet only 10% of these units are thus designated.

Overall, the City of San Rafael has a population density of 3,700 people per square mile, based on 2.5 people/unit. The new Northgate would have a density of over 53,000 people per square mile! It would be the most densely populated area in all of Marin. Its 3,550 added residents would impose undue stress on the current infrastructure of roads, water supplies, electrical demands, emergency, healthcare and educational institutions.

Let's look at traffic for example. With only single lane Northgate Drive and Los Ranchitos as the mall's feeder streets, everyday traffic would be extremely congested. The intersection of Northgate and Las Gallinas leading to Freitas Parkway and onto Hwy 101, is already a stop-light managed bottleneck. Now imagine the situation in a natural disaster such as a wildfire or earthquake where thousands of cars filled with panicky residents are trying to flee. Even if more streets were built, they would have to lead to Highway 101. There's simply no way out. One only has to look at the recent calamitous wildfire in Lahina in Maui to see what that nightmare scenario here would be like.

For years, I've resented the prevailing NIMBY mentality that has prevented or at least delayed nearly all mid-large scale developments in our county. Those are selfish people, I'd say to myself. Not every proposed housing, retail or commercial project is inherently damaging to our cherished way of life. Yet, I now find myself looking at the drawings and projections for this new Northgate with apprehension. Simply stated, it does not fit. It is too damn big.

As a compromise, let's consider reducing to <500 units housing fewer than 1,000 people. While it would still strain the existing infrastructure, the revision could be made to work. Let's give that idea a long look.

Sincerely,  
Norm Levin

**Ashley Suhr**

Hello! This is less of a public comment and more of a general question regarding the Northgate Development Plan. Is a specialty grocery store included in the plans? I believe a specialty grocery store would greatly benefit and elevate the Terra Linda community. I moved here two years ago and one of my only complaints is for the local Safeway. Other communities just north (Novato) and south (Greenbrae, Larkspur, Mill Valley) have multiple specialty stores such as Mollie Stones, Whole Foods, The Nugget. It would be wonderful to see something along these lines in our TL community.

Thank you!  
Ashley Suhr

**Joan Wlodaver**

Hello,

Please consider my comments as part of your evaluation for the entire Northgate Mall Project.

- Seven stories is way too high for the area!! It's way taller than any nearby buildings and just doesn't fit in with the surrounding area. There's nothing anywhere near there like it. The buildings would tower over everything nearby and drastically change the entire neighborhood. Please lower the height of the buildings!!

-The roads around the mall area are not big enough to accommodate so much more traffic from such high density housing, and trying to get out in an emergency will be extremely dangerous. Please reconsider the extreme height and density of the project.

- The proposed town square is way too small for the housing that's being proposed. It should be at least twice the size that is in the present plan. It should be a welcoming space where people will want to congregate. The town square should be environmentally friendly, with NO ASTRO TURF please!!

- Please do not approve drive thru restaurants!! Idling cars pollute the air and increase the carbon footprint. Walking or biking to restaurants should be encouraged, especially because it seems that an environmentally friendly space is what this housing/retail proposal is all about.

Please rethink the proposed plans and the enormous impact this new development will have on the community.

Thank you,  
Joan Wlodaver

**Janet Shirley**

Dear Design Review Team:

I am a concerned resident of the Terra Linda area and our family lives just a block away from the Northgate Mall. In reviewing the general construction and layout design being offered by the developers of this project, please consider the sentiments of people who live very close to the mall.

Please include the following recommendations to be recorded on behalf of residents of Terra Linda:

**POINTS:**

- Marin needs more housing but 7 story buildings do not conform with the surrounding area. High density housing makes traffic worse, demands for water much greater, and road congestion a daily occurrence. Are the roads big enough to support an emergency exit plan?
- We need a vital community hub. The proposed town square is too small for the housing that is being proposed. The Town Square should be at least twice the size that is being proposed.
- No astro turf or rocks! This is what is being proposed as part of the town square. A public meeting space should be environmentally friendly. We can do better! We need viable and user-friendly meeting spaces around the town square--not dog parks, astro turf, and rocks for seating.
- No drive-thru restaurants! The latest development plan includes 2 drive-thru fast food places which will only increase the carbon footprint. We need local merchants to be part of this development, not chain fast food places.

Thank you for your attention.

Janet Shirley

**Linda Haumann**

I am a long time resident of San Rafael and particularly the TerraLinda area. I wholeheartedly support the development of Northgate Mall into a mixed use facility. I especially am in favor of providing more affordable housing to both renters and homeowners. Increased density in this area is to be expected as we grow Marin into a welcoming place for all ages and many diverse backgrounds. Providing more affordable housing, will benefit all of us. As my husband and I grow older, we need our caregivers close by and we need places for our children and their children to thrive.

**Theresa Brady**

I grew up in Marin and have painfully watched Northgate turn into the pathetic mall it is today. The first iteration, which was outdoor and reminiscent of CM Town Center, was the best version of the mall. What has happened over time is that developers haven't listened to the community while wasting millions of dollars repeatedly reimagining the mall, and ultimately we've ended up with the abandoned, underserved, cold, unwelcoming, pathetic version we have today. We live here. We know what we need and want, and what will create a thriving residential and commercial gathering place. I'm sure the developers think we're whiny and impossible to please but it's because we are saying the same things on repeat and they are not listening.

It's a misnomer to call this project "Northgate Town Square" when the "Town Square" part of the development is a postage stamp-sized afterthought dangled to the community as a carrot in exchange for a grossly overdeveloped and oversized residential project. I believe Northgate to be a great place for mixed used residential housing and commercial development but this monstrosity is just an excuse to jam as much housing down our throats with no concern for building community nor the development's impact on our fragile infrastructure. The population of Terra Linda is just over 7,000 and this development will increase the population by more than 50%. The number of units must be reduced. We simply do not have the infrastructure to support this growth unless the roads and access to the freeway are enhanced. Please insist that the developers abide by height and open space restrictions, as well as honor the community's long-established and thoughtful plan for developing Northgate into a community gathering place. This would include pocket parks sprinkled throughout, a community center and pool for the new residents, and a thoughtfully and naturally landscaped central gathering space that has plenty of shade and is connected to retail dining and shopping, NOT surrounded by a parking lot. One need only look to our neighbors to the south in Marin Country Mart and Corte Madera Town Center for what will thrive here. We don't want big box shops and department stores. We want a destination to gather as a community and we want the housing to be desirable, to fit into the existing architecture both in scale and style, and we want those who reside there to have a thriving shopping and dining center to lessen their car travel, and that encourages the rest of TL Community to join them by foot and bike.

Let's get it right this time so we end up with a thriving Northgate development.

**Kathleen Swart**

Northgate will have too many cars. More water and energy use.  
Please reconsider. Thank you.

K.Swart

## **Lou and Sophie Shehi**

Hello -

I'm writing to ask a few questions and give my opinion.

First of all-

1-will there be story poles to show the enormity of the buildings that the developers want to build 2-do the make story poles 7 stories tall?

3-are the developers going to listen to the neighborhood concerns or are they going to act on our concerns?

4-so far-all I e seen us listening. With over 30 community outreach studies-I have never heard anyone say that shoving over 1400 -7 story tall buildings right up against the road-a great idea.

5-every single person I've spoken with thinks it's a horrible idea and that shoving these monstrosities in the middle of a sleepy little suburban community is an abomination.

6- the developers said in the last meeting that there weren't any homes on the West side of the proposed development-so that it wouldn't effect anyone over there. I live on the West side of the proposed development and it would greatly affect my quality of life as well as my financial investment in our home.

7- I am all for upgrading the mall.

I think that commercial and residential is a fabulous way to go.

Just not shoving half of San Rafael's housing requirements in our backyard. This is a recipe for disaster.

8- the developers keep saying malls are dying. Every single mall in Marin County is doing extremely well.

8- that 90% of the units will be for rent-is a terrible way to gain more units. We're all for helping our teachers and first responders the ability to be stakeholders in the county that they're working in but renting is not going to give them a leg up in our community.

Thank you-

Lou and Sophie Shehi

**Candiece Milford**

Thank you for your time as you thoughtfully consider all public concerns regarding the Northgate Mall development.

Looking down on the mall from Quail Hill Townhomes is very sobering given the extraordinary proposed 5 - 7 story structures. According to the laws of perspective, I hand drew the implications of these overly-tall buildings on the site. I do not have all the setbacks etc. so it is not completely accurate. However, it does show how the structures (which more appropriately should be built closer to the freeway entrance on the northwest corner adjacent to an existing 5 story commercial building) are MASSIVE, dwarfing residential homes in the area.



There is also concern about the light pollution caused by these several hundred apartments, in addition to the excessive burden of hundreds more cars and their traffic implications. As stated earlier, positioning these structures nearer the freeway will mitigate some of the impact.

When you consider that the perspective shown is looking down on the buildings, you can only imagine how dwarfed a person is relative to these proposed structures. (for scale, see white car parked near the old Sears building)

Thank you for your consideration in not approving the excessive heights of the buildings and to relocate them to the more appropriate northwest corner of the property.

Sincerely,  
Candiece Milford

**David Carey**

Staff-

This project is ill-conceived and will be detrimental to the safety, health, convenience and quality of life for people who live in Terra Linda. This will create impassible traffic issues on Las Gallinas Ave., the years long construction will be a huge inconvenience for everyone.

If this were to go forward, which it should not, the developer should pay to build a new elementary school and a new middle school. We are getting tired on the bond programs attached to our property taxes to upgrade the schools. This amount of people will increase the demand on the school districts and the developer should pay for it.

Also major upgrades to the surface streets will need to happen so first responders can make it quickly to situations and the hospital. This should be included and new on and off ramp to Highway 101 which regularly backs up now, there will be an absolute stand still on the roads.

Where is the water going to come from?? last year we had a lot of rain the year before, we had serious restrictions, this needs to be addressed.

A full scale EIR needs to happen!, we have not seen a copy of one.

Please do not allow this project happen in San Rafael, we have lived here for 30 years and nothing like this has ever even been proposed. The owners of the Mall have taken away shopping from us by closing all the store leases and trying force this on us, please do not allow this to go forward. The way to do this is to make it too expensive for the developers to move forward in making them pay the real infrastructure costs that they are trying to push on us.

Sincerely,  
David Carey



## **Sally D'Angelo**

Dear Design Review Board members,

I have significant concerns about the future of the Northgate Mall and more specifically, Terra Linda, an area I have called home for 20+ years.

The 5, 6 AND 7 story buildings are grossly out of character for our neighborhood. While several story buildings might be appropriate for downtown San Rafael, these would be some of the tallest buildings in SR and the County and certainly the tallest in the TL surrounding area. They will overwhelm any surrounding buildings and dwarf surrounding single family homes. We deserve to not be shaded into oblivion by these buildings. And having lived in cities, I am concerned with the wind tunnels they may create, exasperated by our natural A/C, the Terra Linda afternoon winds. Further, they will destroy what is one of the most magical views from north bound 101, the sight of returning to our quiet TL valley. We need a 3-D visualization and story poles to more adequately reflect the impacts of this development, well before any decisions to approve this development. 2-D renderings do not adequately reflect what is being proposed. The scale of this proposal needs to be demonstrated to the existing community.

Simply put, what MG is proposing is too much for our little valley. I suspect that few who moved here wanted to live in a city or downtown. I would have moved to the West End or simply downtown San Rafael if I wanted that feeling. The height and density bonuses need to be eliminated. And while MG is offering a pittance of properties to purchase, it is simply too few. This many rental units will contribute to transience and not long term neighbors who want to maintain the charm of TL. I am guessing that when my neighbors checked 'yes' to adding housing in our valley, they did not anticipate the scale or inappropriateness of this proposal.

Finally, we simply do not have the infrastructure to support this many units here in south TL. It is maddening that we are expected to absorb near half of SRs housing requirement with this development. And this does not account for other proposals. Four weeks ago, the town of Lahaina, Maui and surrounding neighborhoods burned to the ground. People could not evacuate. I know people who died and many more who lost everything. While I hope we don't have the failings of Lahaina, how are the 1000s of old and new residents, visitors, shoppers, and workers supposed to evacuate in a fire? A few years ago, about 100 people gathered at NG mall for Guatemalan Independence Day. Traffic backed up on the local streets for over an hour after the event ended. Even school drop off and pick ups clog our little valley. So add those additional folks, too, and we could experience a catastrophe like Lahaina. And we don't have an ocean to jump into...

MG could make the NG mall acreage something special for young people and families. A true neighborhood with 3 story row houses, spread evenly across the acreage, vs concentrated on the south end, with parks, for example, and not try to rival the development of the streets around the Chase Center in San Francisco. We don't want a city in our little neighborhood.

Please stop this insanity.

Thank you,

Sally D'Angelo

**Madelene Lees**

Overall thoughts:

The density of the tall housing looks like a “mini city” is planned. It looks like a prison. I am not for this oppressive looking housing density from edge to edge of the existing sidewalks. Nor the amount of residential units, the height, nor the amount of cars that would ensue from new dwellers. I am truly saddened by this monster of a project.

Questions:

1. Cars: If each unit had 1-2 cars we could have up to almost 3000 cars that would spring from new people. Where is the parking planned? And how many parking spaces for the amount of units proposed? What happens to the existing streets that would now be flooded with cars?
2. Green space: Is there any open green space? Not just walkways but larger areas for people to enjoy? Or a garden area? A walking trail area?
3. Setback: How much setback is there from the existing sidewalks? It looks like the max space is being used from edge to edge and top height to ground. A prison.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our thoughts and comments.

Sincerely,

Madelene Lees

**Raoul McDuff**

Good Morning:

I have a couple of questions for tonight's meeting

1. What are the major challenges which have been identified from the EIR?
2. Is the Developer collaborating with local Housing Agencies? For example, EAH?

Many thanks,  
Raoul McDuff

**Maryellen & David Ovadia**

We have carefully reviewed the attached documents and have four important statements:

- 1). We understand that height and scale of the residential buildings are not within the purview of the DRB. However, like many people who spoke up at the July 18th meeting, we are very concerned about the impact of height and density of these buildings on the neighborhood that immediately surrounds the Northgate center. We feel strongly that the DRB should also consider the impact of these factors on the immediate neighborhood. These residential buildings should not exceed five stories !!!!!
- 2). We also understand that the DRB does not focus on issues impacting the neighborhood regarding traffic flow, security, water and power demands, schools, fire dept., hospitals, and so on. However, the integration of these issues into a review phase early in this next round of discussions is crucial. When will we, as close and concerned neighbors/citizens, have the opportunity to comment on these critical items?
- 3). The summary of the DRB's recommendations does not reflect the multiple and strongly worded objections to any fast food or drive in/drive out restaurants as part of the project. This should be added as a change element.
- 4). Any approvals for phase two (yr 2040) should undergo the same stringent review process that is applicable to County & City regulations, environmental issues (water/energy/traffic, etc) at that time. We do not see this next review phase in the attached documents.

Thank you for reviewing these comments and concerns. We will attend this evening.

Maryellen & David Ovadia

**Dianna Fleming**

Dear DRB,

I am opposed to the proposed plan for the Northgate Mall. The plan, particularly the height of the buildings and density, demonstrates a lack of concern for the safety and welfare of the residents, businesses, and organizations in the neighborhood. The fact that the previous proposal was for a Costco shows the motive is to get as much profit as possible out of the property. The current plan is to jam piles of rental units into this space no matter what the consequences. The height of the proposed buildings is appalling.

The traffic problems are numerous and have not been adequately addressed. In addition, there is inadequate provision for the parked cars of the anticipated residents. A realistic estimate is 2 cars per unit, even with public transit access.

I urge the review board to reject this poorly conceived plan.

Sincerely,

Dianna Fleming

Quail Hill resident

**Kimberly Wilson**

Greetings,

I grew up in Terra Linda and when Northgate was an open air mall. Please consider the existing traffic on HWY 101 and the off ramps, and Terra Linda cannot accommodate any more vehicles with our existing roadways, especially with Kaiser (who can't accommodate the existing patients). We have daily traffic on Freitas Parkway, due to all the private schools and students coming as far away as San Francisco. We almost accidents almost daily or weekly at the intersection of the Southbound Highway 101 off-ramp and gas stations. Please consider at least 2 parking spaces per unit! I realize state law only mandates 1 parking space. Will the City of San Rafael taxpayers have to pay to upgrade the infrastructure?

Respectfully,

Kimberly Wilson

Terra Linda Resident

**Mary Ellen Jenkins**

I'm writing in support of the redevelopment of Northgate Mall. I support the inclusion of parks, bike and pedestrian paths, and access to transit. Most importantly this plan includes much needed housing. I encourage you to require as much AFFORDABLE housing as possible.

Thank you,

Mary Ellen Jenkins

**Joan Wlodaver**

Dear San Rafael Design Review Board,

I have been a resident of Marinwood for 25+ years and I have frequented the businesses in the Northgate Mall for all of those years.

I have some concerns about the project you are about to approve, especially regarding the height and density of the project, which is severely out of proportion to the community in the surrounding neighborhoods. The seven stories proposed is completely out of proportion to the surrounding area and can only be thought of as an eyesore, blocking views of the nearby hills and negating the aesthetics and architectural character of the community forever. The huge size and height of the buildings will do nothing to contribute to the attractiveness of the area. Surely there must be some thought given to contributing to the attractiveness of the area. Is there any way that the height of the buildings can be reduced? Please.

The size and density of the project will severely stress local resources, like water, and create traffic congestion, especially during high-peak travel times and if there should ever be an evacuation emergency. Reducing the height and density would alleviate some of these concerns. Is there any way that the height and density of the buildings can be reduced? Please.

I hope that the drive-thru restaurant is negotiable. Please don't approve a drive-thru restaurant. There are already two (McDonald's and A&W) less than a mile away on Merrydale. Why are we encouraging more greenhouse gas emissions when we don't have to? Shouldn't we be forward looking and seeking ways to reduce carbon emitting transportation? Please say no to a drive-thru restaurant.

There are so few community meeting spaces that this seems like an excellent opportunity to add some attractive areas for people to gather and want to be, like cafes, restaurants, a supermarket, bakery and onsite services within the complex, places with both outdoor and indoor seating areas so people would not have to get in their cars and drive. I'm hoping that residents like me, and the new residents, will find enough onsite businesses and services to use and enjoy. Can the plan include these? Please.

The proposed plan appears to have a minuscule town square center in proportion to the enormously huge high density buildings planned. Can the plan include a much bigger town square center that will be an attractive area where people will want to go to and to be? Please.

Please rethink these points and reconsider the impact of such a humongous project to make it a more beautiful community oriented space for everyone, to fit in with our incredibly beautiful natural area where we are all so very lucky to live. Please.

Thank you,  
Joan Wlodaver

**Wendy Loder**

To Whom it may Concern:

My questions are: how much of a "town center" will be included? Will there be a performance venue included? Indoor or outdoor venue? What about traffic with extra thousands of residents with their cars? Where will they park? Will you improve the freeway entrance & exits? What about using Merrydale road to develop a new entrance as the Freitas one is pretty maxed out?

Thanks,

Wendy Loder



September 6, 2023

San Rafael Design Review Board  
1400 Fifth Avenue  
San Rafael, CA 94901

**RE: Northgate Town Square Design Review**

Honorable Board Members,

We would like to summarize a few ideas that we hope will help guide your resolution of remaining issues concerning the design of the Northgate Town Square Project:

- 1. Maintain the full number of housing units in the development.** An already-developed property of this size; this close to a freeway, a train station, and major streets; and largely surrounded by commercial buildings can accommodate at least the 1,422 units proposed. Our only request is that the affordable housing be at least as well designed as the other housing.
- 2. Enlarge the namesake Town Square** by removing the parking aisles to the west, thereby creating a central open space large enough to anchor the identity of the entire project, designed for both casual relaxation and active entertainment, and supported by a yearly budget dedicated to activation of the space in concert with the larger community.
- 3. Use large, spreading trees** to reduce 'heat islands' in the parking areas and provide screening and a pedestrian scale throughout the project, supported by sufficient root space, irrigation, and ongoing maintenance budgets. (See attached July 7 letter for details.)
- 4. Prioritize pedestrians** with wide walkways, well-landscaped and separated from traffic.
- 5. Activate outdoor spaces with adjacent cafes**, ample seating and varied plantings.
- 6. Provide complete building electrification**, EV readiness, and other sustainability features in accordance with the City's recently adopted reach codes and Climate Change Action Plan, as well as mitigations of greenhouse gas impacts identified in the Environmental Impact Report.

We believe that Northgate Town Square has the potential to evolve a new standard of suburban character--compact, lively, diverse, walkable, and infused with trees and nature--an attractive entertainment and retail destination, and a thriving residential community well connected with its surroundings.

Thank you for your diligence in pursuing these results.

Sincerely,

William Carney  
President, Sustainable San Rafael

*Attachment: SSR letter of July 7, 2023*



July 18, 2023

San Rafael Design Review Board  
1400 Fifth Avenue  
San Rafael, CA 94901

**RE: Northgate Town Center Design Review**

Honorable Board Members,

Sustainable San Rafael has commented previously on design elements and the scope of the environmental analysis of the proposed Northgate Town Square. We would like to emphasize a few key ways of improving the design elements before you this evening.

**1. Provide the vision of a fully realized Town Square.** Although improved, the Town Square at the heart of the development remains dominated by automobiles. This central space will never fully benefit the development or the community if it is mainly a parking lot. We request that the developer provide an alternate 2040 Master Plan of this area, enlarging the plaza to include the two parking aisles to the west. If the City deems that the 68 parking spaces in these two aisles are still necessary in 2040, they could be provided by adding spaces in overhead structures like the one already onsite, or under new buildings, or by replacing the three suburban restaurant pads included in this phase. The community needs to see a conceptual plan of what a fully realized town center could be.

**2. Provide large canopy trees to shade all parking areas.** The 'accent' and 'field' parking area trees specified largely meet this important criterion for reducing the development's 'heat island' impact and increasing its natural character, with the Platanus, Ginkgo, Zelkovia, Pistacia, and Acer rubrum 'autumn gold' that are recommended. However, the columnar Acer rubrum 'armstrong' and the smaller strawberry trees, olives, and Chinese elms do not achieve this purpose and should be removed from the parking lot lists.

**3. Maintain adequate pedestrian paths at a minimum of 6'.** The success of this mixed-use development will be largely a function of how comfortable people are when walking. People should not feel squeezed out by cars or bikes, important as all modes of mobility may be.

We believe that the redevelopment of Northgate offers a generational opportunity to integrate sustainability values into a true town center for North San Rafael, a regional commercial and entertainment destination, and a model of twenty-first century place making.

We look forward to your support of these modest suggestions.

Sincerely,

William Carney  
President, Sustainable San Rafael





July 18, 2023

RE: Northgate Town Center Trees

To Whom It May Concern,

I am sharing my professional thoughts on the landscape plan for Northgate Town Center based on viewing the PDF version (very small and hard to read on my computer). I am clear I may be missing many important items, so I am weighing-in strictly based on my experience and observations over many years in urban forestry across California.

One of the things that is important, and often is not addressed, is that the trees planted in parking lots should be large canopy shade trees to cool and shade the asphalt/urban heat island, especially now as we face climate change issues.

The tree choices seem very appropriate for locations specified with a few exceptions I'll mention here:

- The Arbutus Marina are excellent but small trees in confined spaces - not great for parking lots but could be used elsewhere successfully.
- The Ginkgo Biloba are very slow growing, a great tree but it will be a long time till there will be a canopy of significance.
- The Pyrus Calleryana, are often multi-stemmed based on how they are grown at the nursery, creating potential future pruning issues. They rarely achieve proper tree form and suffer from Fire Blight (no cure) and are generally not recommended.

Tree wells/planting areas need to be as large as possible for trees to survive and thrive. I couldn't find the planting schematic though I'm sure one exists.

I image the planting areas are appropriately designed, but the old 3'x3' tree well cutouts in parking lots, set trees up for failure - not allowing trees to grow to the point where the desired health and environmental services will be achieved.

How will the landscape be managed, cared for? Who will be responsible for the maintenance, and will there be certified arborists on the team to manage the trees over the long-term? On-going care is everything!

Studies show that people will travel further, linger longer, and spend more money in shopping districts with healthy urban tree canopies. I, being a remote observer here, believe this is professionally done, and I applaud the designers and developer in including significant amounts of urban greening in their plans to support improved quality of life for the residents and shoppers.

Feel free to contact me with any questions,

Sincerely,

Executive Director

RECEIVED

SEP 5 2023

August 30, 2023

Planning Division, CDD  
1400 Fifth Street 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
San Rafael, California 94901

Re: Project at 5800 Northgate Drive. Redevelopment

To whom it may concern:

I am writing you regarding the new development at 5800 Northgate Drive. You are trying to turn Marin into a big city. We are not.

The impact that this will have on the community is astronomical. The additional traffic and noise to name two. Is the City going to hire additional Police and Fire? We don't have enough as it is to protect the existing neighborhoods. What about hospitals and schools they are already over worked and over crowded with not enough personnel. You don't even care for our roads. I know this is about more revenue for the City but that does not help the community.

Our restaurants are limited and we have one grocery store Safeway. I would like to see more grocery stores and retail stores that would create jobs rather than an apartment building that would bring more people.

I am just writing you to let you know that I strongly OPPOSE this new development.

Thank you.

Marie Bettencourt

September 5, 2023

San Rafael Design Review Board  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Design Review Board Members:

I have been a resident of San Rafael for over 35 years. I am a Leader in the Marin Organizing Committee and a member of Congregation Rodef Sholom.

My family and I have watched as the Northgate Mall has transitioned from a vibrant community location to a failing property. The Northgate Mall redevelopment that is proposed by Merlone Geier would be a tremendous asset for our Marin County community. It would not only revitalize the area, but it would also provide a significant amount of housing.

1. The Northgate site is the best location in San Rafael to add this level of density and height.
2. The fact that the developer is working with EAH, who is an experienced developer of affordable housing in the Bay Area, is a plus. The proposed architecture for this parcel is consistent with the other residential apartments and townhomes incorporated into the project.
3. There is a tremendous benefit that the EAH residential building will have nearly 100 affordable units, with 25% of the apartments built as 3-bedroom units.
4. As it relates to overall project design, the developer is proposing a larger town square, bicycles, and pedestrian connections, and also a landscaped courtyard as part of the EAH development.

While I appreciate the need for the City of San Rafael to review a project of this scope, I am also concerned that the longer the process takes, the more it will increase the costs for the redevelopment of this property. Therefore, I would request that the Planning Commission recommend that an Environmental and Design Review Permit be granted to allow the comprehensive redevelopment of the existing Northgate Mall into a new, phased, mixed-use development to move forward.

Sincerely,  
Judith Bloomberg

Dear Sirs,

I have reviewed the plans for the proposed development at Northgate. In general, I believe 1422 units is a lot. Such a large project needs to be meticulously planned to ensure success. After reviewing the proposal, it is clear that not nearly enough parking has been included in the plan.

The plan states that the project will have an average of 1.68 parking spots per unit. Looking at other high density areas in our city, it is clear that less than 2 spaces per unit are grossly inadequate! You should be aware that a 2 bedroom unit often houses more than 2 individuals who own cars. 922 units will equal at least 2000 cars maybe as many as 3000! Not planning for these extra cars is a disaster in the making.

Without assigned parking, the extra vehicles will need to park somewhere. It is safe to say that these extra cars will park on site in the parking designed for the retail stores. This will reduce parking for shoppers and hurt vendors on site. Extra cars will also clog local street parking. Even if all the extra cars have parking, all these cars will negatively traffic as well.

All one has to do is drive 101 at commute times and see the gridlock in and out of the Canal neighborhood. The same will happen at Northgate! The huge influx of cars in the Northgate neighborhood will negatively affect traffic patterns for several blocks both north and south and east and west of the freeway. Gridlock will occur during commute times. Just getting to the freeway will be a nightmare! Many of these new residents will take the "back way" and create heavy traffic at Smith Ranch, Merrydale, North San Pedro and Lincoln.

To reduce these problems, the obvious choice is to reduce the number of units and provide adequate parking for all units. Increasing traffic capacities and infrastructure in and around Northgate would be very costly, if even possible! Please consider these parking and traffic situations, which will happen if the project goes forward as planned. I urge you to reduce the number of units and plan for the needed parking and increased traffic.

With best regards,

Stuart Shepherd

# **THE CLARK-IWANS**

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**September 6, 2023**

**Planning Division, CDD  
1400 5th Avenue, 3rd Floor  
San Rafael, CA 94903**

**SUBJECT: PUBLIC COMMENT - 9.6.23 DRB MEETING**

**Dear Planning Commission:**

**We fervently oppose the developer of the Northgate Town Square Project taking advantage of the height and bonus concessions under the guise of creating more affordable housing in our neighborhood. Adding a six or seven-story building -- dwarfing any other structures in Terra Linda -- and adding innumerable more units is unacceptable.**

**The infrastructure of Terra Linda can't handle the traffic and the safety challenges this monstrosity would bring (e.g. evacuation problems, etc.). Jamming more people and cars into our small community benefits no one but the developer's bottom line. Once they are finished, they can walk away from the egregious impact their project will cause, leaving our community less safe and less desirable.**

**Please make your decisions that shape Northgate for the better and serve your constituents in the best ways possible. Thank you.**

**Respectfully,**

**Susan & Kelly Clark-Iwan**

Re: Northgate “Town Square” Project

To date, Merlone Geier and San Rafael’s government have demonstrated remarkable lack of imagination and lack of grace in promoting the current proposal for Northgate Mall. The proposed development is monstrous and absurdly out of scale in terms of size and density for anywhere but a large city or dorms, let alone this formerly calm and open area that nicely supports modest, functional retail. The situation seems to arise from a combination of Merlone Geier’s lack of experience in this arena, unchecked thirst for profit, and San Rafael’s pursuit of property tax revenues, with no consideration for the people who already live here or for anyone who might be forced to live in the properties condoned. The officially stated benefits for the community are extreme gaslight. Here’s how the MG website describes the project:

Northgate Mall is being completely reimagined for the present and decades into the future; beginning with the transformation of the indoor mall into an inviting, open-air concept and community gathering place.<sup>1</sup>

What this translates to in actual plans is a tiny “public space” surrounded by to-the-edges cheap, ugly design that is out of character for Marin, a sixty years out-of-date idea of what’s trendy in commercial property (a movie theater!), said sustainability features that are total greenwash, and a callow approach to affordable housing, which, given San Rafael’s record, will be varianced out anyway. As far as I can tell, the contributions of the Design Review Board have not helped and skirt the elephant in the room: this is a terrible plan that will destroy the value of the area to everyone. *The project is wrong, so the design is wrong.*

I know you’ve heard the above before, but here’s an additional consideration that should be used to forecast the true impact of the proposed project in terms of density and local infrastructural impacts. Over the past decade and particularly the last few years, San Rafael’s multifamily properties have experienced a population surge. In my neighborhood, duplex units that used to be occupied by one or two people are now occupied by seven people *in a single unit*. This is how middle- and low-income people manage \$3300 rents for two-bedroom apartments. The overcrowding leads to population densities that exceed neighborhood capacity – parking, travel, green space, noise levels – and deteriorates living conditions for all. Rents don’t go down. Similar overcrowding will continue into new units, so the true future population of MG’s

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<sup>1</sup> From <https://www.merlonegeier.com/current-development-projects/>, 2 September 2023.

proposed housing complex, if it proceeds, might greatly exceed the projected population, which is already far too big for the area. In addition, if developing housing for middle- and lower-income or really any people matters at all, it must come with attention to making places anyone would want to live – versus 400 square foot 1-bedroom apartments packed in modern versions of Soviet bloc style as MG is promoting.

There are many things one could do with Northgate Mall that benefit the people of San Rafael and Marin County and still bring profits to MG and tax revenue to San Rafael. Even a Costco is a thousand times better than the current plans. Please reflect on Marin County's history and past county and city leaders' care in planning for a future that respects the beauty of Marin and the need for a peaceful environment. There's a new exhibit at the Marin History Museum celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1973 Marin Countywide Plan. San Rafael's current planning trajectory, exemplified by MG's proposal, is antithetical to this legacy.

Please do the right thing. Please try again. As is, this is a flagrantly anti-community anti-well-being project. If it goes through, the community won't blame regulations, policies, or 21<sup>st</sup> century manifest destiny: we'll forever blame the San Rafael planners who failed to correct this grave misstep.

Respectfully,

-Michael Kyle