



December 18, 2023

**Mayor Colin and City Council Members
1400 Fifth Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901**

Re: DRB / PC

Dear Mayor and Council Members

I've been assessing the possible dissolution of the Design Review Board for the last several weeks and apologize for the late comments. I've been a long serving member of the Design Review Board. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 18 years +/- I've volunteered as I am a lifelong resident of San Rafael and feel I need to offer my expertise to give back the community that has given me so much. I firmly believe that the board has done an excellent job for decades by shaping the built environment in San Rafael. I believe that we have made a difference by ensuring we've achieved the best quality feasible for projects throughout San Rafael.

This success was achieved by having a group of qualified and skilled professionals at the helm of reviewing design and landscape issues for proposed projects. The 5-member board has always had a synergy. We've always brought our the best in each other. At times, it really took hearing the perspective of the other professionals on the board to be able to adjust pre-conceived notions that we may have entered the meeting with. This is how the creative process works. We all speak the same language. It's quite unique and something that comes with years/decades of being a design professional.

I have mixed feelings about the elimination of the design review board. Taking smaller projects that once would have come to the board and allow them to be handled by staff is mostly a positive move. I would suggest that a licensed architect, perhaps a board member should be available to staff to assist on a case by case basis should staff feel the need.

Mid size to large projects have traditionally benefitted greatly from design review. I've found that most of those projects would get a recommendation for approval in one or two meetings as the applicant would generally be very responsive to our comments. Thus the system worked.

Very large projects seemed to have been more difficult due to the overlay of policy issues that lie more in the purview of the Planning Commission or City Council. These projects would sometimes get caught up in the complexity of policy vs design would result in more time, more meetings. Those projects would have greatly benefited if we would have had joint Design Review/PC meetings.

I sense that it is those large projects are the ones driving this proposal. We're also dealing with a general sense of entitlement that people appear to have these days. Everyone is looking for a way to circumvent the traditional process. This is just an observation, but I also feel it's true. I caution that we shouldn't make decisions based on emotion and response to the squeaky wheels out there. People are much more apt to complain when they're frustrated or impatient. People tend not to reach out or comment when they're happy with the process. I would submit that the



majority of our public in San Rafael has been happy with the efforts of the board and simply take it for granted that someone has their eyes on to protect the city's interests.

The last several years have been difficult. The pandemic changed how we did things. The DRAC had mixed results. Sometimes it didn't make sense to have two of us attempt to dissect all of the design issues. We sorely missed input from the other three members. This concerns me with the suggestion of one licensed member and one license alternate on the PC. If council does go down the road, I would suggest the PC may need to be enlarged or reconfigured to include a minimum of two licensed design professionals. In an ideal world, we would have two licensed architects and one licensed landscape architect. Some smaller towns have fewer design professional members, but we are a city of over 50k people thus should have more.

I would like the Mayor and Council to consider my comments as they make this potentially difficult decision. The big question I'd ask is why? San Rafael has had a design review board for as long as I can remember. It has been very successful. If changes need to be made regarding what projects come to the board, let's do that. If there are projects that would benefit from joint meetings, let's do that. If there is something wrong with our board, let's fix it. If the decision is to eliminate the board, then consider my comments about the makeup and size of the PC. If it comes to that, I will gladly apply if that is deemed helpful.

I hope this correspondence adds to the discussion

Thanks for your time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stewart K Summers', written in a cursive style.

Stewart K Summers
Architect