

June 15, 2020

Mr. Phillip Brennan, Associate Planner  
Department of Community Development  
City of San Mateo  
330 West 20th Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94403-1388

**RE: Mid-Peninsula Housing**

Dear Phillip:

I reviewed the drawings, evaluated the site, viewed the videos of the two Planning Commission Study Sessions, and prepared review letters on August 22, November 15, and April 1. Staff has worked with the applicant over the last several months to address the concerns identified in the review letters. A modified design has now been completed at the city's direction to add two additional floors of residential units. The revised design has subsequently been reviewed in a study session. My comparison and comments on the current plans and elevations are as follows:

**SITE CONTEXT**

The site is located in Downtown San Mateo in a transition area between the retail core and the residential and smaller retail neighborhood to the east. The site is immediately adjacent to the railroad corridor. Photographs of the site and surroundings are shown on the following page.





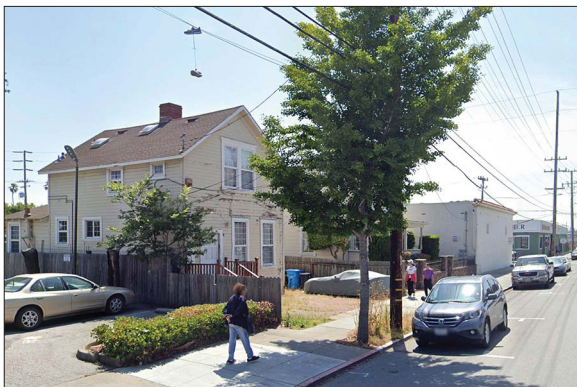
*Aerial of Site looking west*



*Nearby structures across South Railroad Avenue*



*Approved Mixed Use project across East Fourth Ave*



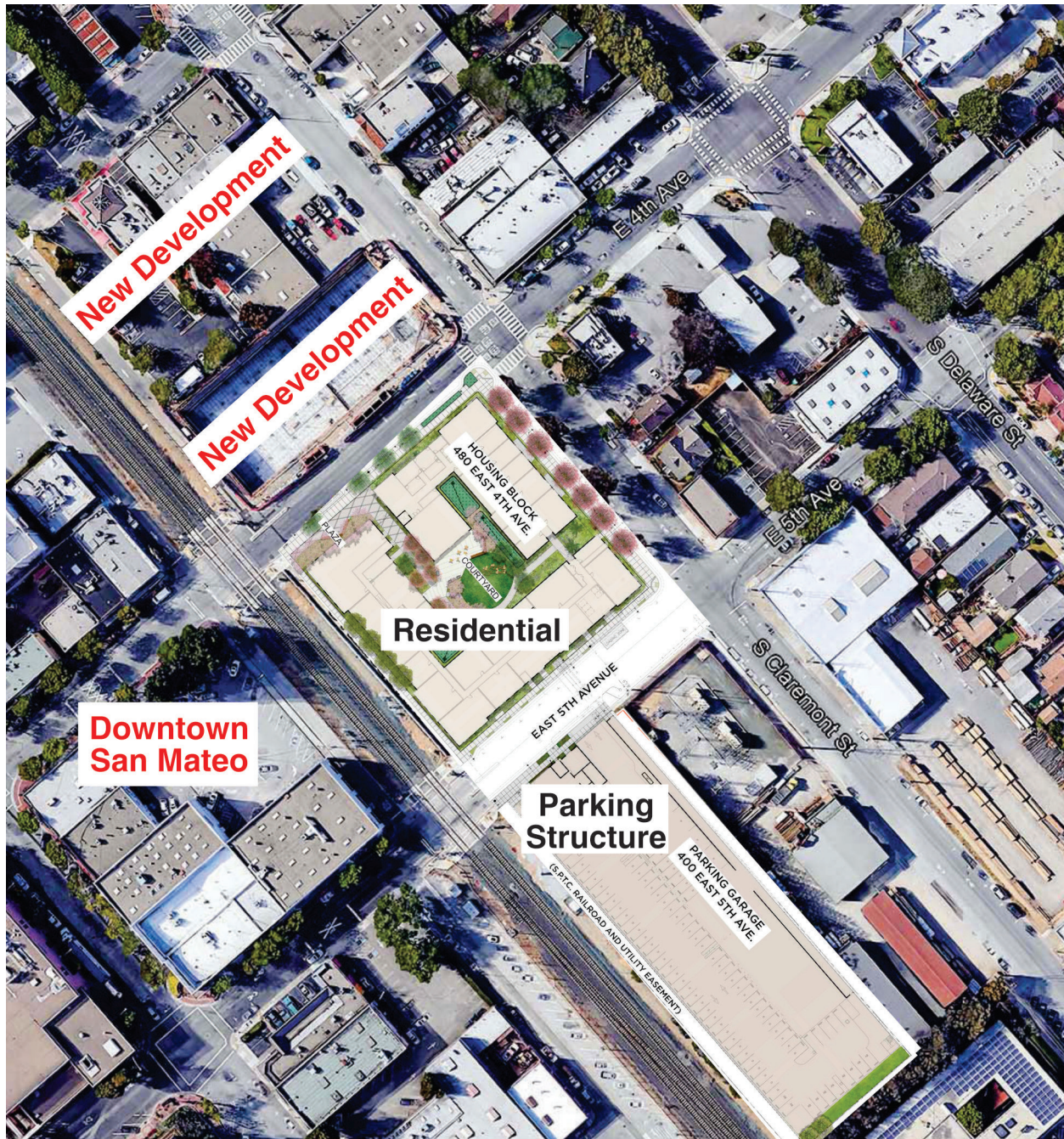
*Mixed uses across South Claremont Avenue*



*Adjacent utility substation on East Fifth Avenue*

## **PROPOSED PROJECT**

The project consists of two structures on two separate parcels. The parcel between East Fourth Avenue and East Fifth Avenue has been increased from 164 affordable multifamily residential units on five floors to 225 units on seven floors. A total of 696 parking spaces are proposed for the parking structure with 164 allocated for residential and 532 for non-residential use. The site and landscape plan in the context of the immediate neighborhood is shown on the aerial photo below.



## **DESIGN REVIEW HISTORY**

### **1. Planning Commission Study Session: April 23, 2019**

The Planning Commission focused their comments and concerns on a limited number of issues:

- Size and appearance of the separate parking structure.
- Materials and details at the primary ground floor facades to better relate to adjacent uses.
- General facade materials, colors and details.

### **2. Design Review Letter: August 22, 2019**

In response to the new drawings prepared by the applicant after the commission's study session, the letter included the following recommendations for further design consideration:

- Recess the windows from the exterior face of the building.
- Lower ground floor patio dividing walls and provide additional landscape buffering.
- Add projecting bays on the South Railroad Street facade to match those on the other facades.
- Reduce the visual bulk of the separate parking structure by adding more visual variety and incorporating elements of public art.

### **3. Design Review Letter: November 15, 2019**

The applicant adequately addressed all of the issues and recommendations contained in the August review letter. No further recommendations for changes were made.

### **4. City Council Study Session: February 3, 2020**

The study session was held to consider proceeding with a larger project using AB1763 to allow for an increase in height and density. Council unanimously expressed that they desired the Applicant to move forward with the new proposal for additional units with comments that this is a once in a decade opportunity.

### **5. Design Review Letter: April 1, 2020**

The review letter summarized the earlier issues, concerns and recommendations related to the five-story project along with the applicant's response to each. An opinion was offered that the applicant had adequately addressed each identified issue and no further recommendations were necessary.

The letter went on to compare the current seven-story project to the previous five-story design. Two potential issues were identified as suggestions for design refinements:

- The South Railroad Street facade was quite flat and was less visually interesting than the previous five-story design which included projecting bay elements similar to those on the other street facades.
- The taller structure might need some additional design attention to allow it to better relate to other nearby buildings.

### **6. Planning Commission Study Session: April 28, 2020**

The applicant made some changes to the design in response to further discussion with staff. The significant changes included a change in the building's color palette and some materials enhancements. The commissioners were supportive of the design changes. Comments from individual commissioners included the following:

- *Liked the revised color palette.*
- *Hoped that something could be done about the blank parking structure wall abutting the PG&E substation.*
- *Concerned about possible shadows cast on adjacent neighborhood.*
- *Felt that the metal panels on the building were not compatible with the rest of the building's aesthetic.*
- *Felt that the South Railroad Street facade needed further articulation.*
- *Liked the proposed light color brick veneer.*
- *Would like to see the design softened by a more transitional design.*

## **DESIGN CHANGES FOLLOWING THE PLANNING COMMISSION'S APRIL 28, 2020 STUDY SESSION**

The applicant has made the following changes and refinements:

### **Color and Materials:**

- The color scheme, grey-green at the lap siding, with darker accent panels, was modified to give the building a lighter feel and reference the character of the nearby residential neighborhood. The light color at the bays and corner elements was fine tuned to a cream color that maintains the contrast at these elements while providing a softer look and feel.
- The corrugated metal siding at the interstitial 'links' – the openings into the courtyard, and at the location that the bridge enters the building on East 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. – has been changed to dark painted cement panels which will be more residential in character.
- The light colored brick which previously only occurred at the entry on East Fourth Avenue has been provided at the first level of all four sides of the building, between the corner elements. An architectural 'water table' feature has been provided to separate the siding above from the brick at the ground level and create a shadow line. This change helps to bring down the scale of the building and make it feel less tall by emphasizing the horizontality.

### **Bay Windows:**

- In addition to providing brick at South Claremont Street, the bottom of the projecting bays have been brought up to the underside of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. This change, along with the top of the bay extending only to the top of the sixth floor gives the building a more horizontal character.

### **Cornice:**

- A metal architectural cornice has been provided to wrap all four corner elements. This allows the building to hold the corner, while minimizing the verticality of these elements and providing more human scale and visual interest at these important locations.

### **South Railroad Street Facade:**

- In addition to the brick at the ground level, and the cornices at the corners, the color change has increased the contrast and visibility of the panel siding facing South Railroad Street. The size of these elements has been modified in a way that limits the vertical emphasis of the previous design. Sunshade devices have been added to the windows at these locations which will give the facade more depth and variety facing the railroad tracks.

### **Revised Bridge Location:**

- The pedestrian bridge has been relocated on East Fifth Avenue to coordinate with the PG&E guy wire location on the garage side of the street. This has resulted in a modification of the East Fifth Avenue facade, and bay window locations.

### **Garage CMU Wall:**

- A pattern of pigmented, split faced CMU was added to the South Claremont Street-facing side of the garage structure to add visual interest that compliments the residential development while also balancing constructability and long term maintenance constraints related to the wall's immediate adjacency to the PG&E substation.

**CURRENT DESIGN COMPARISON WITH INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FOURTH AVENUE FACADE:  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FOURTH AVENUE FACADE:  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FIFTH AVENUE FACADE:  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FIFTH AVENUE FACADE:  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET FACADE:  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET FACADE:  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**SOUTH RAILROAD STREET FACADE:  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**SOUTH RAILROAD STREET FACADE:  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FOURTH AVENUE FACADE:  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FOURTH AVENUE FACADE:  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FIFTH AVENUE PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE:  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FIFTH AVENUE PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE:  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**SOUTH CLAREMONT & FOURTH AVENUE CORNER**  
**CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**SOUTH RAILROAD STREET FACADE DETAIL**



**SOUTH RAILROAD STREET & FIFTH AVENUE CORNER**  
**CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FOURTH AVENUE ENTRY  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FOURTH AVENUE ENTRY  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



*Note: In all previous designs, the projecting bay elements shown here over the patios at the second floor level only occurred on the South Claremont Street facade. On the current design, all projecting bay elements start at the third floor level - see sketch below.*

**GROUND LEVEL PATIOS  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**GROUND LEVEL PATIOS  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FIFTH AVENUE HOUSING AND PARKING STRUCTURE FACADES FROM SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET**  
**CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**EAST FIFTH AVENUE AND SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET PARKING STRUCTURE FACADES**  
**CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGNz**



**PARKING STRUCTURE FROM RAILROAD CORRIDOR  
INITIAL SEVEN-STORY DESIGN**



**PARKING STRUCTURE FROM RAILROAD CORRIDOR  
CURRENT SEVEN-STORY DESIGN** Pedestrian bridge has been relocated

### **SUMMARY EVALUATION**

The applicant appears to have been responsive to the planning commission's concerns and comments. While the size of the structures in this transitional urban framework zone and the budget constraints inherent in the development of affordable housing have been quite challenging, I believe that the softer color palette, selection of materials and attention to architectural detail will be successful. I have no recommendation for changes.

Phillip, 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