

January 14, 2021

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

RE: 222 East Fourth Avenue

Dear Wendy:

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

SITE CONTEXT

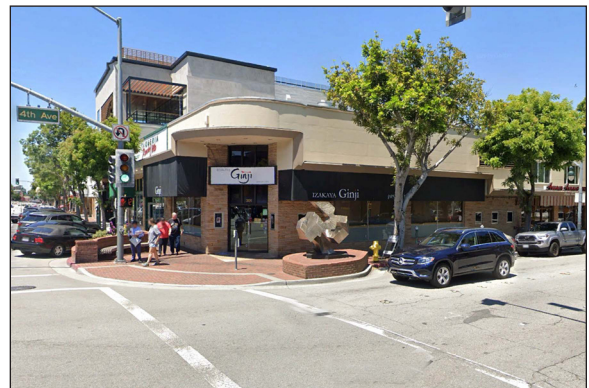
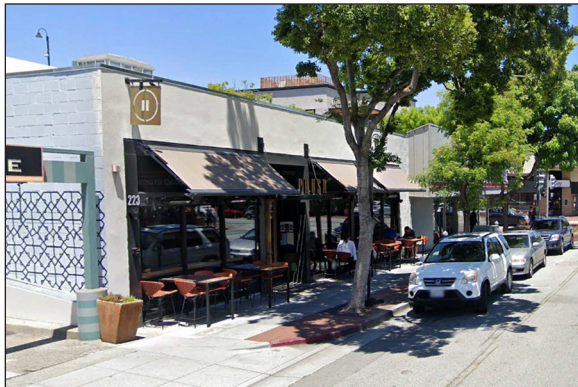
The site is located in Downtown San Mateo at the corner of the East Fourth Avenue and B Street commercial corridors. Other nearby structures include the Downtown Core Area and a large multifamily residential project immediate across East Fifth Avenue from the site. The site is within both the *Downtown Area Plan* and the *Downtown Retail Core/Historic District Design Guidelines* documents. Photographs of the site and surroundings are shown on the following page.



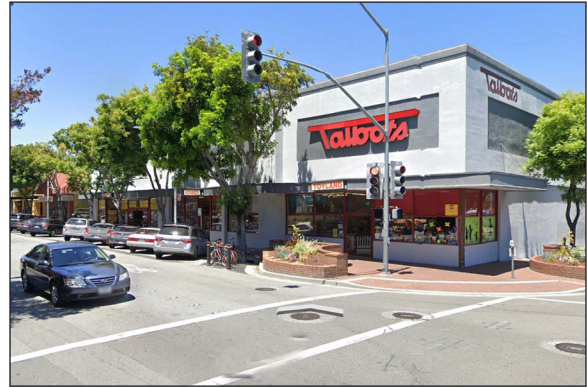


THE SITE

EAST FOURTH AVENUE STOREFRONTS



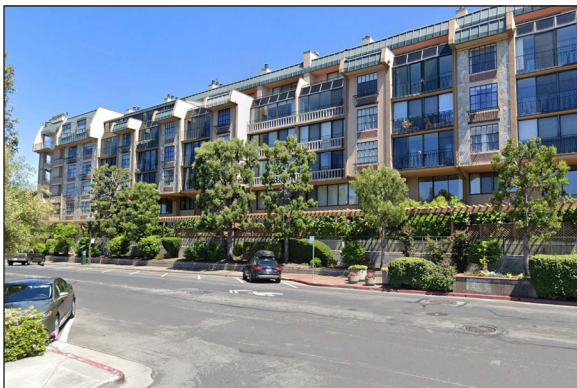
B STREET STOREFRONTS



ELLSWORTH AVENUE STRUCTURES



EAST FIFTH AVENUE MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL



ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The project consists of three levels of office and an upper level of 10 residential units over ground floor retail and two levels of below grade parking - see proposed sketches below.



East Fourth Avenue Facade



East Fifth Avenue Facade



B Street Facade



Ellsworth Avenue Facade

The purpose of this preliminary design review is to identify issues that are likely to arise as the project proceeds to Planning Commission review in order for the applicant to anticipate and respond to the concerns prior to submitting a formal application.

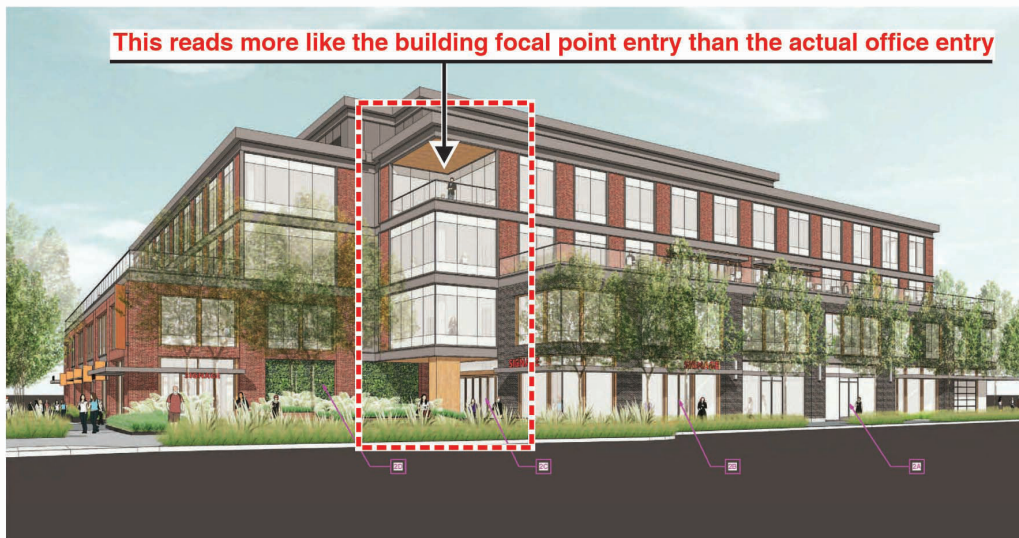
Overall, the project is well designed with design consistency throughout. There are a few specific issues outlined below, but the larger concern relates to its suitability, as currently designed, to this specific downtown site. This concern is informed by discussions and decisions by the Planning Commission on other similar mixed use projects in downtown over the past few years. Some of the issues are as follows:

1. The entry lobbies to the offices and to the residential units are poorly defined.





**Residential entry
is very weak**



This reads more like the building focal point entry than the actual office entry

- The massing and design of the East Fourth Avenue base facade is not very sympathetic to the commercial frontages across East Fourth Avenue and in the adjacent downtown area along East Fourth Avenue and B Street. The uniformity of the storefronts as just similar openings in the brick wall is very much out of character with the uniqueness of the building's immediate context.



**This retail frontage is not very sympathetic to the
commercial frontages across 4th Avenue**

***Fabric awnings are noted
but not visually apparent***

3. The overall building massing and facade/height articulation is not very sympathetic to the adjacent downtown area.

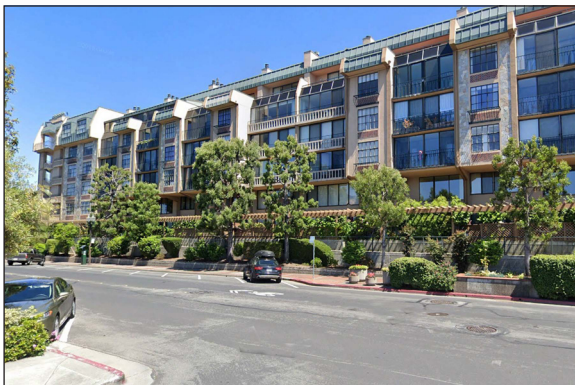


These strong unbroken linear and rectangular forms are in great contrast to the current Downtown character

4. The massing, design, architectural details and landscaping of the East Fifth Avenue facade is not very sympathetic to the multifamily residential frontage across East Fifth Avenue.



This streetscape and facade is not very sympathetic to the multifamily residential frontage across 5th Avenue



5. The two-story brick building base is divided into two different colors - red brick along East Fourth Avenue and B Street and dark gray brick along East Fifth Avenue and Ellsworth Avenue. This division between strong retail frontages and other frontages may work, but may need some further explanation and discussion.



Red brick base on retail streets and gray brick on other two facades may work, but intent is not totally clear

6. The building corner at the East Fourth Avenue and B Street commercial corridors intersection is quite strong on the existing building and greatly down played on the proposed design.



This corner is much weaker than the current building



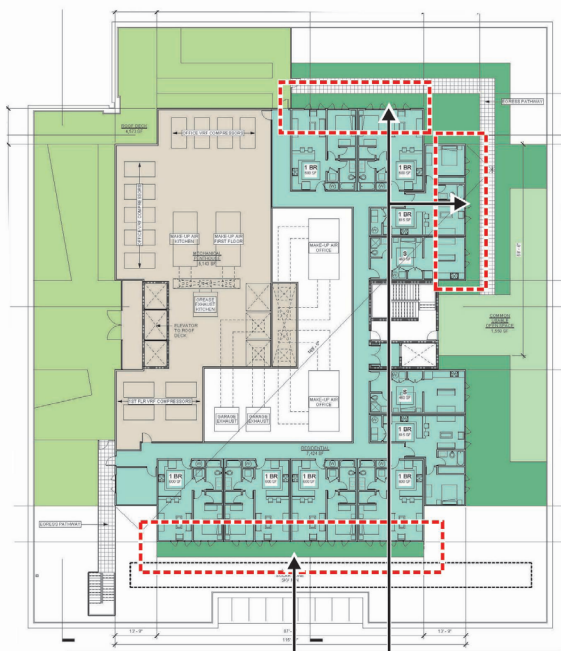
7. Overall, the facades of the building masses are very flat, in contrast to the depth and articulation of the current building on the site. While windows in the two-story building base have some recess, upper floor windows have very little.



Facades without significant window recesses seems very flat

Blade signage doesn't look very workable given pedestrian visual blockage by projecting canopies

8. Blade signage at the pedestrian level is an appropriate approach in this context, but the vertical format may not be workable as shown, given the potential visual blockage from sidewalk level by the projecting canopies.
9. Fabric awnings are noted along the retail frontages, but are not apparent in the sketches.
10. The residential massing and facades on the top floor currently have no distinctive character or quality.
11. The absence/extent of the private open space for the residential units seems quite limited given the large amount of roof area available.



Extent of private outdoor space for these units seems quite limited given the large amount of roof area available

RECENT DOWNTOWN PROJECTS CONTEXT

Over the last few years, the Planning Commission has reviewed and approved several similar downtown mixed use projects. Each has undergone substantial discussion in regards to their design relationship to the character and texture of their downtown context. One important conflict has been common to most of these projects: A desire by the applicant's architect for architectural design purity and the Planning Commission's desire for an emphasis on contextual urban design. One should expect that the concerns and directions established in these reviews and approvals will influence the review of this new project. Images of the recent projects are shown below and on the following page.



405 EAST FOURTH AVENUE



406 EAST THIRD AVENUE



180 EAST THIRD AVENUE





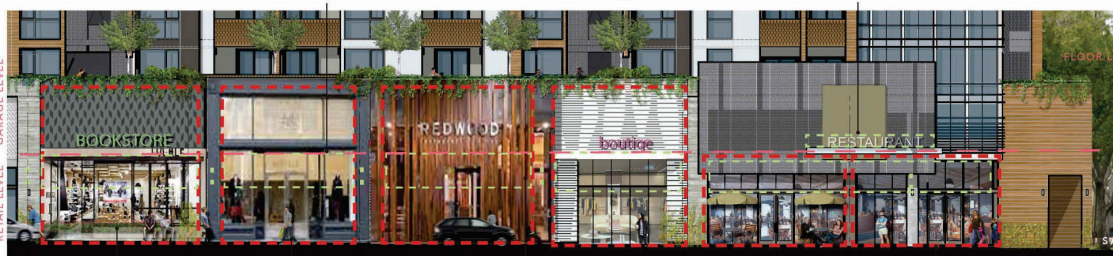
EL CAMINO REAL AND EAST THIRD AVENUE
NE CORNER



EL CAMINO REAL AND EAST THIRD AVENUE
SE CORNER



303 BALDWIN AVENUE



LIMIT OF STOREFRONT OPTION

BLADE SIGN ON COLUMN, TYP.

LIMIT OF STOREFRONT OPTION

FRONTAGE TYPE B

FRONTAGE TYPE A

THE ESSEX AT CENTRAL PARK

Features most often discussed and common to most of these projects include the following:

- Strong relationship to the immediately adjacent downtown character, articulation, materials and details.
- Ground floor storefronts related to the scale of nearby commercial storefronts.
- Distinctive building corner treatment.
- Variety in ground floor storefronts appropriate to the scale and character of downtown San Mateo.
- Substantial architectural detail and scale elements at the ground floor.
- Substantial facade articulation (both horizontal and vertical) to avoid box-like, repetitive structures.
- Breakup of larger building to reduce their apparent mass and sameness.
- Strong emphasis on a two-story building base through upper floor setbacks and color/material changes.
- Variation of materials to reflect the smaller scale of the downtown fabric.
- In some cases, storefront design guidelines to allow storefront variety and individualization within a controlled architectural framework.
- Color variations to reduce the apparent visual mass of larger buildings.
- Strong emphasis on office and residential entries.
- Variety in window treatments to avoid excessive repetitiveness.
- Incorporation of materials and details related to the historic and traditional buildings remaining in downtown San Mateo.
- Signage appropriate to the pedestrian environment.

EXISTING AND NEW

While it is not necessary or perhaps even advisable to replace the design or character of an existing downtown building when a new replacement building is proposed, it is probably wise to recognize that the Draeger's building has been a landmark structure in downtown San Mateo for a long time, and the general public may be quite interested in its replacement at a time when concern is growing in the city and throughout the Peninsula from long-time residents concerned with the changing character of their hometowns. In thinking through options for the design of this new mixed use project, it may be useful to compare the new to the old - shown below.



The primary features of the existing Draeger's building are summarized on the following page.

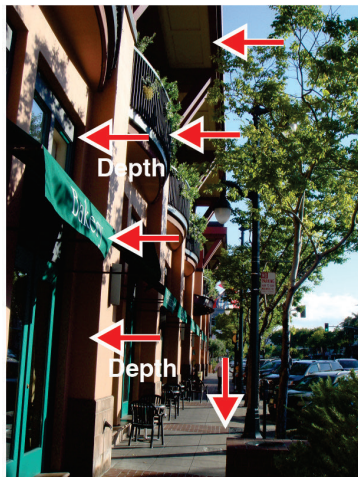
EXISTING DRAEGER'S MARKET FEATURES



Strong Sense of Entry



**- Corner Articulation - Architectural Detail
- Building Cap - Facade Depth**



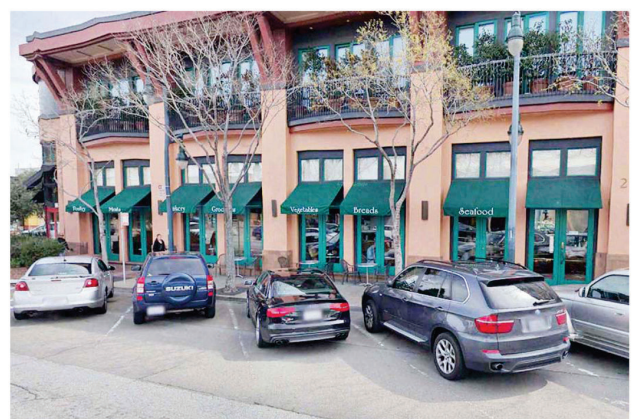
Strong Pedestrian Scale and Visual Interest



**Height and Depth Articulation - Architectural Detail
Building Cap - Facade Depth**



**- Strong Sense of Entry
- Interesting Uses**



Interesting Storefronts and Details

RECOMMENDATIONS

The intent of a preliminary review is to identify potential issues that are likely to be of concern to the Planning Commission, and to suggest some approaches that might be considered by the applicant in preparing their formal design application for city review. Some approaches are suggested below.

1. Break up the box-on-box massing with articulation of heights and facades. Consider a projecting roof cornice.
2. Provide more elements of architectural scale and detail on the two floors of the building base. The overall goal should be to reflect the richness and variety of Downtown San Mateo street facades. Examples include:
 - Sloped awnings.
 - Decorative lights.
 - Cornice cap at top of the two-story base.
 - Projecting trim between the first and second floors.
 - Projecting balconies or Juliette balconies at the second floor.
 - Variety in storefront openings

A few examples are shown below.



3. Provide more individualization at ground floor storefronts. Suggest reviewing the design guidelines prepared for the other similar downtown mixed use projects.
4. Provide greater facade depth by recessing all windows.
5. Increase the proportion of brick wall surface relative to the windows on the upper floors.
6. Provide different window portions and greater window recesses on the second floor to distinguish them from the upper floors.

7. Provide more emphasis and architectural distinction at the office and residential entries.
8. Consider more variety in building materials and/or color to break up the large scale of the structure.
9. Provide more unique brick details as was customary on the older historic brick buildings downtown.
10. Increase the East Fifth Avenue facade sensitivity to the scale, character and landscaping of the immediately adjacent multifamily residential development frontage.

See multifamily residential streetscape photo below.



11. Improve the appearance and provide for some private outdoor spaces on the upper residential floor.
12. Consider a more distinctive corner treatment at the prime East Fourth Avenue and B Street retail corridors intersection. -*See one example below.*
13. Design a well integrated pedestrian signage system that allows for some business individualism.

Two examples are shown below.



Wendy, 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