

March 25, 2020

Mr. Rendell Bustos  
Department of Community Development  
City of San Mateo  
330 West 20th Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94403-1388

**RE: Concar Passage**

Dear Rendell:

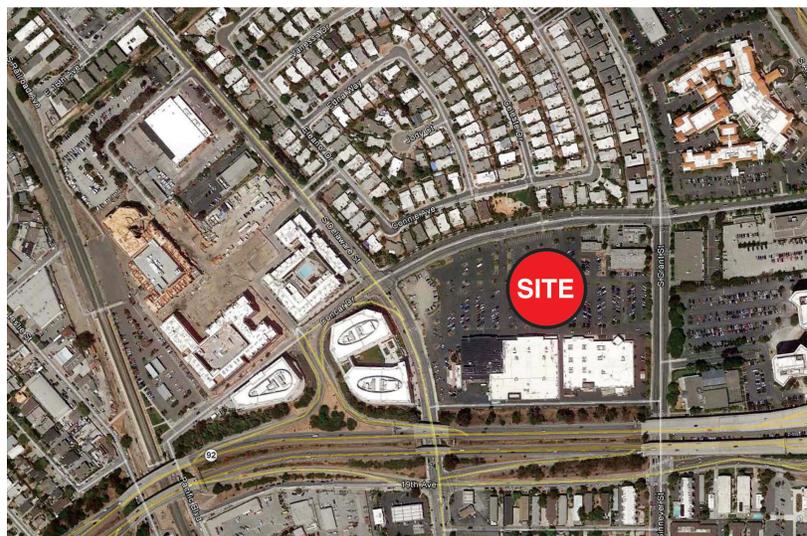
Since the commencement of my involvement in this project in June of 2018, I have been involved in the following:

- Reviewed of the applicant's study session drawings.
- Visited the site.
- Viewed the video of the Planning Commission Study Session.
- Reviewed the applicant's revised drawings and provided preliminary comments in November, 2018.
- Provided a formal review letter to staff in January of 2019.
- Met with the applicant and the design professionals in their Irvine office in March.
- Participated with staff and the applicant in a video conference in April.
- Reviewed revised drawings and provided review comments and illustrations in September.
- Reviewed the applicant's response to the September review comments.
- Reviewed the applicant's new drawings.
- Viewed again the Planning Commission Study Session Video.
- Provided a formal review letter to staff in November.
- Reviewed the applicant's response to the November review comments regarding the Highway 92 frontage.
- Reviewed the applicant's most recent new drawings and response to comments.

The comments below summarize the concerns raised and addressed during this design process along with the the changes made after the Planning Commission's Study Session.

#### **SITE CONTEXT**

The site is located immediately adjacent to Highway 92. It is bordered by an older single family residential neighborhood on the north, a new three-building office complex on the west, and mixed retail and office development to the east. Diagonally across the Concar Drive/South Delaware Street intersection is the new mixed use Station Park Green development while the Marriott Hotel occupies the block immediately northeast of this site. The site is currently occupied by an older shopping center. Photographs of the site and surroundings are shown on the following page.





*The Site from the Concar Drive/South Delaware Intersection*



*View along site boundary adjacent to Highway 92*



*View west on Concar Drive (site to the left)*



*Residential neighborhood immediately across Concar Drive*



*Retail and office development immediately across South Grant Street*



*Neighborhood Park immediately across Concar Drive*



*New office development immediately across South Delaware Street*



*New mixed use Station Park Green development immediately across South Delaware Street*

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## MARCH 27<sup>th</sup> STUDY SESSION (2018)

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were several members of the public who spoke in favor of the project as a welcome Transit Oriented Development providing much needed housing. Others voiced a fairly consistent range of design related concerns including the following:

- The project is too big and in-turning away from the surrounding neighborhood. Opinions were expressed that it was too large and fortress-like.
- Residents were disappointed that they would be losing the convenience of the retail uses within the existing shopping center.
- Some expressed the opinion that placement of the open space in the center of the development was not very accessible or welcoming to the surrounding community. Some opinions were expressed that they would like to see more contiguous open space without a road running through it.
- Concern was expressed about the safety of the Depot Way interior roadway intersecting Concar Drive at a pedestrian crosswalk to the single family residential neighborhood to the north.

### PLANNING COMMISSION COMMENTS

Overall, the Planning Commissioners felt that the mix of housing was appropriate and much needed in the city. The concerns and comments from one or more of the commissioners are summarized below:

- The inward facing assembly of buildings seems to create a barrier to the surrounding community - doesn't seem welcoming.
- The open space is not well sized to be useful - especially when Depot Way is proposed to run through it.
- A larger open space would be desirable.
- Concern was expressed that the Trader Joe's location was located at the worst place for it on the block, and that it would make traffic worse.
- Parking appeared limited on Depot Way for delivery and service vehicles.
- More below grade parking would be desirable.
- Would like to see better developed open green spaces.
- Internal open space should be visible to the surrounding community, and should have things to activate the space and attract neighboring residents - central open space needs to provide significant amenities - for neighborhood, not just for the residents of this project.
- Would like to see more differences in the style, materials and colors of the buildings. Like to see more interesting buildings. Would like to see more setbacks and articulation of the structures.
- Current building designs appear more suited to office use and a Highway 92 frontage than to the adjacent neighborhood.
- Buildings look too similar in terms of materials and colors - want to see more difference in building styles, materials and colors.
- Would like to see more setbacks from the public right-of-ways - overbearing if too close to the street. The South Grant Street residential frontages deserve to have some separation from the street (setbacks, stoops, landscaping) - buffer by as much green as possible or better materials.
- A reduction in the number of buildings would be desirable.
- Prefer a less dense project with some increased variation in building heights and setbacks.
- One opinion was stated that the project needs some significant community benefit to the surrounding community, and that significant changes would be needed in order for the commission to make the required findings.

## CHANGES MADE FOLLOWING THE PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION

Staff has continued to work with the applicant over the past twenty-one months to address the concerns raised by the Planning Commission in their March 2018 Study Session. Each concern has been discussed, and the applicant has made the changes that they feel are feasible. The following is a summary of changes relative to the commission's concerns. In cases where sketches or elevations shown in the Study Session drawings were not sufficient to show the evolution of the design, images from the applicant's first submittal after the Study Session (dated September 19, 2018) were used.



Current Site Plan  
in Context

## SITE PLAN



STUDY SESSION SITE PLAN



CURRENT SITE PLAN

### Planning Commission Concerns:

- 1. Inward facing assembly of buildings seems to create a barrier to the surrounding community - doesn't seem welcoming.*
- 2. Internal open space should be visible to the surrounding community, and should have things to activate the space and attract neighboring residents - central open space needs to provide significant amenities - for neighborhood, not just for the residents of this project.*

### Project Changes:

*No changes have been made to the basic site plan layout and placement of building structure aside from enlargement of the central open space - see below.*

**DENSITY AND MASS**



**STUDY SESSION LEVEL 3 PLAN**

Larger building forms broke up into smaller building segments



**CURRENT BELOW LEVEL 3 PLAN**

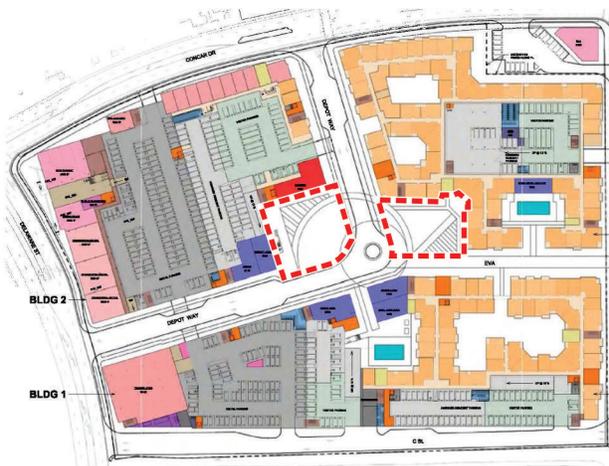
**Planning Commission Concerns:**

1. *Would like to see more setbacks from the public right-of-ways - overbearing if too close to the street.*
2. *A reduction in the number of buildings would be desirable.*
3. *Prefer a less dense project with some increased variation in building heights and setbacks.*

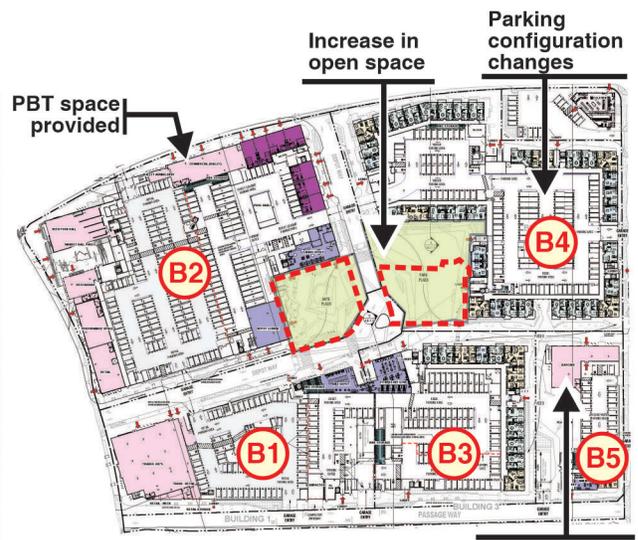
**Project Changes:**

- *The number of buildings or floor area has not been reduced, but the building mass has been visually reduced somewhat by separating the two buildings on the eastern half of the project more.*

**OPEN SPACE**



**STUDY SESSION LEVEL 1 PLAN**



**CURRENT LEVEL 1 PLAN**

**Planning Commission Concerns:**

1. *The open space is not well sized to be useful - especially when Depot Way is proposed to run through it.*
2. *A larger open space would be desirable.*
3. *Would like to see better developed open green spaces.*
4. *Internal open space should be visible to the surrounding community, and should have things to activate the space and attract neighboring residents.*

**Project Changes:**

- *The central open space has been enlarged.*
- *Improvements have been made to provide a more gradual transition from the Central Open Space to the podium level of Building #2.*
- *Substantial refinements have been made to the landscape details with the open space divided into an active Arts Plaza adjacent to Building #2 and a more passive Park Plaza adjacent to Buildings #4.*
- *The internal podium level plazas have been refined.*

**OPEN SPACE: COURTYARDS**



**STUDY SESSION LEVEL 3 PLAN**



**CURRENT SITE PLAN**

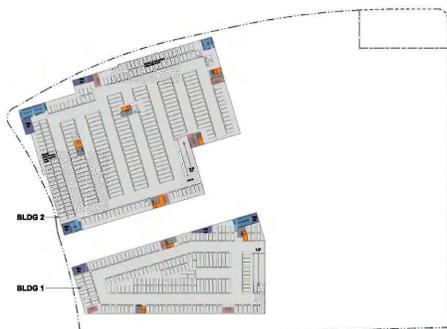
**Planning Commission Concerns:**

1. *Courtyards appear small.*

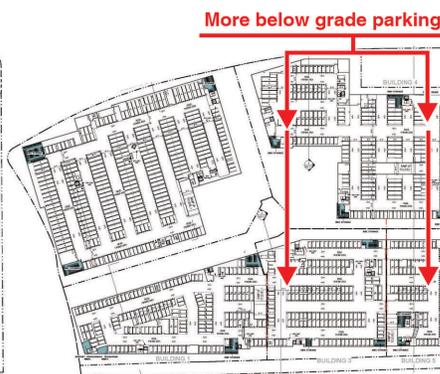
**Project Changes:**

- *Courtyards have been increased in size*

**PARKING**



**STUDY SESSION BELOW GRADE PLAN**



**CURRENT BELOW GRADE PLAN**

**Planning Commission Concerns:**

1. *More below grade parking would be desirable.*

**Project Changes:**

- *More of the parking on the easterly half of the site has been relocated below grade.*

## **BUILDING DESIGN**

### **Planning Commission Concerns:**

- 1. Would like to see more differences in the style, materials and colors of the buildings. Like to see more interesting buildings. Would like to see more setbacks and articulation of the structures.*
- 2. Current building designs appear more suited to office use and a Highway 92 frontage than to the adjacent neighborhood.*
- 3. Buildings look too similar in terms of materials and colors.*

### **Project Changes:**

*Several weeks have been spent with staff working closely with the applicant's design team to address the commission's concerns. Efforts have been focused on providing more facade variety to better express an urban environment with less of a feeling of single project uniformity. The applicant's design team has been very responsive to staff concerns and suggestions. Illustrations on the following two pages show the evolution of this design process - from the study session proposals to the current application.*

### **STUDY SESSION BUILDING DESIGNS**

**On which the Planning Commission's concerns above were based.**



### APPLICANT'S INITIAL REVISIONS

Following the Planning Commission Study Session in March, the applicant revised the building designs - see illustrations below.



Style 1: All buildings facing the central open space



Building #1 including South Delaware St. and Hwy. 92 Frontages



Building #4 including Concar Drive and Building #3 Hwy. 92 Frontages

### STAFF EVALUATION AND CONCERNS

Based on the Planning Commission's concerns, staff advised the applicant that the proposed designs likely looked too much the same and seemed very boxy in form and detail, as follows:

*Building Forms and Articulation: The designs for the buildings are well developed with subtle variations between the four architectural styles. However, they are very boxy and repetitive in form with limited height variation. The facades facing Highway 92 especially appear monolithic. Overall, the designs are very much like the structures on the adjacent Station Park Green project. In the study session, the commissioners expressed the desire for more variety in style, materials and colors. As the design stands at this point, the overall impression is one of a single "Project" rather than one of varied structures within a visually rich "Sense of Place".*



STYLE 2



STYLE 3

## CURRENT BUILDING DESIGNS

The current building designs provide substantial variety. While the original designs had a strong horizontal emphasis and a somewhat boxy look, the current designs have a mixture of horizontal and vertical forms and a greater variation in color and materials in order to reduce their visual perception of large, continuous buildings. Also, while the buildings have largely remained the same height as the original proposal, substantial articulation of the building parapets reduces the feeling of single large buildings.



*Arts Plaza from Building #4 roof deck*



*Arts and Park Plazas from West Paseo*



*The Depot from Depot Way*



*View of Arts Plaza from Building #2 viewing deck*



*Peninsula Ballet Theatre along Concar Drive*



*Concar Drive/Depot Way intersection*



*Building #4 along Grant Street*



*Trader Joe's along Delaware Street and Depot Way*

## SUMMARY

Staff has worked closely with the applicant since the Planning Commission's March 2018 Study Session to address the commission's concerns. While the project has retained the essence of its original land use and site planning framework, the parking layout, open space details and architectural design have been greatly refined. Major changes have included:

- A substantially larger central open space and a more graceful link between the grade level and the podium of Building B2.
- More below grade parking.
- Enlarged and refined interior residential courtyards.
- Increased building design articulation and visual variety with an improved residential scale and character.
- Improved Highway 92 facades and elimination of the exposed parking structure facade on that frontage.

The applicant will continue to refine the design and landscaping details as they prepare the final contract documents.

I have no further recommendations for changes.

Rendell, 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 L. Cannon