



**SAN RAFAEL**  
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

Community Development Department – Planning Division

Meeting Date: September 6, 2023  
Case Numbers: PLAN21-039, ZC21-001, UP21-007, ED21-024, TS21-002, IS21-002 & DA21-001  
Project Planner: Heather Hines, Project Manager  
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Alicia Giudice, CDD Director  
Agenda Item: 2

**REPORT TO THE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

**SUBJECT:** **Northgate Town Square Project.** Design Review Board hearing for recommendation and feedback on the proposed Northgate Town Square Project which includes requests for a Rezone to the Planned Development (PD) zone, a Use Permit, an Environmental and Design Review Permit, a 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. An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is being prepared for this project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Design Review Board recommend Planning Commission approval of an environmental and design review permit, inclusive of recommended list of additional requirements provided in the Recommendation section below.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**PROPOSED PROJECT**

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

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. The 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 (demolition square footage updated to reflect Sears Auto Center and Seasonal Building are included in the overall Sears Anchor building)
- 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

At full buildout, the redevelopment project will result in 1,422 residential units, inclusive of 147 lower income affordable units, and 217,520 square feet of retail.

### **ENTITLEMENTS AND DECISION MAKING**

The project is subject to review and approval of the following entitlements:

- Rezone to the Planned Development (PD) zone
- Master Use Permit
- Environmental and Design Review Permit
- Vesting Tentative Subdivision Map
- Development Agreement
- Master Sign Program

Individually, the entitlements listed above are subject to review and approval by different decision-making bodies (e.g. Planning Commission, City Council). As set forth in Section 14.02.020(J) of the San Rafael Municipal Code (SRMC), where a single development project seeks multiple approvals, the highest decision-making body shall review and approve, conditionally approve, or deny the requested entitlements. For the proposed project, the City Council is the highest decision-making body and therefore will make the final determination on all project entitlements and associated environmental review. The role of the Planning Commission is to review all project entitlements and associated environmental review and provide a recommendation to the City Council.

The role of the Design Review Board is limited to providing design-related comments and recommendations which will be considered by the Planning Commission and will inform the Commission's ultimate recommendation to the City Council regarding the environmental and design review permit. As such, at this meeting staff is soliciting feedback and recommendations from the DRB on the design-related elements of the project and confirmation of feedback from the July 18<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting to include in the formal DRB recommendation on the project. Recommendations from the DRB should focus on feasible modifications that can be incorporated without reducing the overall number of residential units. Staff is seeking design recommendations/feedback related to:

- Building siting and orientation
- Architecture
- Colors/Materials
- Open Space
- Landscaping
- Parking

### **LOCAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS APPLICABLE TO REVIEW**

Given the size and complexity of the project, the following discussion provides targeted information related to the requested entitlements that are within the purview of the DRB. The discussion is focused on design-related project components that would benefit from detailed review and feedback from the DRB, including the following local laws:

- San Rafael Municipal Code: Title 14 – Zoning
  - Chapter 14.07 (Planned Development District)
  - Chapter 14.16 (Site and Use Regulations)

- Chapter 14.17 (Performance Standards)
- San Rafael General Plan 2040
- San Rafael Design Guidelines

## **Zoning Consistency**

### *Planned Development District*

Chapter 14.07 of the SRMC provides for the establishment of Planned Development (PD) Districts and serves several purposes. Particularly relevant to the proposed project, PD Districts are intended to promote and encourage clustered development; encourage innovative design on large sites by allowing flexibility in property development standards; encourage open areas in land development; establish a procedure for the development of large lots of land to reduce or eliminate the rigidity, delays, and conflicts that otherwise would result from application of zoning standards and procedures designed primarily for small lots; and accommodate large-scale, complex, mixed-use, phased developments. As set forth in Section 14.07.030 (Property Development Regulations), in order to establish a PD district a project must:

- Have a minimum net area of 2.5-acres;
- Comply with the maximum residential density permitted by the General Plan, not precluding additional units permitted consistent with state density bonus law;
- Comply with floor area ratios set forth in the General Plan;
- Comply with building height limits contained in the General Plan  
(see *Building Height discussion on Page 4 of this staff report*)

All other development regulations are as prescribed in a proposed development plan, which is subject to review and approval by the decision-making body. The development standards proposed for the Northgate Town Square Planned Development District largely mirror existing development standards for the General Commercial (GC) zoning district with some exceptions as discussed below:

### *Open Space*

The GC zoning district does not have minimum open space requirements for either the residential or commercial elements of the project. However, San Rafael Municipal Code Section 14.05.030, encourages the provision of usable outdoor area in residential development as part of a mixed-use project within no minimum identified.

At the July 18<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting the DRB discussed the overall site plan and town square which includes common open space that will be publicly available within the project.

Each of the six residential parcels includes more than 100 square feet of private open space per residential unit, which is similar to the open space requirement for the HR1 (High Density Residential) zoning district. This calculation does not include the town square or other publicly accessible open space within the project. Table 2 provides a breakdown of private open space, including both outdoor open space and indoor recreational areas proposed for each residential building and broken down by square footage per unit in each building. In addition to the open space areas shown below, the proposed Town Square will provide 48,075 square feet of publicly accessible open space area, a 12,934 square foot bike hub with amenities, and 25,752 open space area near Major 1 (all of which are proposed as part of Phase 1).

**Table 1: Open Space and Recreation Amenities**

	<b>Private Open Space</b>	<b>Common Open Space</b>	<b>Common Indoor Recreation Space</b>	<b>Average Open Space per unit</b>	<b>Sheet Reference</b>
Residential 1	2,800 sf	15,765 sf	1,300 sf	207 sf	RE-6
Residential 2	10,450 sf	11,853 sf	0 sf	223 sf	RE-18
Residential 3	15,960 sf	22,566 sf	4,453 sf	153 sf	RE-38
Residential 4	28,796 sf	33,386 sf	8,219 sf	158 sf	RE-56
Residential 5	15,772 sf	22,681 sf	9,831 sf	192 sf	RE-74
Residential 6	17,036 sf	19,619 sf	6,962 sf	175 sf	RE-92

**Building Height**

As proposed, the project proposes to restrict 10.5% of the residential units to low income households which meets the city’s primary and secondary affordable housing requirements<sup>1</sup> While the project would qualify for a density bonus under the State Density Bonus Laws, applicant is not seeking a density bonus. However, applicant does seek to utilize an incentive/concession under State Density Bonus Law. a concession or incentive is defined as: A reduction in site development standards or a modification of zoning code or architectural design requirements, including a reduction in setback or minimum square footage requirements; approval of mixed-use zoning; or other regulatory incentives or concessions which result in identifiable and actual cost reductions. (Gov. Code, § 65915, subd. (k)(1).) The project is eligible for one incentive/concession, because at least 10 percent of units in the project are for low-income households (Gov’t Code § 65915(d)(2)(A).) Specifically, applicant seeks an incentive/concession to increase the height limit across the Project site above the current 36 foot maximum height limit. The building heights, shown below, have been proposed.

Section 14.16.120 of the SRMC excludes architectural features (such as screening for mechanical equipment) from the overall height calculations.

As proposed and consistent with the state density bonus law, Residential 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 exceed the SRMC’s base 36-foot building height limit as follows:

**Table 2: Max Building Height**

	<b>Max parapet/ridgeline Height</b>	<b>Sheet Reference</b>
Residential 1	57’ – 6”	RE-7
Residential 2	35’ – 0”	RE-21
Residential 3	67’ – 6”	RE-39
Residential 4	77’ – 6”	RE-57
Residential 5	57’ – 6”	RE-75
Residential 6	77’ – 6”	RE-93

An additional 12 feet in projections such as elevator penthouses and other equipment is not included in these maximum building heights consistent with SRMC Section 14.16.120.

<sup>1</sup> Affordable Housing Requirements handout: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/sanrafaelca/uploads/2019/06/Affordable-Housing-Density-Bonus-Handout-1.pdf

### *Landscaping*

The applicant has proposed that all minimum landscaping requirements be applied to the entire, approximately 45-acre site. However, all residential lots (with the exception of Residential 6) individually meet the minimum 15% landscaping requirement. Detailed landscaping is shown on the following plan set sheets for the 6 residential buildings:

- Residential 1 – Sheet L-10, L-11
- Residential 2 – Sheet L-12, L-13
- Residential 3 – Sheet L-14, L-15, L-16
- Residential 4 – Sheet L-21, L-22, L-23
- Residential 5 – Sheet L-52, L-53
- Residential 6 – Sheet L-45, L-46, L-47

As shown on the plan sheets listed above, landscaping on residential lots includes a mixture of 24, 36, and 48-inch box trees, shrubs, grasses, groundcovers, and stormwater treatment plants. Other landscape amenities include resident gardens, gathering spaces, seating, play structures, and game areas.

### *Parking*

Pursuant to AB 2097<sup>2</sup>, (Gov. Code section 65863.2), a public agency shall not impose or enforce any minimum parking require on residential, commercial or other developments projects if the project is located within on-half mile of public transit. “Public transit” means a major transit stop as defined in section 21155 of the Public Resources Code. The project is within ½ mile of a major transit stop (SMART Station), the City cannot require minimum onsite parking standards for the project.

### *Residential Use in Commercial Districts*

Section 14.17.100 of the SRMC sets forth performance standards to ensure residential uses in commercial districts are not adversely impacts by adjacent uses. Apart from Residential 5, which is located proximate to commercial uses at the northeast corner of Las Gallinas Ave/Merrydale Rd., all residential buildings are sited away from commercial uses and high-traffic roadways. A standard condition of approval will be included in the entitlement package to ensure that all requirements of Section 14.17.100 are satisfied.

### **General Plan Consistency**

The residential components of the project have been reviewed for consistency with the General Plan 2040, including the applicable policies outlined in Exhibit 5. References to other General Plan policies as part of the DRB’s discussion on July 18<sup>th</sup> (focused on commercial architecture, bicycle and pedestrian amenities, landscaping, and town square) were included in the staff report for that meeting which is included at Exhibit 7.

### **San Rafael Design Guidelines Consistency**

In general, the project has also found to be consistent with and incorporates design recommendations and guidelines contained in the City’s Design Guidelines for residential development. A bulleted list of applicable design guidelines is included at Exhibit 6 for reference. Additionally, discussion items below for DRB feedback are informed by the Design Guidelines. References to other design guidelines applicable to the overall site plan, landscaping, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and commercial architecture were part of the staff report for the DRB’s July 18<sup>th</sup> meeting which is included at Exhibit 7.

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<sup>2</sup> AB 2097 became effective January 2023 and prohibits public agencies from imposing or enforcing any minimum automobile parking requirement on any residential, commercial, or other development project that is within one-half mile of a Major Transit Stop.

## ANALYSIS OF RESIDENTIAL COMPONENTS

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). To complement the DRB's discussion from July 18th, staff is recommending that the DRB focus on the residential components of the project for discussion and recommendation. References to plan set sheets for each residential building is provided below along with a brief discussion of the residential architecture and any outstanding design discussion items requested by staff. Staff recommends that the DRB discuss items identified by staff as well as any other design-related project components and provide targeted and feasible recommendations and feedback that the applicant can incorporate into the final design.

### **Residential 1**

Residential 1 is a 96-unit multi-family residential building that is proposed as a stand-alone clustered affordable housing building to accommodate the inclusionary housing requirement for Phase 1 of the project. As currently proposed, Residential 1 would be developed, owned, and operated by EAH, a nonprofit affordable housing developer. Residential 1 would consist of 31 studio units (430 square feet), 17 one-bedroom units (520 square feet), 24 two-bedroom units (750 square feet), and 24 three-bedroom units (995 square feet) (Sheet RE-3). All units in Residential 1 would be deed restricted affordable to lower-income households at an average of 45% AMI.

Residential 1 is a five-story building with parking and residential amenities located on the ground floor and approximately 25 units located on each of the upper four stories. All residential units are accessed from the interior double loaded hallway on each floor. Forty-six parking spaces are located in the ground floor garage and an additional fifty spaces are located in a surface parking lot to the north of the building. Consistent with minimum building code requirements, 15% of the total parking is designated for installation of EV chargers and the other 85% of the proposed parking will be EV ready. Bike parking for 72 bicycles is located in the bike room shown at the east corner of the parking garage with direct access both from within the garage and from the exterior of the building adjacent to the lobby entrance.

Ground floor residential amenities include a lobby, laundry room, community space, learning center, mail room, management offices, and restrooms. Outside amenities within the private common area include seating and lounge areas, children's play area, and garden boxes. Private decks provide additional private open space for individual units on the second, third, and fourth floors overlooking the outdoor common area and the front lobby area.

Residential 1 includes a variety of exterior materials, including CMU wall, cement plaster, manufactured wood horizontal siding, and standing seam metal panels (Sheet RE-8). The building design includes architectural features such as ground floor canopies and Juliet balconies on the upper floors. The architectural style has been significantly refined through the design process and the large brick arches on the ground floor have been removed, consistent with previous design feedback from the DRB. A vegetative green screen is incorporated into the ground floor facades on the north and east elevations along the parking garage.

The parcel is loosely triangular shaped and includes frontage on Northgate Drive as well as along the interior street between Residential 1 and 2. The "rear" of Residential 1 looks across the surface parking lot to the existing parking garage which is proposed for upgrades to add solar and trellis.

The following sheet references encompass the relevant sheets in the project plan set for review of Residential 1:

- Floor Plans: RE-3, RE-4, RE-5
- Building Sections: RE-7, RE-8

- Building Entry: RE-9
- Elevations: RE-10, RE-11
- Landscaping: L-10, L-11

Overall, the layout and design of Residential 1 meets the relevant design guidelines and is consistent with design related policies in the General Plan. The ground floor amenities have ground floor orientation to ensure appropriate orientation and provide a functional layout. The large outdoor common area provides opportunities for a range of uses and appears appropriate for a variety of resident ages.

There are several outstanding design aspects of Residential 1 that staff believes warrant additional feedback and refinement to ensure quality design within the project and appropriate screening between different land uses and along roadway frontages. Staff seeks the DRBs feedback regarding the following:

- Is the outdoor common area appropriately landscaped to buffer the outdoor common area from Northgate Drive?
- Is the design and exterior materials equivalent to the level of design of the other residential parcels?
- Are there opportunities to provide better screening between Residential 1 and the adjacent parking garage to avoid potential aesthetic and glare impacts?

## **Residential 2**

Residential 2 is a 100-unit ownership townhome component that is proposed to the east of Residential 1 and abuts the rear façade of the cinema structure and Residential 3. This component of the project is located along Northgate Drive and bound by interior project roadways on the other three sides. Residential 2 would consist of 15 buildings (2 five-plex, 3 six-plex, 8 seven-plex, and two eight-plex) and includes 10 one-bedroom units (470 square feet), 40 two-bedroom units (1,358 to 1,575 square feet), 30 three-bedroom units (1,441 to 2,019 square feet), and 20 four-bedroom units (92,092 to 2,124 square feet) (Sheet RE-14). All units in Residential 2 would be market rated ownership units with the smaller one- and two-bedroom units offering an alternative ownership opportunity that is non-deed restricted affordable by design.

Residential 2 townhomes are three stories in height and each unit has an attached garage accessed from the rear of the townhome with front stoops located on the street frontages, interior paseos, or common private open space. Uncovered guest parking is provided on the interior driveway network within Residential 2.

Common amenities in Residential 2 are limited to the approximately 12,000 square feet of outdoor open space provided at the interior of the lot. Additionally, some of the units have small private usable outdoor areas as illustrated on Sheet RE-18.

Residential 2 is designed with three color variations of the manufactured wood horizontal siding and cement plaster. The different materials and colors are used to break up the massing and articulate the base of the individual structures (Sheet RE-23). The building design includes simple wood guardrails for patios and balcony areas and low-slung rooflines to evoke a lower density residential character. The massing and design of Residential 2 was modified and refined to provide a more appropriate interaction with the low-density single family residential on the other side of Northgate Drive directly across from the proposed townhome component. These changes were made by the applicant to respond to community and DRB feedback during previous study sessions.

The following sheet references encompass the relevant sheets in the project plan set for review of Residential 2:

- Floor Plans: RE-14, RE-15, RE-16, RE-17, RE-19, RE-20

- Building Sections: RE-21, RE-22
- Building Entry: RE-23
- Elevations: RE-24, RE-25, RE-26, RE-27
- Landscaping: L-12, L-13

Overall, the layout and design of Residential 2 meets the relevant design guidelines and is consistent with design related policies in the General Plan. The reduced density and massing in Residential 2 interact well with existing residential development in the neighborhood and provides a variation from the multi-family apartment units in the other Residential components of the overall project.

Staff's outstanding concern with the design of Residential 2 is related to the interaction of the units facing the rear elevation of the cinema structure and the need for additional screening and modulation of the large massing of the cinema structure as seen from the front stoops of the adjacent townhomes. Staff seeks the DRBs feedback regarding this issue.

### **Residential 3**

Residential 3 is a 280-unit multi-family residential building proposed at the corner of Northgate Drive and Los Ranchitos Road. Interior roadways separate Residential 3 from Residential 2 to the east and Residential 4 to the north. Residential 3 would consist of 63 studio units (620 square feet), 164 one-bedroom units (680 to 1,315 square feet), and 53 two-bedroom units (1,130 to 1,655 square feet) (Sheet RE-30).

Residential 3 is a six-story building with a 471 space eight-level parking structure wrapped into the interior of the building. The parking garage includes one underground level, six typical levels with assigned stalls for the residential units on each of those levels, and minimal parking on the roof level. Consistent with minimum building code requirements, 15% of the total parking is designated for installation of EV chargers and the other 85% of the proposed parking will be EV ready. Bike parking for 284 bicycles is located in two ground floor bike rooms at the southeast and northeast corners of the building.

Most of the residential amenities for Residential 3 are located on the ground floor or the roof level, but a smaller roof deck and indoor amenity area are located on the fourth floor. The ground floor includes a central cluster of amenities at the southeast corner of the building, including a main lobby, clubhouse, leasing office, and indoor amenity space. A secondary lobby and mail room are located at the northwest corner of the building. A common outdoor courtyard with a lounge area with games, turf area, and an outdoor kitchen is also located on the ground level, interior to the building. Additionally, there is a small outdoor seating area outside of each lobby with lounge furniture, benches, fire feature, and bike racks. A roof deck with pool, poolside lounge areas, outdoor dining and kitchen facilities, and pool clubhouse and gaming area are located on the upper level. Private outdoor areas/patios provide additional amenity for many of the ground floor units (Sheet RE-38). In total, Residential 3 includes approximately 26,290 square feet of common usable outdoor area and an additional 16,294 square feet of private outdoor area.

Residential 3 includes a variety of exterior materials, including three different colors of cement plaster, manufactured wood horizontal siding, and large porcelain tile (Sheet RE-40). The building design includes architectural features such as ground floor canopies and mixed material guardrails on the upper floors. Residential 3 has a maximum parapet height of 67' – 6" but also uses step backs and articulation to bring the massing down at the corners on Northgate Drive (both intersection with Los Ranchitos Road and the interior drive) and increased height toward the center of the overall project site as seen in the south and east elevations on Sheet RE-42. Ground level glazing, canopies, and landscaping soften the pedestrian experience at the key entries to the building.

The following sheet references encompass the relevant sheets in the project plan set for review of Residential 3:



- Floor Plans: RE-30, RE-31, RE-32, RE-33, RE-34, RE-35, RE-36, RE-37
- Building Sections: RE-39, RE-40
- Building Entry: RE-41
- Elevations: RE-42, RE-43
- Landscaping: L-14, L-15, L-16

Residential 3 is a large residential building being introduced to the site. The use of landscaping along the street frontages combined with setbacks in building height along Northgate Drive seek to soften the massing in closest proximity to existing residential development. The massing steps up toward the interior of the Northgate Town Center project site to minimize impacts to existing development. The colors and materials are also used to break up the massing and provide visual interest when viewed from greater distance. Overall, the layout and design of Residential 3 meets the relevant design guidelines and is consistent with design related policies in the General Plan. The ground floor amenities have ground floor orientation to the public realm and feature more pedestrian scaled detailing. Common areas provide both indoor and outdoor amenities to serve residents.

There are several outstanding design aspects of Residential 3 that staff believes warrant additional feedback and refinement to ensure quality design within the project. Staff seeks the DRBs feedback regarding the following:

- Is there adequate variation and pedestrian scaled articulation at the southwest corner?
- While the main lobby is located at the southeast corner, is the secondary lobby entry at the northwest corner adequately articulated?
- Does the increased setback and landscape buffer at the intersection of Los Ranchitos Road and the interior street provide adequate gateway differentiation?

#### **Residential 4**

Residential 4 is a seven-story mixed use building with 446-units of multi-family residential and approximately 6,400 square feet of ground floor commercial, and public use space for a library branch and community meeting room. Residential 4 is bounded by Los Ranchitos Road to the east, the main Merrydale entry to the north and interior roadway to the south and west. The cinema and town square are located directly across the street from the west elevation of Residential 4. Residential 4 would consist of 41 studio units (620 square feet), 310 one-bedroom units (680 to 1,415 square feet), and 95 two-bedroom units (908 to 1,970square feet) (Sheet RE-45).

Residential 4 has a 845 space ten-level parking structure wrapped into the interior of the building. The parking garage includes two underground levels, seven typical levels with assigned stalls for the residential units on each of those levels, and minimal parking on the roof level. Consistent with minimum building code requirements, 15% of the total parking is designated for installation of EV chargers and the other 85% of the proposed parking will be EV ready. Bike parking for 476 bicycles is located in two ground floor bike rooms at the northeast corner of the building accessible from the Merrydale entry and another bike room accessed from the interior roadway across from the cinema.

The main lobby and interior amenities, inclusive of a coworking space, clubroom, and community center (which is also accessible to the general public) are located on the ground floor along the western side of the building. Common outdoor amenities include a courtyard located adjacent to the clubroom on the first floor and a roof deck. Outdoor amenity areas include a variety of features including seat walls, lounge furniture, outdoor dining facilities, bocce ball courts and lawn games, turf areas, a swimming pool, and spa. Private outdoor areas/patios provide additional amenities for the majority of residential units (Sheet RE-48 – RE-54). In total, Residential 4 includes approximately 33,386 square feet of common usable outdoor area and an additional 28,796 square feet of private outdoor area.

Residential 4 includes a variety of exterior materials, including three different colors of cement plaster, three different colors of metal panels, manufactured wood horizontal siding, and brick siding (Sheet RE-58). The building design includes architectural features such as ground floor canopies and recessed outdoor decks with mixed material guardrails on the upper floors. Residential 4 has a maximum parapet height of 77' – 6", incorporating step backs, articulation, and varied roof forms along the Las Ranchitos Rd frontage. Ground level glazing, canopies, and landscaping along the west elevation soften the pedestrian experience at the storefront entries.

The following sheet references encompass the relevant sheets in the project plan set for review of Residential 4:

- Floor Plans: RE-46, RE-47, RE-48, RE-49, RE-50, RE-51, RE-52, RE-53, RE-54, RE-55
- Building Sections: RE-57, RE-58
- Building Entry: RE-59, RE-60
- Elevations: RE-61, RE-62
- Landscaping: L-21, L-22, L-23

Residential 4 is the largest of the proposed residential buildings being introduced to the site. The use of landscaping along the street frontages combined with building stepbacks, architectural features such as ground floor canopies, and recessed upper floor outdoor areas with guardrails seek to soften the massing along all elevations. The colors and materials are also used to break up the massing and provide visual interest when viewed from greater distance, varying between horizontal and vertical orientation to create visual interest. Overall, the layout and design of Residential 4 meets the relevant design guidelines and is consistent with design related policies in the General Plan. The ground floor tenant amenities and commercial components of the mixed-use building have orientation to the public realm and feature more pedestrian scaled detailing. Common areas provide both indoor and outdoor amenities to serve residents.

Staff's outstanding concern with the design of Residential 4 is related to the variation and articulation along the Los Ranchitos Rd (west elevation) and south elevations and in particular seeks the DRBs feedback regarding whether enough variation and articulation is provided or whether additional features should be added to ensure visual interest along these elevations.

## **Residential 5**

Residential 5 is a five-story mixed use building with 25 multi-family residential units, approximately 13,500 square feet of ground floor retail, and a six-level parking structure. Residential 5 is part of the 2040 vision plan for the overall Northgate Town Center and is located largely in the existing Macy's footprint. Residential 5 together with Residential 4 frame the primary Merrydale entry into the Northgate project site. Residential 5 would consist of 30 studio units (620 to 730 square feet), 162 one-bedroom units (680 to 830 square feet), and 59 two-bedroom units (1,130 to 1,150 square feet) (Sheet RE-67).

Residential 5 is a five-story building with a 458 space six-level parking structure wrapped into the interior of the building. The parking garage includes five typical levels with assigned stalls for the residential units on each of those levels and additional parking on the roof level. Consistent with minimum building code requirements, 15% of the total parking is designated for installation of EV chargers and the other 85% of the proposed parking will be EV ready. Bike parking for 284 bicycles is located within one ground floor bike room located on Los Ranchitos at the corner with Merrydale.

Residential amenities for Residential 5 are located on the ground floor with the exception of a small roof deck located on the fourth floor. The ground floor includes a central cluster of amenities from the interior roadway that forms the western frontage of Residential 5 and between the 3,500 square foot shopfront and 10,000 square foot Major 3. The cluster of ground floor amenities for Residential 5 include a lobby,

co-working space, leasing office, and clubroom., including a main lobby, clubhouse. A common outdoor courtyard with a pool, BBQ area, pool pavilion, fire lounge, and smaller seating areas is also located on the ground level behind the commercial frontage. There is a small courtyard and seating area next to the Shop space and fronting Merrydale as well as a lawn area with casual seating and fire lounge further east on Merrydale. Private outdoor areas/patios provide additional amenity for many of the ground floor units (Sheet RE-74). In total, Residential 5 includes approximately 23,065 square feet of common usable outdoor area and an additional 14,773 square feet of private outdoor area.

Residential 5 uses color in its design more than other proposed residential structures, including seven different shades of cement plaster. Additionally, a manufactured redwood siding and a white brick material are used in the design (Sheet RE-77). The building design includes architectural features such as ground floor canopies and transparent glass guardrails and metal guardrails. Residential 5 has a maximum parapet height of 57' – 6" and is a more continuous building height with details in some of the roof overhangs to differentiate the different components of the overall building.

The following sheet references encompass the relevant sheets in the project plan set for review of Residential 5:

- Floor Plans: RE-68, RE-69, RE-70, RE-71, RE-72, RE-73
- Building Sections: RE-75, RE-76
- Building Entry: RE-77, RE-78
- Elevations: RE-79, RE-80
- Landscaping: L-52, L--53

Residential 5 includes significant setback from Merrydale Road to create the wider entry feel into the project and in response to previous DRB feedback. The creation of small outdoor amenity areas within this setback provide a greater interaction between the private and public realm for Residential 5. This is also evident in the significant setback along the western frontage of Residential 6 to provide outdoor amenities for the commercial tenants as well as in front of the indoor resident amenity areas. This area uses special ground treatment, landscaping, and outdoor furnishings to both support the commercial and to provide interaction at the pedestrian scale.

Residential 5 is consistent with the City's design guidelines and does a good job creating a vibrant but simple aesthetic for this mixed-use building that creates an inviting entry, a lively commercial frontage, and a pleasing high-density residential environment. Staff does not have any specific questions for DRB feedback relative to Residential 5.

### **Residential 6**

Residential 6 is a seven-story mixed use building with 249-units of multi-family residential and approximately 29,300 square feet of ground floor commercial space. Residential 6 is bounded Northgate Drive to the west and interior roadways to the north, east, and south. Residential 6 is surrounded by Pad 5 (proposed as part of Phase 2) to the north, Town Square to the east, and the parking structure to the south. Residential 6 would consist of 36 studio units (620 square feet), 160 one-bedroom units (680 to 830 square feet), and 53two-bedroom units (1,150 square feet) (Sheet RE-82).

Residential 6 has a 319 space three-level parking structure within the interior of the building. The parking garage includes one underground level and two typical levels with assigned stalls for the residential units on each of those levels. Consistent with minimum building code requirements, 15% of the total parking is designated for installation of EV chargers and the other 85% of the proposed parking will be EV ready. Bike parking for 276 bicycles is located in a bike room at the southeast corner of the buildings 1<sup>st</sup> floor parking area and is accessible from the Northgate Dr entry.

The main lobby and interior amenities, inclusive of a coworking space, and mail room are located on the ground floor at the southeast corner of the building. Other interior amenities include small lounge areas on floors 3, 4, 5, and 6 and a clubroom on level 3. Common outdoor amenities include two third-floor courtyards and a fifth floor roof deck. Outdoor amenity areas include a variety of features including seat walls, lounge furniture, outdoor dining facilities, fire features, a swimming pool, and spa. Private outdoor areas/patios provide additional amenities for the majority of residential units (Sheet RE-86 – RE-90). In total, Residential 6 includes approximately 19,620 square feet of common usable outdoor area and an additional 17,036 square feet of private outdoor area.

Residential 6 includes a variety of exterior materials, including three different colors of cement plaster, manufactured wood horizontal siding, and large porcelain tile (Sheet RE-94). The building design includes architectural features such as ground floor canopies, recessed outdoor decks with mixed material guardrails on the upper floors, and trellis features at the upper floor common outdoor areas. Residential 6 has a maximum parapet height of 77' – 6", incorporating articulation through varied roof heights that are greater at the outside of the structure and decrease moving toward the center. Ground level glazing, canopies, and landscaping along the east elevation (facing Town Square) serve to soften the pedestrian experience and provide visual interest.

The following sheet references encompass the relevant sheets in the project plan set for review of Residential 6:

- Floor Plans: RE-83, RE-84, RE-85, RE-86, RE-87, RE-88, RE-89, RE-90, RE-91
- Building Sections: RE-93, RE-94
- Building Entry: RE-95
- Elevations: RE-96, RE-97
- Landscaping: L-45, L-46, L-47

The use of landscaping and amenities for commercial users along internal roadways combined with building stepbacks, architectural features, stepped roof lines, and variation in colors and materials serve to break up the massing and provide visual interest when viewed from greater distance. Overall, the layout and design of Residential 6 meets the relevant design guidelines and is consistent with design related policies in the General Plan. The ground floor tenant amenities and commercial components of the mixed-use building are orientated toward the Town Square and feature more pedestrian scaled detailing. Common areas provide both indoor and outdoor amenities to serve residents.

There are several outstanding design aspects of Residential 6 that staff believes warrant additional feedback and refinement to ensure quality design within the project. Staff seeks the DRBs feedback regarding the following:

- Should the southwest corner incorporate additional features to screen large expanses of plaster and perforated metal screens to ensure screening prior to maturation of proposed trees is adequate?
- Is there enough variation and articulation provided at the west and south elevations?

### **Discussion Items**

The following discussion is broken into broad topics with specific references to the residential design guidelines contained in Exhibit 6 where applicable. These topical discussion items may be similar to feedback questions referenced above for each residential parcel but also built upon the overarching themes for the DRB to consider in their discussion and ultimate recommendation to the Planning Commission.

### *Open Space*

As explained above, neither the PD zoning district nor the GC zoning district impose minimum open space requirements for either the residential or commercial elements of the project. However, the provision of usable outdoor area is encouraged in residential development as part of a mixed-use project within no minimum identified. The Northgate Town Square project includes both community open space accessible to the public, such as the town square and bike hub and private common open space accessible to the residents of the associated residential parcel as well as private open space such as a patio or balcony specific to a single residential unit. As previously mentioned, there is no open space requirement for the commercial component of the overall project. The common open space on each residential parcel has been reviewed for consistency with the 100 square feet per unit that is codified for the HR1 zoning district and will be a base development standard in the project specific PD.

At the July 18<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting there were comments from DRB members that the town square should be increased in size to effectively serve the community. In the September 6<sup>th</sup> DRB staff report the specifics of the common open space for each residential parcel is discussed to provide greater context to the mix of open space amenities available to the users of the overall Northgate site.

Staff recommends that the DRB discuss the distribution and type of open space amenities provided on residential lots in conjunction with the size and configuration of the town square and provide recommended modifications, if appropriate. Specifically, given the larger context is there a consensus to recommend an increase in the size of the town square.

#### *Building Height and Architectural Features*

As previously discussed in this report, the applicant has requested a waiver of the maximum building height consistent with the provisions of the state density bonus. As such, the overall maximum building height is not in and of itself within the purview of the DRB. However, consistent with the residential design guidelines, building height should consider adjacent buildings and transitional elements should seek to minimize apparent height differences. The guidelines also call for relating new roof forms to those found in the general area when possible. Staff recommends the DRB discuss the impact of proposed building height on adjacent uses, views of residential buildings from the public right-of-way and prominent viewpoints and provide feedback and recommendations on ways to minimize impacts of building height, including recommending additional articulating features or materials that may reduce the appearance of height and mass and/or adjusting building orientation/siting, if appropriate. To ensure compliance with state density bonus law, recommendations should include feasible options that will not reduce the overall residential unit count.

This same discussion relates to design guidelines regarding scale in that design techniques should be used to break up the volume of larger buildings into smaller units and transitional elements such as stepped façade, roof decks, and architectural details should be used to merge larger buildings into an existing neighborhood. The applicant team has used a variety of techniques to break up the massing such as building step backs from Northgate Drive, incorporation of the smaller scale town home element in Residential 2, canopies and landscape design to create a pedestrian scale at the ground floor, etc. Have these efforts been successful in achieving the desired high quality infill development and does the DRB have recommendations for further refinement of these design treatments?

#### *Landscaping*

As discussed at the July 18<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting, the overall Northgate Town Square project proposes a significant landscape package to create shade, provide screening between different users on the site, enhance pedestrian and bicycle travel, create gateways at key entries, and create usable spaces. Staff recommends the DRB discuss the location, distribution, mix, size, and species of proposed plantings as well the location and distribution of tenant amenities and seeks DRB concurrence with the proposed location, distribution, mix, size, and species of proposed plantings.

The Design Guidelines specifically calls out the importance of landscaped areas adjacent to sidewalks as a key component of a successful residential project. The Northgate project provides a significant

amount of landscaping adjacent to the sidewalks throughout the project with specific areas where greater landscape buffer is provided to create a gateway, enhance the pedestrian experience, or otherwise enhance the environment for enjoyment and safety along the pedestrian and bicycle corridors.

### *Parking Layout/Siting*

The City's design guidelines seek to create usable and safe driveways and parking areas that minimize the minimize visual prominence. All of the residential parcels largely contain onsite parking to parking structures within the envelope of the building itself. The surface parking lot to the rear of Residential 1 is the only readily visible parking lot serving the residential uses. Staff recommends the DRB discuss the overall layout, design, and siting of residential parking areas and provide recommended modifications, if appropriate. Comments on the adequacy of the amount of parking should be avoided as the project is not subject to parking minimums nor to parking maximums.

### *Lighting*

The design guidelines as well as regulations in the SRMC limit the intensity of lighting to provide for adequate site security and pedestrian and vehicular safety. The proposed light fixtures for each of the project buildings is provided for consideration of the design in relation to the architecture of the project. Additionally, conditions of approval will be included in the project entitlements to ensure that all lighting performance standards are satisfied in final permit plans.

### *Building Design*

Staff recommends that the DRB discuss the architectural design of each residential building and provide recommended design modifications, if appropriate, to reduce any potential conflicts between existing commercial uses and proposed residential uses and to ensure the proposed design meets the intent of the San Rafael design guidelines and design-related General Plan policies.

Additionally, staff recommends particular focus on the building entrances for each of the residential parcels to ensure that entrances create a clear, well defined sense of interest that is pedestrian scale and oriented toward the street. Does the DRB have recommendations for further refinement of these aspects of the residential design?

Furthermore, while the residential buildings are large, high density infill, does the architecture adequately articulate building facades to break up long monotonous walls? This was brought up as part of the July 18<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting with regard to the cinema structure and Staff recommends discussion and consensus feedback on refinements that may be needed to appropriately respond to the direction of this design guideline.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff is seeking the Design Review Board's recommendation including any design feedback on the residential focus areas outlined above as well as consensus on the previous feedback from the July 18<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting. Following the DRB's recommendation to the Planning Commission the project will continue the review process to include:

- Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) Public Review (Fall 2023)
- Planning Commission Review and Recommendation to City Council (Fall – Winter 2023)
- Final EIR (FEIR) and Project Entitlement Review by City Council (Winter 2023 – 2024)

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The following notification was completed to ensure that those interested in participating were given opportunity to contribute input to the September 6<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting.

- Public Hearing post cards were sent to all addresses within the 94903 zip code

- Public Hearing posters were installed at five locations on the Northgate Mall site and at the Terra Linda Community Center and the Northgate Library.
- Public Notice in the Marin IJ published 15-days prior to the meeting day.
- Email notification was sent to individuals and organizations on the City's interested parties list.
- Meeting information was provided on the Northgate project webpage, the Planning Division and Community Development Department webpages, the City's News webpage, and the City Manager Snapshot newsletter.

Staff have received comments throughout the review process. Comments received subsequent to the July 18<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting are attached to this report as Exhibit 9.

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](#),
- DRB Public Hearing – [July 18, 2023](#)

In addition to the four City sponsored meetings outlined above, the applicant team has sought 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

Staff recommends that the Design Review Board recommend Planning Commission approval of an environmental and design review permit, inclusive of the recommended list of additional requirements provided below. This list has been provided based on feedback received from prior Design Review Board and Planning Commission meetings.

- Increase the size of the town square.
- Eliminate the dog park and repurpose the area within the town square.
- Eliminate synthetic turf or other faux natural features as part of the design of the town square and use natural products instead.
- Eliminate the mountain relief on the cinema and consider green wall or other softer methods to break up the building massing.
- Consider opportunities for music venue (Hopmonk example)
- Add additional awnings and other shade options to make space more usable year-round.
- Evaluate additional opportunities to break up the sheer wall of the rear elevation of the cinema across from the townhomes.
- Incorporate additional landscaping between the outdoor common area of Residential 1 and Northgate Drive.
- Modify the architectural design and exterior materials of Residential 1 to include features and materials more akin to those proposed for Residential 3, 4, 5, and 6.
- Provide landscaping or other features, such as a green wall on the south side of the parking garage to increase screening between the north elevation of Residential 1 and the adjacent parking garage.
- Provide additional screening and modulation of the large massing of the cinema structure as seen from the front stoops of the adjacent townhomes of Residential 2.
- Provide additional variation and pedestrian scaled articulation at the southwest corner of Residential 3.
- Provide additional articulating features at the secondary lobby entry at the northwest corner of Residential 3 such as seat walls, planters, etc.
- Provide varied landscaping at the intersection of Los Ranchitos Road and the interior street adjacent to Residential 3 to provide adequate gateway differentiation.
- Increase architectural variation and articulating features along the Los Ranchitos Rd (west elevation) and south elevations of Residential 4 to provide visual interest along these elevations.
- Incorporate additional screening features at the southwest corner of Residential 6 to ensure screening prior to maturation of proposed trees is adequate.
- Increase architectural variation and articulating features along the west and south elevations of Residential 6.

## 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. [General Plan Policies](#)
6. [Residential Design Guidelines](#)
7. [DRB Staff Report, 7/18/2023](#)
8. [Plant Palette, 7/11/2023](#)
9. [Public Comments](#)



