

January 16, 2025

Ms. Erin Walters
Community Development Department
Town of Los Gatos
110 E. Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95031

RE: 14789 Oka Road

Dear Erin:

I reviewed the drawings, and evaluated the site context. My comments and recommendations are as follows:

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The site is located in a mixed use neighborhood of residential, office, recreational facility and agricultural uses. It has been used as an orchard. Photographs of the site and its surrounding context are shown on the following page.





The Site: Street looking south



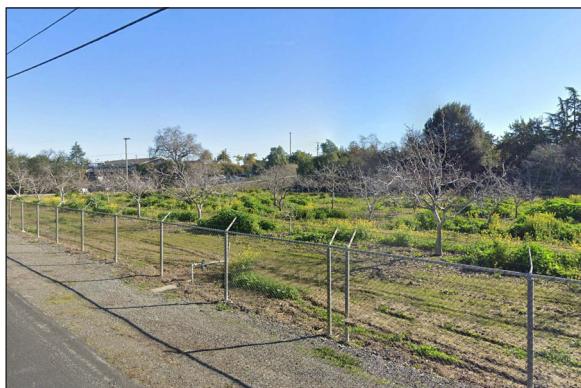
The Site: Street looking north



Office project to the immediate left



Residential neighborhood to the immediate right



Vacant parcel across Oka Road



Nearby house to the right on Oka Road

PROPOSED PROJECT



NOTE: LANDSCAPE SHOWN FOR GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION ONLY. SEE LANDSCAPE DRAWINGS FOR MORE INFO.



PROPOSED PROJECT

**7-PLEX
ELEVATION A**



Front Elevation



Rear Elevation



Left Elevation



Right Elevation

PROPOSED PROJECT

**7-PLEX
ELEVATION B**



Front Elevation



Rear Elevation



Left Elevation



Right Elevation

PROPOSED PROJECT

**8-PLEX
ELEVATION A**



Front Elevation



Rear Elevation



Left Elevation



Right Elevation

PROPOSED PROJECT

**8-PLEX
ELEVATION B**



Front Elevation



Rear Elevation



Left Elevation



Right Elevation

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

OVERVIEW

The Town of Los Gatos has grown incrementally over many decades with a strong self-sense of its small scale and small town feeling and reputation. While trends and family needs have changed over time, the town has always emphasized small scale, well landscaped and architecturally detailed design and neighborhood compatibility as core principles in guiding its growth. As a result the Town of Los Gatos has maintained qualities highly prized by families seeking homes in the South Bay and sales prices have reflected that desirability. To maintain those special qualities that have defined the community, the town over time has prepared a variety of standards and guidelines to set forth community expectations and provide guidance to applicants for design in the spirit of those expectations.

CHALLENGES

While this proposed project will provide much needed housing in the community, it has many conditions and features that are inconsistent with the current town character and scale.

In recent years, as residential development in the community has expanded to include more multifamily developments, many applicants have worked with the town to modestly adjust their designs to be more in alignment with the scale and qualities that have made the Town of Los Gatos uniquely special and attractive. The material below outlines some of the concerns with the proposed design as it has been presented along with modest solutions and techniques used in similar developments in Los Gatos and other nearby communities to address similar issues.

AREAS OF CONCERN

The adjacent illustration groups the areas of concerns on the proposed site plan.



AREA A: STREET FRONTAGE

ISSUES

Overall, the Oka Road frontage is very repetitious with small setbacks, limited landscaping and architectural detail, long facades, uniform heights and diminished entry delineation and character.

1. The setbacks from Oka Road are quite small.
2. Frontage landscaping appears limited to street trees.
3. The residential facades facing Oka Road are quite repetitive with little individual unit identity.
4. Residential entries are all rather bland and lacking in any individual identity..
5. Recessed entries appear to each contain a rectangular box element which I assume is the HVAC air conditioning condenser equipment.



Oka Road Frontage Elevation



*Oka Road Frontage Elevation
Left: 8-Plex A*



*Oka Road Frontage Elevation
Middle: 8-Plex B*



*Oka Road Frontage Elevation
Right: 7-Plex A*

LOS GATOS AND SIMILAR PROJECT EXAMPLES

Front Entry Patios and Gardens



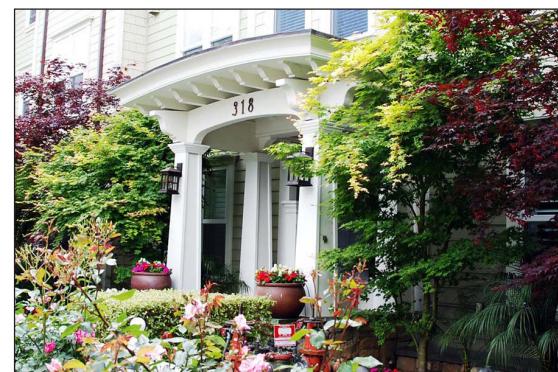
Los Gatos



Los Gatos



San Mateo



San Mateo



San Mateo



Rivermark: San Carlos

Change in Unit Type Along Frontage



Arbor Rose: San Mateo



Arbor Rose Street Frontage: San Mateo

Varied Facade Articulation and Prominent Entry Porches



Cupertino



North 40 Phase 1: Los Gatos



North 40 Phase 1: Los Gatos

Street Frontage Step Downs

TAKEAWAYS

- Unified front patios and yard landscaping can add rich color, visual interest and individual unit identity to street frontages.
- Porches can add a stronger sense of residential unit entries and individuality.
- Air conditioning condensers at front entries are undesirable.
- Strong projecting overhangs and balconies can add a sense of human scale to the street frontage facade.
- End units step down can add variety and better human scale.

AREA B: END UNIT DESIGN

ISSUES

1. The end elevations along the side access drives and the north-south pedestrian paseos are quite repetitive.
2. Many end walls are an unbroken three stories tall which has always been discouraged in the town's various design guidelines.
3. There is no variations in setbacks or building heights which leads to a box-like project look which is at variance with community expectations.



End Elevations: East Access Drive



7-Plex A



7-Plex B

LOS GATOS AND SIMILAR PROJECT EXAMPLES

End Elevation Entries



San Mateo: Arbor Rose



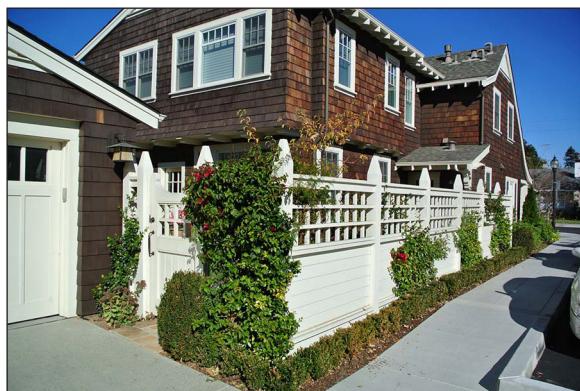
San Mateo: Arbor Rose

End Elevation Porch And Balcony Wrap



Cupertino

End Elevation Private Open Space



Los Gatos



North 40: Los Gatos

End Elevation Step Downs



North 40 Phase 1: Los Gatos

End Elevation Integration with Front Elevation



Rivermark: Santa Clara

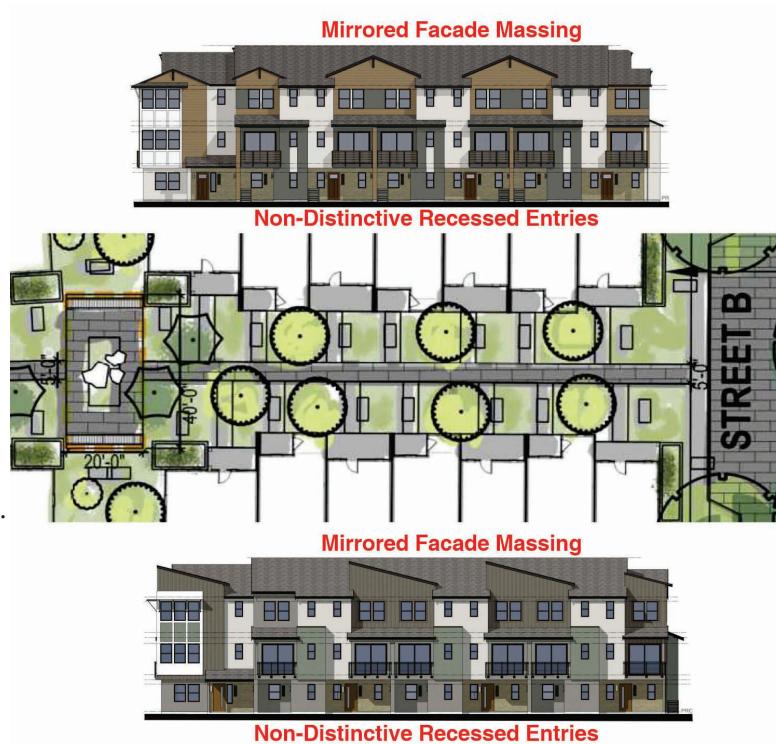
TAKEAWAYS

- Locating entries on the end elevations can enhance the streetscape and enliven that sense of entry for visitors.
- Extending front elevation elements and features around onto end elevations can enhance the residential character and scale of the structure.
- Better integration of end elevations with front elevations can provide a more unified design.
- Reducing building height on end elevations can reduce the appearance of a “project” and enhance the individuality of the structures.
- Fencing and substantial landscaping at end elevations can provide a visual step up in building mass.

AREA C: PEDESTRIAN ENTRY PASSAGEWAYS

ISSUES

1. The pedestrian passageways linking unit entries to the guest parking driveways seem adequate in width but details on how the spaces between buildings is not yet adequate to understand the intent and scale of these important areas.
2. The significant issues would appear to be the sameness and flatness of the facing facades and the non-distinctive recessed unit entries seem like a lost opportunity to provide visual interest along the roughly 475 feet combined facade frontages.



One way to assess this long frontage is to compare it to a similar length three structure frontage in the recently completed North 40 Phase 1,



North 40 Phase 1 Longest Continuous Facade Frontage



Typical Proposed Entry Passageway Facade Frontage



North 40 Phase 1 End Structures

The proposed project frontage is much flatter, more repetitious and lacking in unit entry interest than that of the similar frontages on North 40.

LOS GATOS AND SIMILAR PROJECT EXAMPLES



TAKEAWAYS

- Facade variety adds visual richness and a sense of home individuality.
- Facade articulation through horizontal plane offsets enhances a sense of individual homes.
- Projecting porches enhances a sense of individual home entries.

AREA D: PEDESTRIAN PASEOS

ISSUES

1. The pedestrian paseos are typical and appear to include passive activities along their length. However, the adjacent side elevations, like the front and rear elevations, are very repetitive.
2. The adjacent building elevations have three story tall unbroken walls along a significant portion of their length which is a condition that has been strongly discouraged in the town's Residential Design Guidelines.



LOS GATOS AND SIMILAR PROJECT EXAMPLES

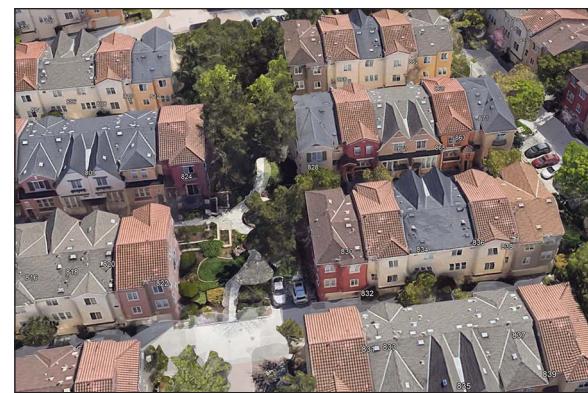
Paseo Corner Porches



Periodic trellises to break up vistas



Wider paseo to bring common open space



TAKEAWAYS

- More facade variety and human scale element along paseos can increase the sense of neighborhood.
- Having more of the common open space closer to the units are often very desirable.

AREA E: NORTH EDGE PEDESTRIAN ENTRY FRONTAGE

ISSUES

1. The Los Gatos Trail frontage is as important in relating to the wider community as the Oka Road frontage. The issues are the same with the added likelihood of the trail frontage being even more pedestrian and bike oriented.

AREA F: COMMON AREA

ISSUES

1. The Common Area is located at the far extremity of the project which may not serve the residents as well as one more centrally located. It will however, being located immediately adjacent to the Los Gatos Creek trail, potentially serve a broader swath of the Los Gatos community. This mix of users may not be the most advantageous for the residents of this community.

AREA G: RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS DESIGN

ISSUES

1. The 138 building facades, front, rear and end, throughout the project are highly repetitive and not indicative of the norm of more variety and individuality in Los Gatos. While there are two styles for the 7-Plex and 8-Plex structures, the difference between the 7 and 8-Plex facades would be perceived as essentially the same.
2. There are a number of three story tall unbroken facades which would not be consistent with the community expectations as reflected in the town's Residential Design Guidelines.
3. There are a number of locations on the facades where material and color changes are made in the same plane which would not be consistent with the community expectations as reflected in the town's Residential Design Guidelines.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Staff should encourage the applicant refine their current design to incorporate more of the features illustrated in the past similar development examples above to better customize the project design to the character, scale and community expectations of Los Gatos.
2. Some suggestions would include:
 - Provide more building facade elevation variety.
 - Provide more individualized unit entry gardens and porches.
 - Enhance the two entry drives with facing project entries and balconies.
 - Break up three story walls.
 - Explore lowering the height of end units to improve the entry drive and interior paseos scale.
 - Eliminate material and color changes in the same plane.
 - Explore bringing more of the Common Open Space into a centralized location.
 - Improve the Paseos by breaking up long vistas with landscaping and trellises.
 - Enhance the 475 feet long auto courts with more landscaping, facade variety and articulation.
 - Relocate the utility equipment at the front entries.
 - Upgrade fencing (e.g., Laurel Mews).

CANNON DESIGN GROUP



Larry L. Cannon