

November 10, 2021

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

RE: BLOCK 21

Dear Rendell:

I reviewed the drawings, and evaluated the site context. My comments on the plans and elevations for this project are as follows:

SITE CONTEXT

The site is one full block adjacent to three recent new developments immediately between it and Downtown San Mateo. Other adjacent development is largely older one story commercial structures while single family homes and large multifamily residential developments are only a block away to the east and north.

Photographs of the site and surroundings are shown on the following page.





ADJACENT NEW DEVELOPMENTS



Mixed Use development Residential over Office across South Claremont Street



Mixed Use development Residential over Office across South Claremont Street



Nearby Office Development entry at East Third Avenue and South Railroad Avenue



Nearby Residential Development across East Fourth Avenue

PLANNING COMMISSION CONCERNS AND COMMENTS

The project was reviewed by the Planning Commission in a Study Session on September 14, 2021.

Comments and concerns expressed by the commissioners included the following.

1. Concerned with the city's jobs/housing imbalance - Why not add additional building height for more residential units?
2. Would like an additional level of residential units. Building height concession: Need to see a worthwhile concession such as more residential units.
3. Jobs housing balance for this project is 13:1 which is far above the city's ideal. If the project has a projected 915 employees based on its commercial area, another 610 residential would be needed to provide a desirable jobs housing balance.
4. Concern with amount of office development that is encroaching on the surrounding neighborhood.
5. Any project here needs to have a positive impact on the whole city - not just about Block 21.
6. A mix of one, two and three bedroom units would be desirable.
7. Would like to see the unit types broadened to allow opportunities for families.
8. The bevel at corners didn't seem right - need to be reworked.
9. Corner designs are incongruent with the rest of the design.
10. Worry about sight lines for pedestrian safety at the garage entry/exit ramp.
11. Architectural design overall very good, but somehow overbearing.
12. Where are we going here? All modern sleek, and somewhat cold. Better if the design could harken back to the adjacent neighborhood.
13. Liked design, but wondered how this fit in with other new adjacent buildings.
14. Don't over articulate the building or it will look outdated over time.
15. Simplify the building.
16. Lower level materials tend to look like a new building added around an existing building - lacks unity.
17. Design good, but concerned about the large expanse of glass which are not compatible with the adjacent residential neighborhood.
18. Project doesn't seem very family friendly - no protected courtyard for children.
19. Residential open space very good.
20. Dimension across the residential courtyard seemed small.



Project reviewed at the September 14th Study Session

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The proposed projects consist of 180,950 square feet of office space and 111 studio and one bedroom residential units in a six story structure. Office space and residential units would share the top three floors of the project, an increase of one floor in response to the Planning Commission's stated desire for more residential units. Underground parking would provide 410 parking spaces with 351 devoted to office use and 58 reserved for the residential units. Office and residential office open space would be provided on the top three floors, and public open space would be provide in three smaller areas at street level - see ground level landscape plan to the right.



The proposed building is designed in a Contemporary Style that draws from the recently approved design for two other mixed use projects immediately across South Claremont Street - see proposed elevations and sketches below.



PROPOSED EAST THIRD AVENUE ELEVATION



PROPOSED SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET ELEVATION



PROPOSED SOUTH DELAWARE STREET ELEVATION



PROPOSED EAST FOURTH AVENUE ELEVATION

ADJACENT PROJECTS BUILDING FACADES COMPARISON





EAST THIRD AVENUE AND SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET CORNER



EAST FOURTH AVENUE AND SOUTH DELAWARE STREET CORNER



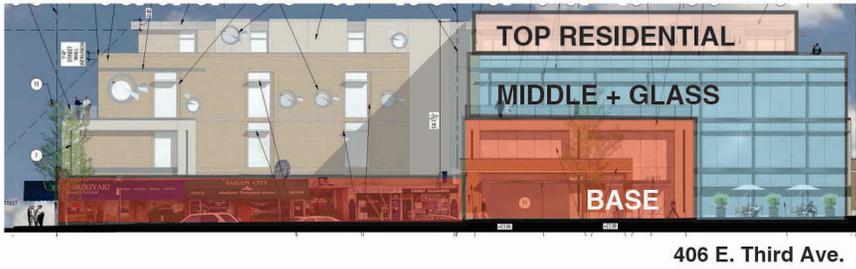
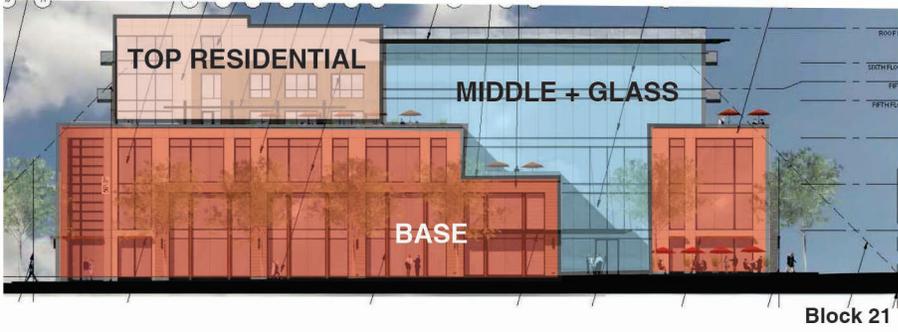
EAST THIRD AVENUE OFFICE DECKS



*E. FOURTH AVENUE AND S. DELAWARE STREET
RESIDENTIAL DECKS*



*E. FOURTH AVENUE AND S. CLAREMONT STREET
RESIDENTIAL DECKS AND BALCONIES*

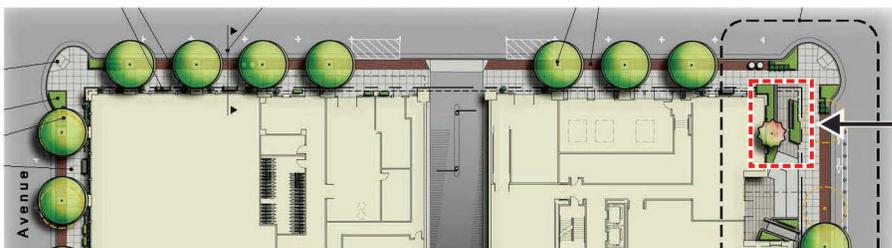


East Third Avenue Facades Massing Comparison



South Claremont Street Facades Massing Comparison

3. The landscape plan shows a well landscape corner plaza adjacent to the main office lobby, while the sketches appear to show a more active use.



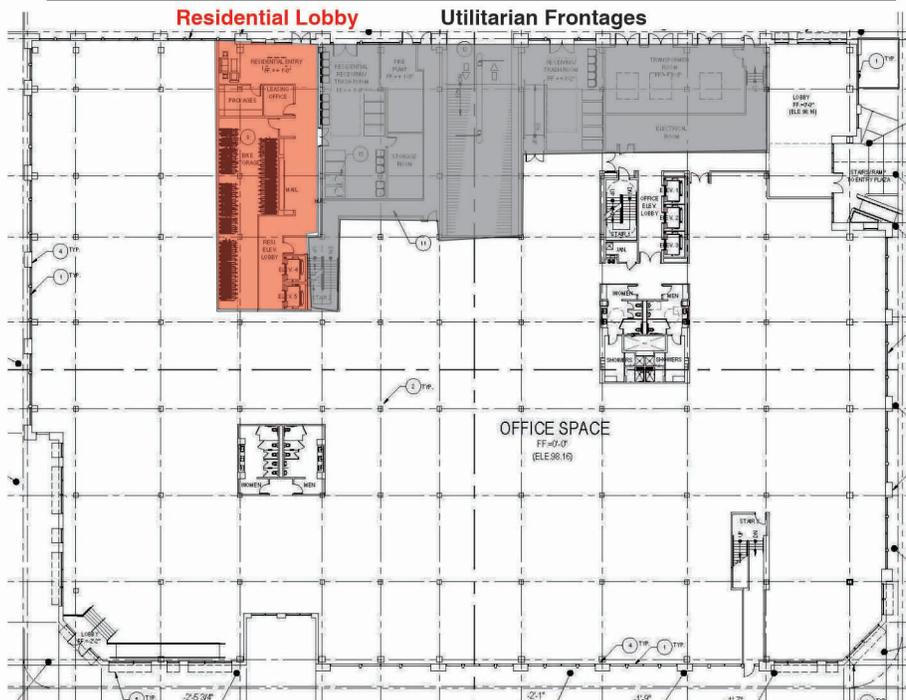
This shows passive open space while sketches show active space which is it?



Planning Commission concern that beveled corners did not blend well with the rest of the design

4. Planning commissioners' initial reaction was that they liked the design, but that it seemed a little overbearing and cold. They also were concerned that the design was lacking in overall design unity, and might not relate well to either the adjacent new developments or the adjacent neighborhood.
5. The project's residential lobby entry is located on South Claremont Street, adjacent to all of the building's utilitarian spaces and garage entry. This doesn't seem like a very pleasant lobby location, and not one to be thought of as a prestigious address.

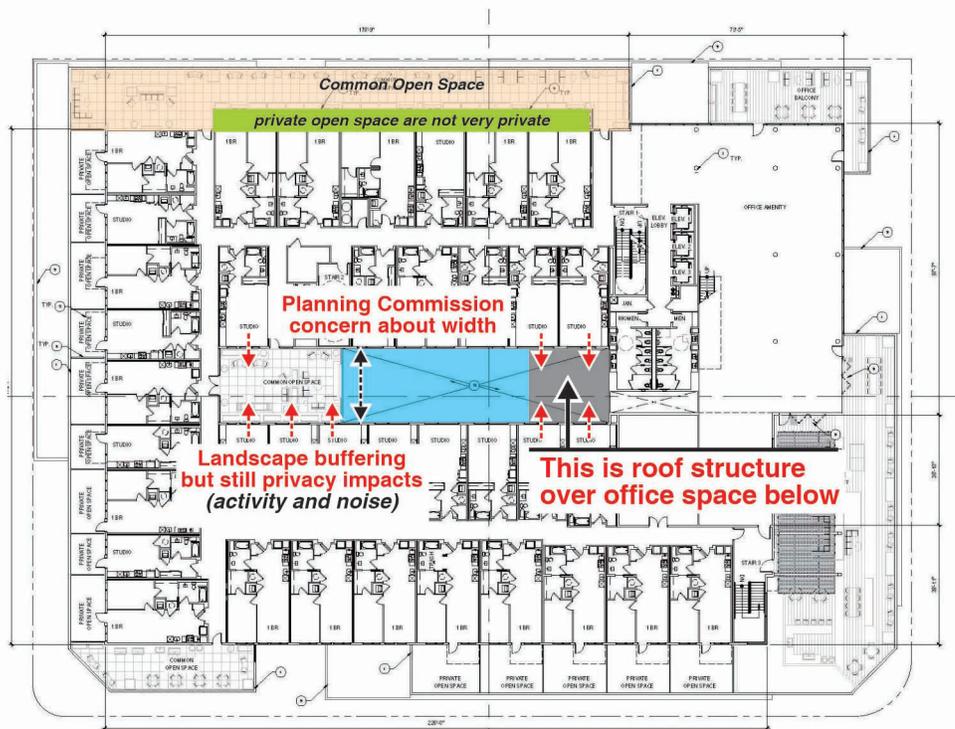
Residential Lobby location on utilities frontage less than desirable



- The residential balconies are quite deep for this type of project, and add to the lack of visual unity expressed by the commission.
- The planning commission expressed concern for pedestrian safety related to the garage entry and exit ramp, a condition that might be compounded by the adjacent location of the residential lobby.



- At least one planning commissioner expressed concern about the width of the open atrium on the residential floors. There is one other issue related to the residential common open space adjacent to the atrium. While the landscape plan shows plantings around the edge of the space to provide some visual buffering of the adjacent residential units, there may still be issues of visual privacy and noise, Note that the plan drawing failed to show the office roof structure that intrudes into the atrium space shown.

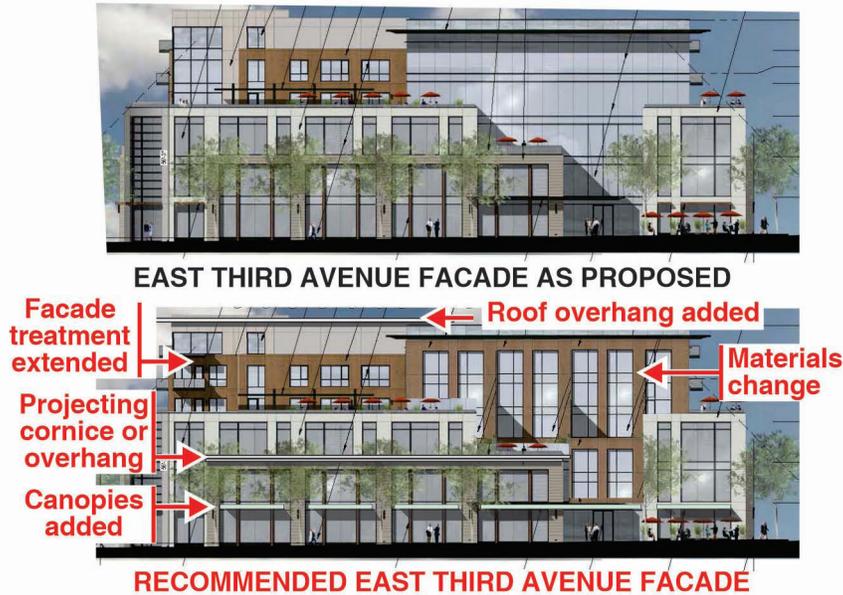


- There is a mixing of residential common open space and private resident patios which may have some visual and noise impacts on the adjacent residential units.

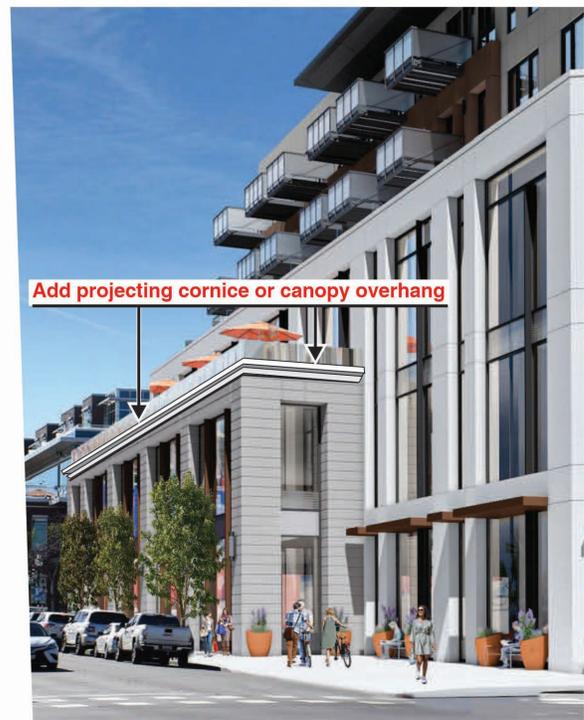
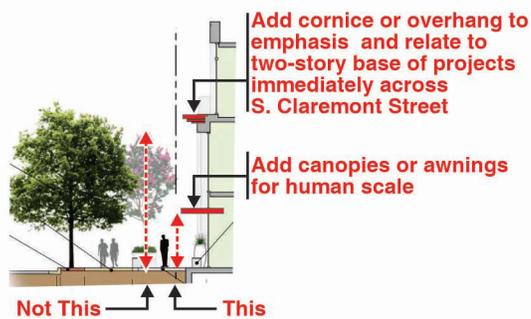
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended to better relate the project's design to those immediately across South Claremont Street, provide more simplicity and unity to the design, and address the planning commission's concerns from the study session.

1. Replace the office building large glass facades with a solid wall with deep window recesses, as shown on the other three building facades.



2. Add a projecting cornice or roof canopy at the second level to emphasize the two story massing along street frontages to better relate to the adjacent new projects and the pedestrian scale of the sidewalks. At the planning commission's discretion, the third floor could also be setback to reduce its impact on the overall building massing and the human scale of adjacent pedestrians.



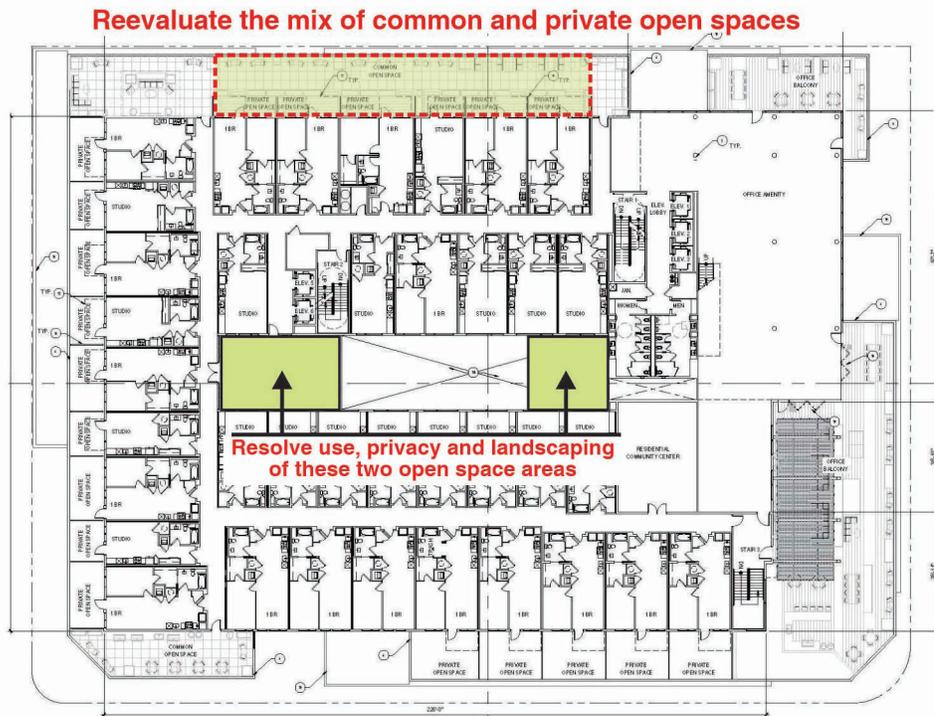
3. Clarify the intent for use and landscaping for the plaza adjacent to the office entry.
4. Provide street front awnings or canopies to better relate to the adjacent pedestrian areas.
5. Extend the darker wall facade with recessed window up to the sixth floor consistently around all facades.
6. Reduce the depth of the projecting private balconies to better integrate them into the overall design, wherever possible. This is often achieved by inseting the balconies, as shown on the photo below, or adding area to the common residential open space.



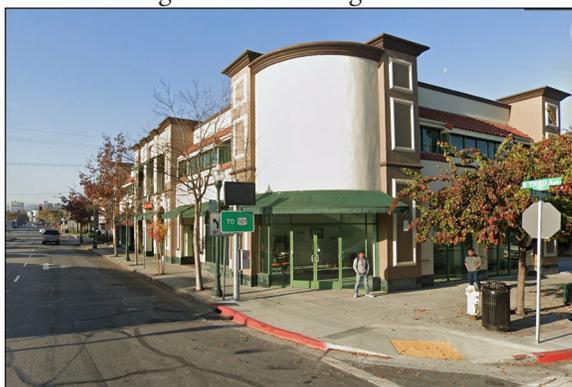
7. Add a projecting roof canopy to the residential portion of the structure.
8. Reverse the color tones of the second and third floor masses to give more visual emphasis to the two story mass
9. Consider relocation the residential lobby entry away from the garage entry and adjacent utilitarian frontages.



10. Resolve the privacy and landscaping of the spaces adjacent to the open atrium on the fourth floor.
11. Reevaluate the mix of residential common open space and private open spaces. One option would be to move this common open space to the roof, where the code allows, which is becoming quite common on larger residential projects.



12. Consider adding more landscaping at the small plaza at the corner of East Fourth Avenue and South Delaware Street.
13. Some planning commissioners were concerned that the two rounded corners did not relate well to the rest of the design. I personally didn't find them a problem because rounded corner entries in downtown buildings are common - see photos below of nearby commercial corner one block east of this site and one at Santana Row. I do note that one of the angles corners is labeled as an entry to ground floor office space while the other is not. If staff and the planning commission feel strongly about this matter, a squaring off of these corners with an inset rectangular landscape space would not be out of character with the the overall design of the building



13. Study the potential pedestrian/vehicle safety conflict at the garage entry.

RECOMMENDED CHANGES SHOWN IN THE COMPARATIVE ELEVATIONS BELOW.



EAST THIRD AVENUE FACADE AS PROPOSED



RECOMMENDED EAST THIRD AVENUE FACADE



SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET FACADE AS PROPOSED



RECOMMENDED SOUTH CLAREMONT STREET FACADE



EAST FOURTH AVENUE FACADE AS PROPOSED



RECOMMENDED EAST FOURTH AVENUE FACADE



SOUTH DELAWARE STREET FACADE AS PROPOSED



RECOMMENDED SOUTH DELAWARE STREET FACADE

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