

ARCHITECTURE

PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN

March 16, 2023

Ms. Somer Smith  
Department of Community Development  
City of San Mateo  
330 West 20th Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94403-1388

**RE: 616 South B Street**

Dear Somer:

I reviewed the drawings, evaluated the site context, viewed the February 8<sup>th</sup> planning commission study session video, and reviewed the initial design submittal. My comments and recommendations are outlined below.

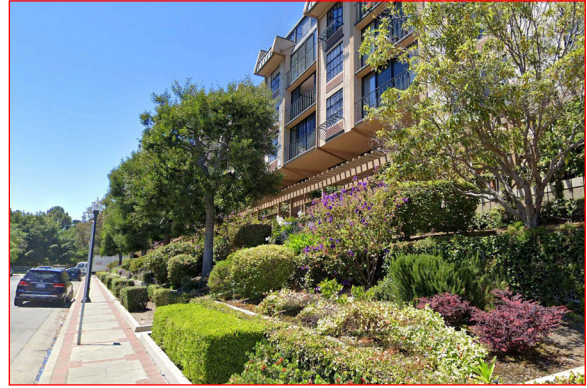




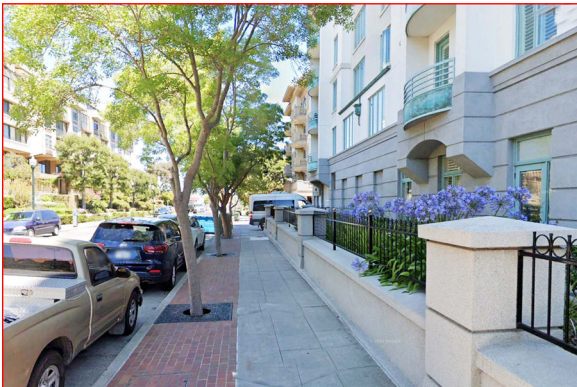
## NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT



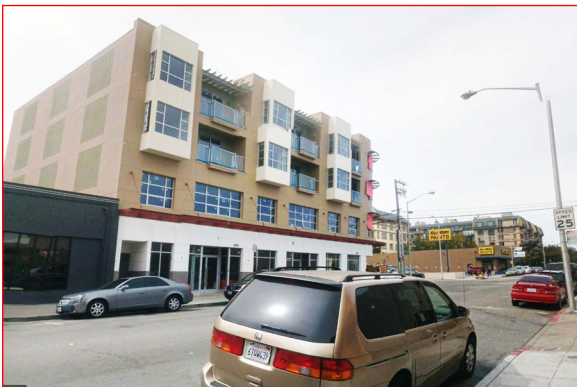
THE GRAMMERCY



STRADBALLY COURT



THE STRATFORD



NAZARETH TERRACE





## PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION

### Individual planning commissioners and members of the public made the following comments.

- Attractive building but it doesn't fit here.
- There would be less push back if the building were designed in a more traditional style.
- Would like to see more traditional style - lot of people don't like modern buildings.
- Source of friction with downtown where historical context is important.
- Prefer to see design more similar to older B Street buildings.
- Prefer to see building more consistent with pre-war buildings.
- Have seen several new projects come to downtown that have used more traditional brick with a clean simple line aesthetic.
- Would probably fit with developer's other nearby projects, but not sure whether it would fit with the larger downtown area.
- Colors are stark contrast to the surroundings.
- Not a fan of articulated facades.
- Feels like this design already looks dated.
- Would like to see potential for outdoor dining.
- Have looked at other Peninsula cities where they are using more traditional building forms (e.g., Redwood City). They haven't repeated themselves with the same type of architecture.
- Attractive but would like to see more stone or brick or stucco.
- We see quite a lot of landscaping on adjacent buildings, but not here.
- Site is set between semi-historic downtown and the Hayward Park neighborhood > homes from the 1920s.
- Feels like the corner elements are a little too stark and overdone. Maybe tone it down to make it less prominent.

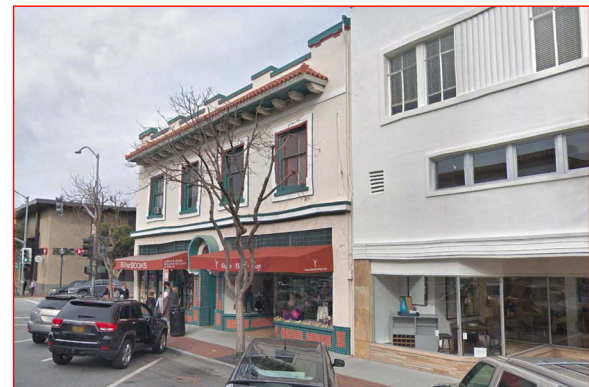
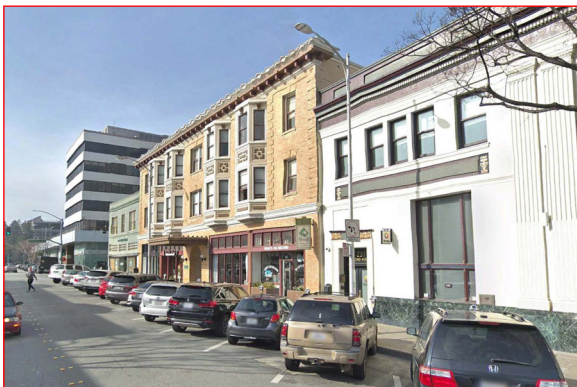
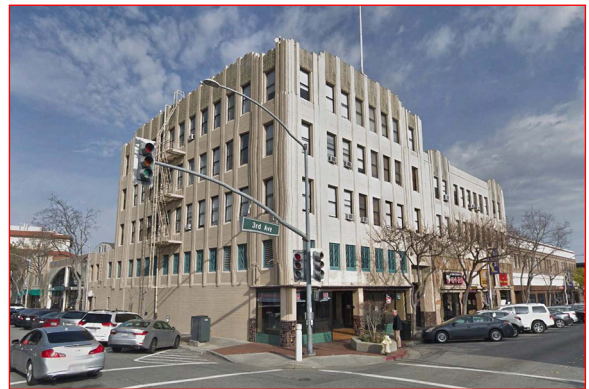
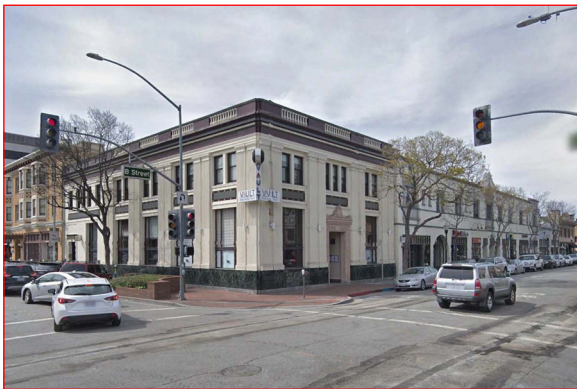
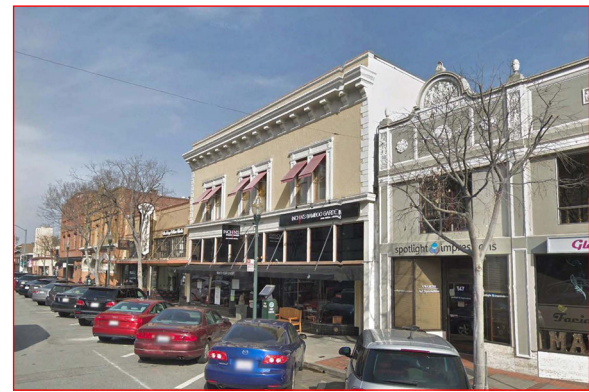
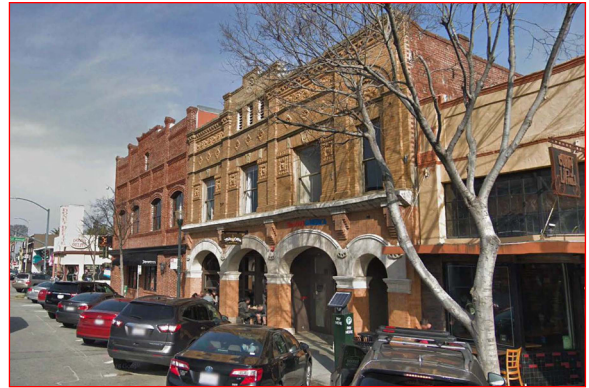
## ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The recurring concern expressed at the Planning Commission study session was the need a better balance between the developer's goal and the community's expectation that this property's design be more reflective of the forms, materials and design of the adjacent downtown fabric. To assist in that discussion some typical examples of desirable downtown storefronts are shown below followed by examples of older downtown buildings and recently approved mixed use structures within the downtown area.





## OLDER DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS CONTEXT





## RECENT DOWNTOWN MIXED USE BUILDINGS



180 EAST THIRD AVENUE



303 BALDWIN AVENUE



405 FOURTH AVENUE and 406 THIRD AVENUE



405 FOURTH AVENUE



221 El Camino Real



2 East Third Avenue





## PROPOSED PROJECT

Following the Planning Commission's study session I reviewed the project illustrated in the sketch immediately below.



In response to the review letter recommendations and further direction from staff, the applicant has submitted a new design shown in the sketches below.



*South B Street / Sixth Avenue corner*



*South B Street / Seventh Avenue corner*



*Second and Fifth Level Common Open Spaces*



## REVISED DESIGN CONCERNS

The revised design is an improvement over the original proposal reviewed by the Planning Commission. However the facade is rather flat with minimum facade plane changes apart from the inset balconies. It is also especially busy on the B Street facade, and does not seem to meet the Planning Commission's study session expectation that this project's design be more reflective of the forms, materials and design of the adjacent downtown fabric - see illustration below.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

I would suggest for consideration two possible approaches to address staff and planning commissioners' concerns.

1. Simplify the B Street facade by adding brick in lieu of the white stucco except in smaller area than bookend the facade. This would retain all of the framework and fenestration of the currently proposed design but repeat the walls and balcony treatment currently proposed on the rear facade - see sketch illustration on the following page.



**B STREET ELEVATION: Proposed**



**B STREET ELEVATION: Recommended**

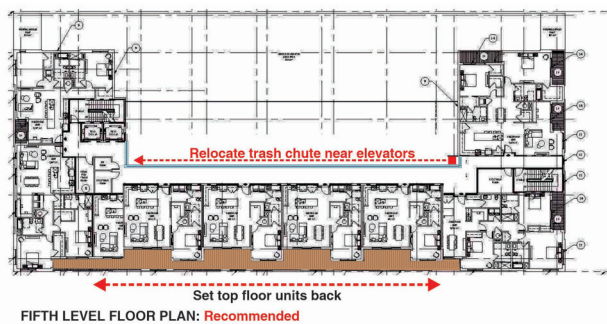




*Currently proposed rear facade treatment  
of walls and balconies*

There are a couple of other changes that might be considered in light of the planning commission expectations expressed at the study session.

- Using brick in lieu of the proposed wood siding to match the material in common use in the older downtown area along B Street.
- Set back a portion of the fifth level facing B Street to provide a stronger top to the building and reduce its visual height as shown in the example in the second approach below.





2. The second suggested approach would perhaps be more sympathetic to the features suggested by the planning commissioners to reflect a style and materials more complementary to older downtown structures.

This approach could include the following elements:

- Brick walls with traditional brick or stone wall caps.
- Varied window treatment.
- Set back upper floor.

One example of this approach is shown below



Other possible refinements:

- Refine the ground floor storefront canopies to enrich the pedestrian experience. Two good examples are shown below.





- Add more substantial landscaping along the storefronts.
- Develop storefront and signage design standards and guidelines that would allow and encourage more unique designs as are common in the older downtown area and as shown on page 3 above.
- Carry front facade design around onto the Sixth Avenue frontage and provide projections of the two building masses to provide more distinctive elements facing the substantial building setback area along that facade.
- Provide landscaping along the Sixth Avenue edge of the outdoor dining area.
- Improve the garage level wall on the rear facade by adding the siding or brick material from the front facade or adding greenscreen to provide a better transition to the adjacent neighboring properties.
- Open the parking level wall at the garage ramp.
- Add substantial landscaping at the edges of the second and fifth level common open spaces to improve project's sensitivity to adjacent neighbors..



Somer, please let me know if you have any questions, or if there are specific issues of concern that I did not address.

Sincerely,

CANNON DESIGN GROUP

Larry Cannon