



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