

September 8, 2022

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

RE: 477 9th Avenue

Dear Linda:

I reviewed the drawings, evaluated the site context and viewed the May 24th planning commission study session video. My comments and recommendations are outlined below.

SITE CONTEXT

The site is located in a transition zone at the southeastern edge of downtown. The surrounding neighborhood contains an eclectic mix of older mostly one story commercial uses and a single family residential neighborhood to the east. Photo of the site and the surrounding neighborhood are shown on the following page.





THE SITE FROM 9th AVENUE



Parcel immediately across 9th Avenue



Parcel immediately adjacent to the north



Nearby one-story buildings across 9th Avenue



View east on 9th Avenue



Nearby buildings across 9th Avenue



View west on 9th Avenue
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View to the site from across railroad corridor

PROPOSED PROJECT



9th AVENUE and SOUTH RAILROAD AVENUE CORNER



9th AVENUE and SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET CORNER



SOUTH CLAREMONT and NORTH FACADE CORNER



PROPOSED 9th AVENUE ELEVATION



PROPOSED NORTH ELEVATION



PROPOSED SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET ELEVATION



PROPOSED SOUTH RAILROAD CORRIDOR ELEVATION

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION

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

Public Comments

- Like the Spanish Revival Style: include tile roof / recessed windows / mouldings / colored tile like Azaro project.
- Railroad corridor facade needs work.
- Referenced San Mateo Multifamily Design Guidelines.
- Smaller scale, softer color/ Juliette balconies preferred.
- More setbacks would be good.
- Too tall and massive for the area.
- Claremont side is pretty massive.
- 9th Avenue walkability needs improvement.

Planning Commission Comments

- Thank you for keeping the oak trees.
- Design seems a bit of a mish-mash between traditional and contemporary.
- Proposed architectural style is good for the site context.
- 9th Avenue facade is superior to the South Claremont facade.
- Claremont facade is overly repetitive and a little course at the moment.
- Claremont facade: would look a lot different if broken down in mass and scale consistent with the proposed architectural style.
- Wonder about more building setback to give Claremont more breathing room.
- Be aware that everything across Claremont is one story in height.
- 9th and Claremont - rather just see one single gable.
- Reduce mass and make it more interesting.
- Ground floor surfaces around the arches seem a little uncomfortably plain.
- Would be desirable to add something like horizontal trim, string course or tile above arched areas to break it up - seems too clean at the moment.
- Like/keep the arches.
- Window treatments: ask to avoid flush mounted windows / Likes widow recesses on the Palo Alto example - gives facade character and texture without becoming too articulated.
- Flatness of the facade is too sheer across a large building like this.
- Increase visual interest and texture to make the building style feel more authentic.
- Provide some facade offsets - it feels too modern.
- Railroad corridor facade looks quite sparse and feels very modern / it doesn't quite fit with the rest of the building style.
- Railroad corridor facade will be seen from many views - it should have the same level of visual interest as the other facades.
- Don't like the railroad corridor and north facades - much too plain - give them more life and interest - live green walls might be one approach.
- Personally don't see the need to do Spanish Revival - could be something more like what's around it in scale and texture.
- Feels Spanish Revival Style would fit very well in this neighborhood, but at first view of the project , not sure one would know that it is supposed to be Spanish Revival - seems more contemporary.
- Spanish Revival Style throughout California, but most have been "cheapened".
- Favors timeless style buildings - not overly articulated.
- More landscaping where building meets the ground would have softer feel.

- Should have some public art and plantings to break up both street facades.
- This is an important project because it will set the tone for this area which is going to change over the next 25-30 years.
- Project is going to be the beginning of downtown and it will be a landmark.
- If design is to be Spanish Revival, make sure it is unique, authentic and does look like it has been there for the past 25 years- if you can't do that, it will be a failure.

Planning Commissioners' Suggestions:

- * Box bay windows
- * Terracotta or clay tile roof tiles (no asphalt shingles)
- * Fabric awnings
- * Recessed windows
- * Juliette balconies (iron)
- * Traditional window mullion patterns
- * Contrasting lintels
- * Decorative exposed rafter tails
- * Colored wall tiles
- * Masonry sills under windows
- * More vertical breaks along the facade
- * More detailing and variation at the top
- * More variation to mitigate the big mass

DESIGN CHANGES

Several changes have been made in response to the concerns raised in the May 24th study session. The sketches below show the comparison between the study session drawings and the current application under consideration.

STUDY SESSION



CURRENT DESIGN



ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The proposed changes are limited mainly to the corner at 9th and Claremont, the railroad corridor facade and the top of the tower on 9th Avenue. The study session issues of facade flatness, lack of style authenticity and the large scale of the building relative to its surrounding context have not changed much. In an attempt to address the issues raised, the facade seems to have become rather fragmented which is quite the opposite of the general simplicity of the Spanish Revival Style. Before moving on to suggestions for some possible changes, I thought it might be helpful to provide illustrations of the following:

- Desirable projects referenced by the planning commissioners at the study session.
- Examples of the great variety within the general Spanish Revival Style
- Recent Bay Area projects which have drawn on the style.

STUDY SESSION EXAMPLES REFERENCED



Palo Alto



Belmont



San Mateo

SPANISH REVIVAL STYLE

There is a wide diversity of forms and details within the Spanish Revival Style including European, Spanish Mission and earlier North, South and Central American precedents. A few are illustrated below.



COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

- Uniform color throughout
- Deeply recessed windows
- Tile roofs
- Varied window shapes
- Juliette balconies and other surface texture
- Both formal and informal massing
- Sculptural quality - simple building form with carve-outs
- Attention to detail
- Base / Middle / Top common composition

BAY AREA EXAMPLES



Millbrae (BDE Architecture)



San Carlos



San Jose



Livermore (BDE Architecture)

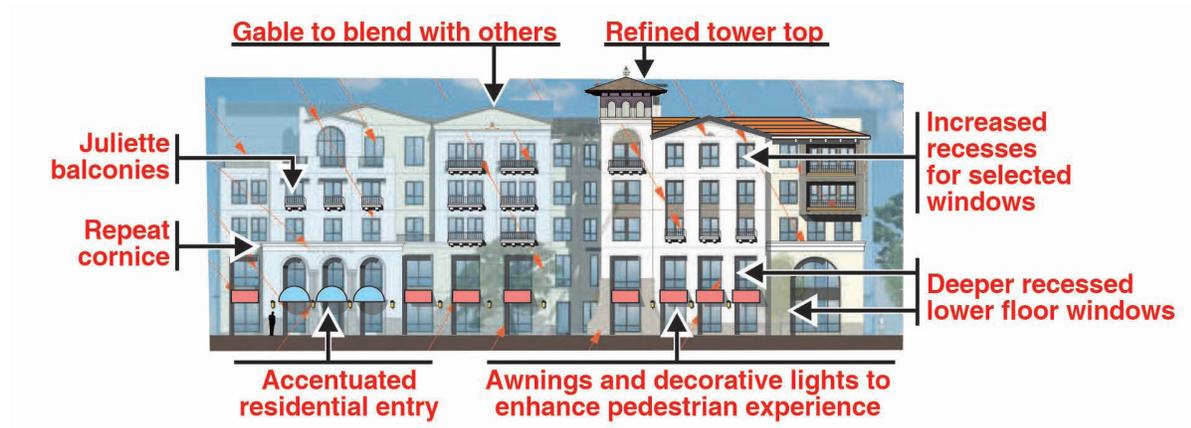


Livermore (BDE Architecture)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on recent state law governing residential development which includes affordable housing, any significant design modifications would need to be mutually agreeable to the applicant and the city. Based on that, the illustrations and examples below are offered as suggestions for discussion. They do not make any significant changes to the currently proposed floor plans and building massing. Suggestions are based on simplifying the design unity of the overall project and adding details appropriate to the proposed architectural style. As noted above, the Spanish Revival Style comes in many flavors with a great diversity in forms and details. Multiple other approaches to adding smaller scale elements and details, improving the pedestrian experience, and providing overall design unity are possible as shown by the multiple photo examples shown above.

9th AVENUE FACADE



Suggested changes include:

- Awning at the first floor to improve the pedestrian environment. The two-story tall openings on the first two floors are rather tall compared to human scale and for the proposed architectural style - see illustrations below.



Proposed



Proposed



Example two-story opening photo



More pedestrian-friendly example (BDE Architecture)

- Decorative wall-mounted light fixtures to enhance the pedestrian environment - see example below left.



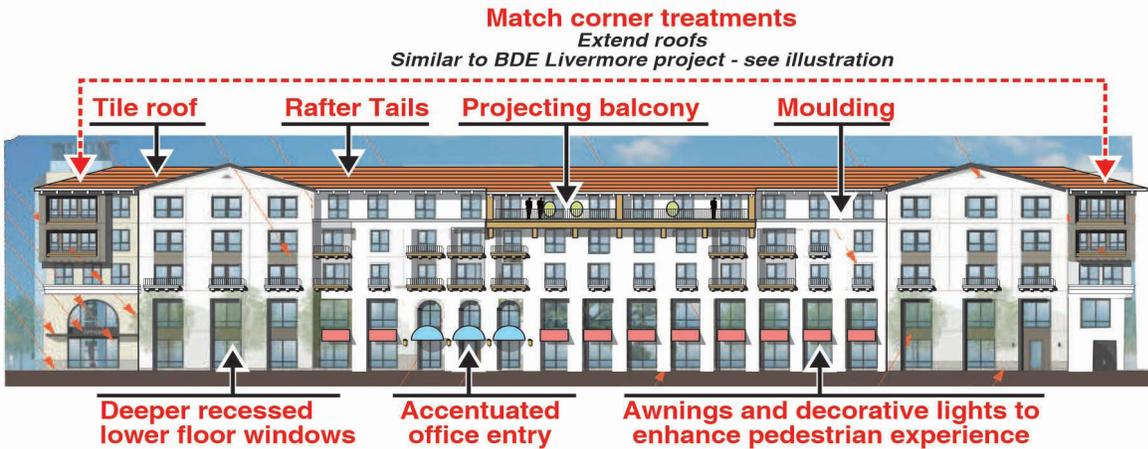
- Deep recesses for the ground floor openings - see photos above.
- Smaller recesses for selected upper floor windows.
- Gable end on top floor in lieu of proposed shed dormer roof to blend with the rest of the 9th Avenue facade.
- More traditional top to the tower - example shown is the approved tower top for The Morgan at Bay Meadows.



Corner Treatment

- Additional projecting balconies and Juliette balconies to enhance the residential character of the building.
- Decorative tiles (not shown) would be another technique for enriching the pedestrian experience. - see example on page 9..
- Corner treatments similar to BDE Livermore project - see illustration above.

CLAREMONT STREET FACADE



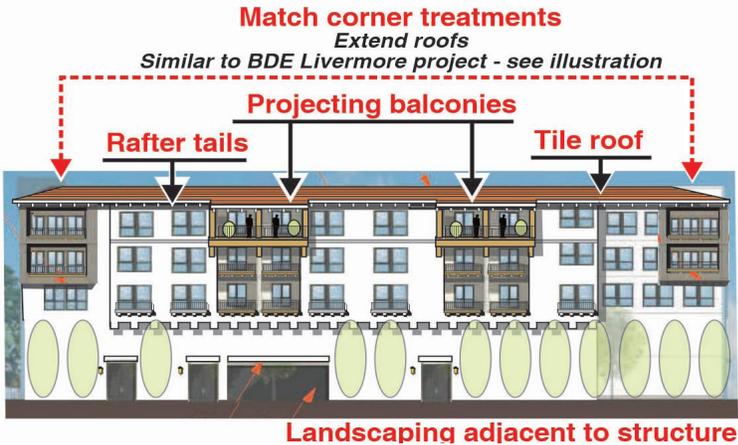
Suggested changes include:

- Ground floor awning and decorative lights as noted above for the 9th Avenue facade above.
- Tile roofing.
- A single wall color - as is common for the Spanish Revival Style.
- Match the treatment of the northeast corner to that at the 9th Avenue corner.
- Additional projecting balconies and Juliette balconies to enhance residential character of the building - especially at the third floor. See examples below.



- Enhanced office entry.
- Mouldings.

NORTH FACADE



Suggested changes include:

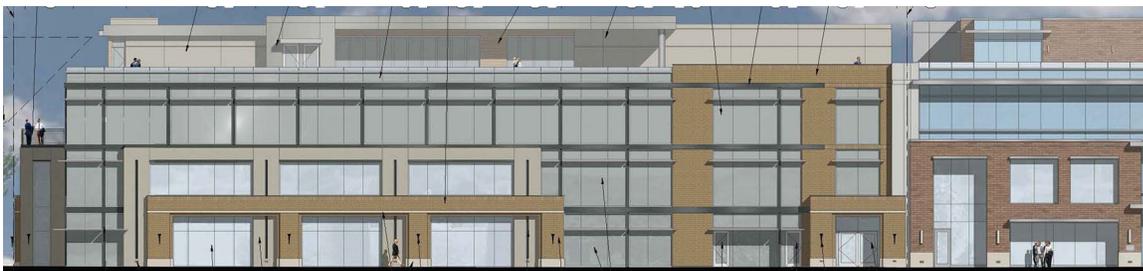
- Similar to the suggestions for the Claremont Street facade.
- Proposed projecting central wall could have wood base or stucco corbels - both are common for the architectural style.
- A single wall color - as is common for the Spanish Revival Style.
- Landscaping adjacent to the building base.
- Decorative lights to match lights along the 9th Avenue and Claremont Street facades.

RAILROAD CORRIDOR FACADE

The proposed west facade is rather under-developed compared to the other facades - see illustration below.



The treatment of railroad corridor-facing facades has been addressed on several recent downtown buildings, but those have been treated with elements and features that reflect the same appearance and level of detail as their street-facing facades - see elevation illustrations below.



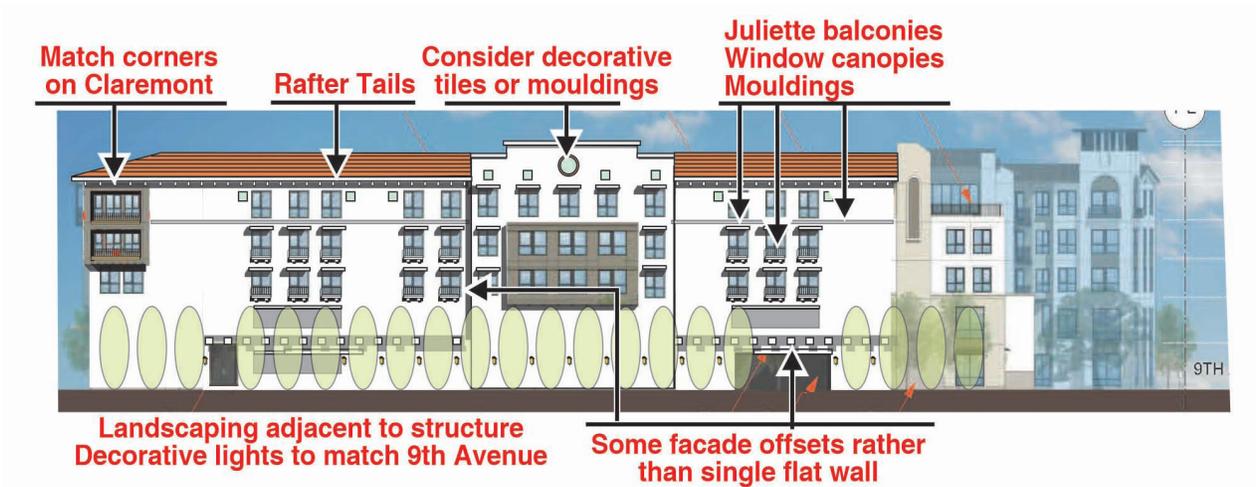
406 East Third Avenue



405 East Fourth Avenue



Kiku Crossing

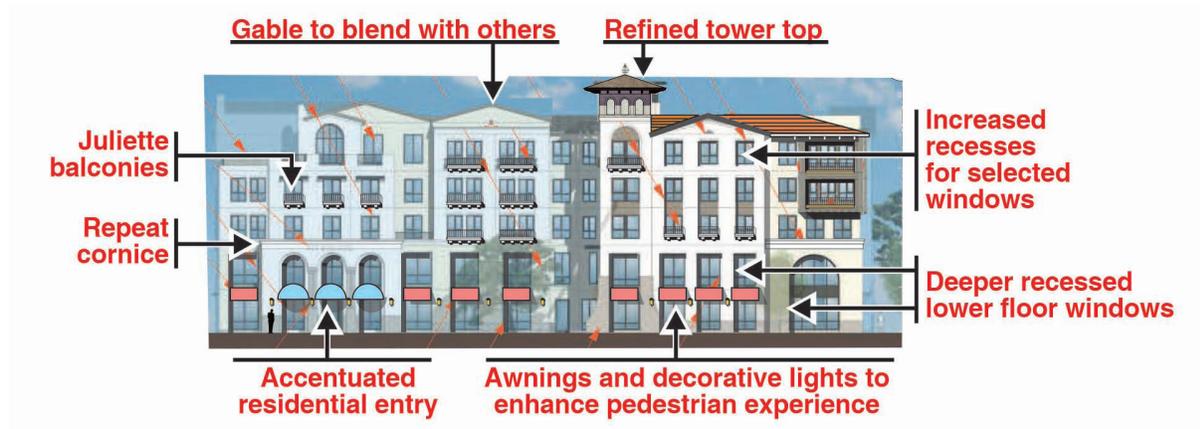


Suggested changes include:

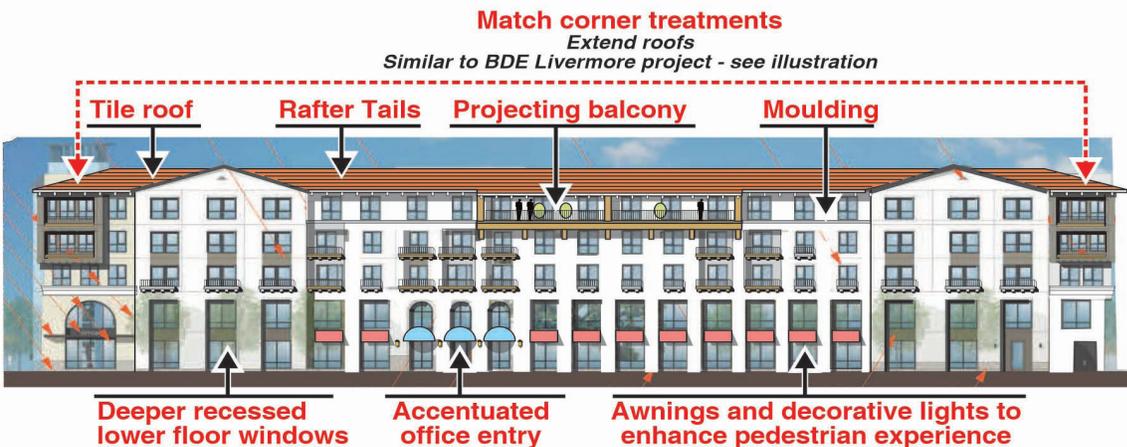
- Some changes in wall planes to decrease flatness of the facade.
- Tile roofing.
- Larger windows.
- Juliette balconies to enhance residential character of the building.
- Projecting canopies over the windows.
- Consider decorative tiles or mouldings.
- Landscaping adjacent to the building base.
- Decorative lights to match lights along the 9th Avenue and Claremont Street facades.

FACADE COMPARISONS

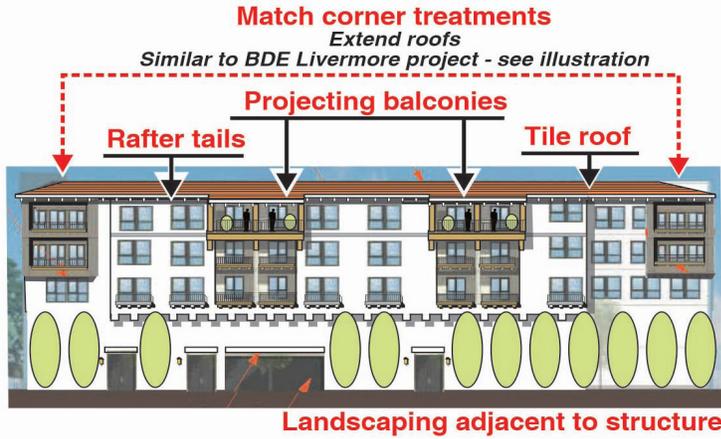
9th AVENUE



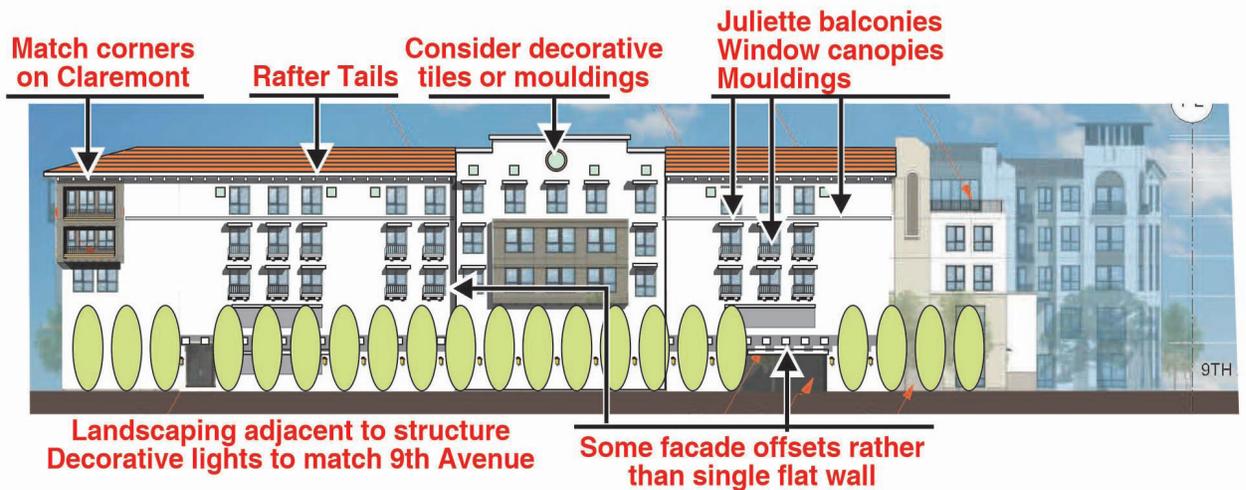
CLAREMONT STREET



NORTH FACADE



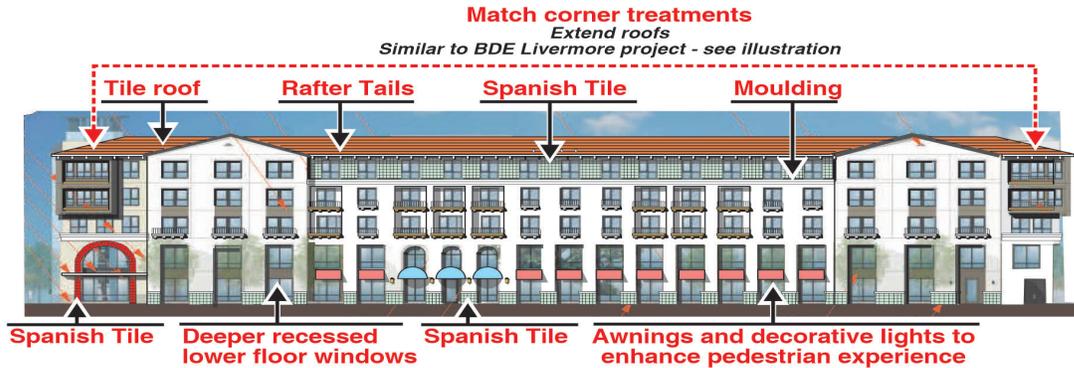
RAILROAD CORRIDOR FACADE



ANOTHER APPROACH\

There is one other approach that I would suggest for consideration. It would be appropriate to the architectural style while simplifying the facade. The illustration below of the Claremont facade shows the concept which includes the following elements:

- Flat central facade plane.
- Partially projecting wood balconies at facade recesses.
- Juliette balconies at recessed windows on all other windows except top floor.
- Spanish tile accentuating the top floor, the building base and corner office entry arch.
- Projecting moulding below the top floor windows.
- Exposed rafter tails at the roof overhang.



Spanish Tile Example

Linda, 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