

**From:** [Adam Klafter](#)  
**To:** [Wendy Lao](#)  
**Subject:** Re: 44 E. 3rd Avenue Project (Ben Franklin Hotel)  
**Date:** Wednesday, January 6, 2021 4:29:36 PM  
**Attachments:** [image003.png](#)  
[image005.png](#)  
[image007.png](#)  
[image009.png](#)  
[image011.png](#)  
[image013.png](#)

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Hello,

Thank you so much for all of this information!

The Evaluation says the hotel was designed by W.H. Weeks and not Morrow and Morrow, which does make sense. In my previous email I mentioned my belief that Morrow and Morrow had worked on the hotel- during research on the former San Mateo Theater building next door (which is attributed in contemporary publications to Morrow), I was searching the Morrow's papers at the Environmental Design Archives at UCB and found original pencil renderings of the principal interior spaces of the Hotel Ben Franklin. Gertrude Morrow was an architectural watercolorist and illustrator so it is possible these were commissioned by Weeks for the project and had no further involvement, but I have not had the chance to look into it further.

Thank you for putting me on the list for future meetings as well, I appreciate your response!

-Adam Klafter

On Wed, Jan 6, 2021 at 1:50 PM Wendy Lao <[wlao@cityofsanmateo.org](mailto:wlao@cityofsanmateo.org)> wrote:

Good afternoon Adam,

Thank you for your email. Yes, there will be opportunities for further comment. This project is only in the pre-application stage, and even so, there is now an additional public hearing (for a design charrette) scheduled for Tuesday, January 26, 6:00pm. You are welcome to attend this meeting, which will be held virtually through Zoom, and share your thoughts. I've added you to the interested parties list, so you'll be notified about this meeting. I will also share your email with the Planning Commissioners.

I've also looked up the previous project's planning application Conditions of Approval and attached in this email, so that you can see what agreements were made. Please see the Attachment "PA 12-040"

Yes, two historic reports have been completed. One to assess the historic status of the building, the second to determine if the proposed project complies with the Secretary of Interior Standards. Please see the Attachments 2 and 6. The historian is also expected to conduct a final review in case the project design changes later.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Thank you,

Wendy



**Wendy Lao, AICP**

Associate Planner | Community Development Department

330 W. 20th Ave., San Mateo, CA 94403

650-522-7219 | [wlao@cityofsanmateo.org](mailto:wlao@cityofsanmateo.org)



**From:** Adam Klafter

**Sent:** Tuesday, January 5, 2021 11:25 PM

**To:** Wendy Lao

**Subject:** Re: 44 E. 3rd Avenue Project (Ben Franklin Hotel)

Hello,

I just found out about the proposal by Draper University to make alterations to the Ben Franklin Hotel and it looks like I missed the initial application and community meetings and I wanted to know if there were going to be further opportunities for public comment?

I was also trying to remember what promises had been made by Draper University at the time the building was converted from hotel use, about the degree of alterations they would make in the future. Are those records available somewhere on the city website?

Finally, I note that the city does refer to the Ben Franklin as a historic structure, which I would agree with. Has a historic resource assessment been completed by either the city or the applicant, and if so is it available in some form to the public? One point which I have not seen noted publicly anywhere to date is that the hotel was designed by Irving and Gertrude Comfort Morrow, the husband and wife team who worked professionally as the firm

Morrow and Morrow. Gertrude was one of the rare women architects of the period; Irving Morrow is of course credited for the art deco detailing and color of the Golden Gate Bridge. Morrow and Morrow also were responsible for the original design of the neighboring San Mateo Theater building. I have confirmed this attribution using documents in the design archive at UC Berkeley.

I appreciate any time you can spare for my questions, and I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

-Adam Klafter

**-Adam Klafter**

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I remember the old Benjamin Franklin hotel not as an iconic and historical structure but as a dilapidated building that cast a shadow of blight across downtown. The building had been unused for years and the entrance smelled of urine. The adjacent alley was so intimidating that, at night, my wife and I would walk around the block rather than risk an encounter. As a resident of Foster City, I wondered how such a grand building fell into disrepair.

My first encounter with Draper University was in 2012 during the initial planning commission meeting. I attended the meeting to learn more about Tim Draper and the University. I did not quite understand the University's entrepreneurial purpose and connection to superheroes. The people who attended the meeting will remember the bitterness displayed by a few residents towards the renovation. It seemed they were more comfortable with an empty decaying building than developing a vibrant downtown that would provide jobs for community members and new opportunities for our youth.

Luckily, Mr. Draper prevailed. Anyone who compares pictures of the old Benjamin Franklin Hotel with Draper University will easily see the life that he breathed into the building and into our downtown. In addition to the hotel, Mr. Draper transformed the building across the street from a consignment store to an open-air workspace where dozens of people work and hundreds gather for events. This building served as the beginning of an ecosystem which eventually attracted many smaller ventures and led to our new vibrant downtown.

You need only to walk around the block to witness the growth and prosperity that Mr. Draper has indirectly brought over the last eight years. The El Camino and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street intersection was completely rebuilt and fitness, technology and healthy food alternatives filled the new buildings with jobs and revenue for the city. Across downtown and along B Street, vacant storefronts opened up with dynamic new businesses.

In the mornings you now smell a wonderful aroma of baking muffins and see a line of socially distanced people waiting to purchase a new baker's goods. This baker's shop is directly adjacent to Draper University and the University students were among the first enthusiastic customers.

There is certainly much about Draper University that we might not completely understand; however, I think that we can all agree that Mr. Draper has brought something special to our downtown. Notably, he has become not only our biggest landowner but one of the more responsible ones.

I have had the opportunity to review Mr. Draper's new plans from the meeting last month. As with my initial encounter with Draper University eight years ago, I might not understand everything. However, I did notice that the plan was well thought out and most of the construction was behind the building. I am certain that Mr. Draper will work with the community to find agreeable solutions to minor issues that might arise. So far, his vision has worked well for our community and I look forward to seeing how the new construction benefits our downtown in ways I can't imagine.

Troy Ryder

December 7, 2020

Wendy Lao  
Associate Planner,  
City of San Mateo, Planning Division

Dear Wendy:

I wanted to share my strong support for Draper University as they contemplate various construction projects to renew their facilities. I wanted to offer my perspective as a citizen of San Mateo since 1994 and a homeowner since 1999.

When I first moved to San Mateo as a renter, I was struck by the how little there was to do. My wife and I would travel elsewhere for dinner and an evening out. With the opening of Draeger's and the creation of the theater district, suddenly San Mateo was a place to visit, to dine and to work. In my view, an equally an important component of the revitalization has been the intellectual and entrepreneurial vibrance Draper University has fostered.

In my time in San Mateo, I have admired the work Tim Draper and his team have done from afar. Not only has Draper University breathed life into the historic Ben Franklin Hotel, but their initiatives attract a global network of entrepreneurs seeking insights into how to sustain businesses. As Draper University adapts to changing conditions, it is important they have some flexibility to meet their commitment to the next generation of entrepreneurs and innovators: to create the very best facility to educate, incubate and fund startups. In the last three years, I have had first-hand experience with Draper University staff, first as a consultant and as of last month, as a board member. I know that Tim and his team will respect the historic nature of the building while also ensuring those entrepreneurs from around the globe will have a world-class experience.

As many employers depart the Bay Area for cheaper destinations, I sincerely hope San Mateo City Planning can demonstrate flexibility to Draper University as it renews its facilities. Draper University is an employer committing to the long term with many of their improvements, which will enhance the functionality of these historic facilities. As a former Stanford University employee, I applaud Draper for contributing a new model of education, one that helps people create business and jobs, many of whom will likely stay connected to the Bay Area and to San Mateo. Perhaps more important, Draper University will be attracting entrepreneurs from around the globe, making San Mateo a destination city in the heart of Silicon Valley. Tim and his team have my wholehearted support in their efforts!



Paul Marca  
933 S. Fremont St.  
650-444-4667  
Pmarca134@gmail.com

**From:** [Maxine Turner](#)  
**To:** [Ellen Mallory](#); [John Ebner](#); [Margaret Williams](#); [Mike Etheridge](#); [Ramiro Maldonado Jr.](#)  
**Cc:** [Wendy Lao](#); [Planning](#); [Sailesh Mehra](#)  
**Subject:** Study Session Item #3, Draper University  
**Date:** Monday, December 7, 2020 5:53:27 PM

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**Members of the Planning Commission:**

I have followed the Draper University project since its inception and have particularly advocated for the enhancement of the public walkway between 3rd and 4th Avenues. This is a well-used public alley with the potential to be an inviting and pleasant space, similar to alleys in Carmel. The Conditions of Approval for the original project walkway specifically identified a living wall to screen the restaurant trash area as a required element of the project. FYI, the living wall was identified on the project plans by their own landscape architect, not imposed by the city.

Sadly, this condition of approval has been neglected since the day it was put in and today the living wall is more dead than alive. More importantly for your discussion tonight is the fact that the existing trash area is necessary for the functioning of the restaurant which I was assured would continue as a use. At the neighborhood meeting I raised questions about how restaurant trash removal would be handled since the proposed elevator will be located over the existing trash holding area. I was told by Martin Kent, the Draper facilities director, that trash was held in an area in the basement and brought to the surface in an existing service elevator. I know this is not true. Furthermore, even the current plans do not identify any basement trash area.

Even if it were true, the proposed elevator to the penthouse will be built on top of the existing service elevator from the basement to the ground level. So how will trash from the restaurant get to the street for Recology pick-up? It was clear from the neighborhood meeting discussion that neither the architect nor applicant had thought about or addressed this trash issue. This is not just an aesthetic issue related to public use and enjoyment of the public alleyway. IMHO, this is a fatal design flaw and as the Planning Commission knows, "the devil's in the details."

Frankly, nothing about this proposed project makes sense, especially since adding open office space can easily be accommodated within the existing structure without the damage and cost of the proposed elevator and stairs. Because of the inability to address trash removal occurring on a public walkway and the negative impacts to the historic value of this iconic downtown landmark, this project should not be approved.

Thank you for considering and addressing my concerns.  
Maxine





**From:** [Megan Kurohara](#)  
**To:** [Wendy Lao](#)  
**Subject:** Statement of Support for Draper University Project Plans  
**Date:** Tuesday, December 8, 2020 5:46:06 PM

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Dear Wendy:

As a resident of San Mateo and a worker in downtown San Mateo specifically, I am writing in support of Draper University's proposed development project.

The proposed construction plans for Draper University's 7th, 8th, and penthouse floor plus alleyway elevator seem incredibly reasonable, with minimal impact on the character of the building and little to no impact on the every day San Mateo resident's engagement with the building. I also find Draper University's engagement in the City of San Mateo's process for this development compliant and responsible.

Since Mr. Draper planted roots here, there has been an increase in both technology companies and the other attractive consumer offerings, all of which add to (without overwhelming) the diversity of the downtown experience. I imagine this has notably added to San Mateo's tax base, and also notably increased daily foot traffic for San Mateo's many restaurants and small businesses.

At a time when many businesses are making plans to migrate out of California, I think it is commendable that Mr. Draper wants to continue investing and building in this community.

I strongly urge the City of San Mateo to support this effort.

Best Regards,  
Megan Kurohara  
Resident of San Mateo  
[megankurohara@gmail.com](mailto:megankurohara@gmail.com)



**From:** [Keith Weber](#)  
**To:** [Ellen Mallory](#); [John Ebnetter Planning Commissioner](#); [Margaret Williams](#); [Mike Etheridge](#); [Ramiro Maldonado Jr.](#); [Christina Horrisberger](#); [Sailesh Mehra](#); [Wendy Lao](#); [Naomi Miroglio](#)  
**Subject:** Draper University Pre-App (PA-2018-054)  
**Date:** Monday, December 7, 2020 4:29:41 PM

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Ellen Mallory, Chair, and members of the Planning Commission:

I have read both ARG reports included in the meeting materials regarding the negative impacts on the historic integrity of this subject property. Two historic reports established the building's historic, architectural integrity and this project entails an "irreversible loss" of the "distinctive features" that give the building its integrity.

Because this is such an important historic building, the proposed project must be in conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards in order to move ahead. Clearly, the irreversible loss of distinctive character defining features is not in keeping with the intent of the Secretary's Standards, which emphasize retention, repair, and preservation of these features, not their removal. The suggestion that the cast plaster ornamentation could be carefully removed without breakage or damage, and stored indefinitely, would make this "irreversible loss" somehow acceptable, is *at best a stretch*.

The inescapable fact that the proposed project will cause an "irreversible loss" and impair the "essential form and integrity" of the building as long as the addition remains in place is reason enough to decline the project. The question the Planning Commission must ask is what is the benefit to the City if it accepts an "irreversible loss" of significant distinctive ornamentation on one of the City's most iconic and beloved buildings in exchange for 9 open office spaces and a roof deck for private use? How can this be justified?

The proposed new elevator and stair tower are only needed as handicap access to the penthouse and a roof deck. The existing elevators already service the seventh and eighth floors. My view is that the trade-off is large and the community benefits nil. I urge the Planning Commission to graciously decline the project as currently proposed and any future proposals that do not preserve and protect the important character defining features of this wonderful building. The City deserves better than this project promises.

Thank you for your consideration.  
Keith Weber  
San Mateo

**From:** [Keith Weber](#)  
**To:** [Wendy Lao](#)  
**Cc:** [Christina Horrisberger](#); [Aaron Aknin](#); [Ellen Mallory](#); [Ramiro Maldonado Jr.](#); [John Ebnetter](#); [Mike Etheridge](#); [Margaret Williams](#)  
**Subject:** 44 E. Third Ave. (Draper University) Elevator Enclosure Pre-app  
**Date:** Wednesday, November 4, 2020 1:26:56 PM  
**Attachments:** [Ltr. re PA18-054 Draper U..pdf](#)

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Dear Wendy,

I am writing in regards to the preliminary planning application for the addition of an exterior elevator enclosure, staircase and associated structures at 44 E. 3rd Avenue, currently known as Draper University. My comments are consistent with my June 14, 2019 letter to you (attached) and our in person meeting with Julia Klein regarding the same application.

As you know, 44 E. 3rd Ave., historically known as the Benjamin Franklin Hotel, is one of San Mateo's most iconic and recognizable downtown landmarks. It is individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historic Resources. It is a significant contributor to the Downtown Historic District, anchoring the district at its western edge. Designed by W. H. Weeks in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, its most striking character defining feature is the elaborate exterior sculptural ornamentation known as Churrigueresque. The Churrigueresque ornamentation is most prominent on the upper floors of both the front and rear facades. Visible from 4th Avenue and parts of Central Park, ornamentation on the rear facade is clearly identifiable.

The new elevator enclosure proposes to replace a large portion of this ornamentation on the rear facade and irreversibly alter the most significant visible exterior "character defining feature" of one of San Mateo's most treasured buildings.

Has the applicant or the City staff consulted with an historic preservation architect to explore a more sensitive design solution, one that would retain the ornamentation and integrity of the rear facade?

Has the City staff contacted the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to discuss the impacts the proposed addition would have on the building's individual eligibility for the State or National Registers and as a contributor to the Downtown Historic District? ([Julianne Polanco](#), SHPO 916-445-7000).

I believe answers to these questions are essential to the processing of this application and should be in hand before the project goes to the Planning Commission.

Also, I am requesting copies of all evaluations, studies, reports or letters relevant to the architectural or historical significance of this structure.

Thank you,  
Keith Weber  
San Mateo

**From:** [Maxine Turner](#)  
**To:** [Wendy Lao](#)  
**Subject:** Draper alley  
**Date:** Monday, June 24, 2019 6:44:24 PM

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Follow up from our meeting today.



2018.09.19



2019.06.19





2019.06.08





June 14, 2019

Ms. Wendy Lao, Associate Planner  
City of San Mateo  
330 West 20th Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94403

SUBJECT: PA18-054 44-55 E. 3rd Ave. Pre-application

Dear Ms. Lao,

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding Tim Draper's proposed alterations to two Draper University buildings: the former Benjamin Franklin Hotel and the former Collective Building. These two buildings are both individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historic Resources, and part of our locally designated downtown historic district.

Re 44 E. 3rd Ave., my concerns revolve around two primary issues: First, the "elevator enclosure and associated structures" as proposed would remove a major rear portion of the decorative Churrigueresque ornamentation that defines the character of both the front and rear facades, and result in the loss of more than a dozen original window openings. The proposed structure would significantly alter the rear facade, which like the front is a "primary" facade, risking the building's individual National Register eligibility and possibly damaging the integrity of the historic district.



Second, considering the original use of the building as a hotel, the current use of the building for student housing, and the pressing need for more housing downtown, the proposal to convert 3 floors of housing to office use, would seem inappropriate and contrary to the trajectory of the current General Plan process.

Re 55 E. 3rd Ave., my concerns are:

The overwhelming impression of both the front and rear facades of this wonderful Tudor style building is one of symmetry. I am concerned that the proposed alterations to the window openings on both elevations may compromise that symmetry and possible historic integrity. The building facades exhibit visible signs of deferred maintenance including peeling paint, missing roof tiles, etc. Any alterations should be conditioned on maintaining, repairing, and repainting the building facades.



My recommendations for proposed alterations on both buildings is to require early stage involvement by a preservation architect/consultant who can:

1. Review, evaluate and comment on the proposed alterations in the context of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation;
2. Propose alternative means for achieving code requirements under the California Historical Building Code;
3. Evaluate and comment on any potential impacts the proposed alteration would have to historic integrity of the building, and it's individual eligibility for the National Register; and
4. Evaluate and comment on any potential impacts the proposed alterations would have to the integrity of the downtown historic district and it's National Register eligibility.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Keith Weber  
San Mateo

CC: Kohar Kojayan, Community Development Director