

ATTACHMENT F1

March 9, 2022

Planning Commission
City of Los Altos
One North San Antonio Road
Los Altos, CA 94022

SUBJECT: APPLICATION COVER LETTER FOR 4350 EL CAMINO REAL

Dear Honorable Chair Bodner:

It's been a long road to your dais after applying in late 2018 – and we are pleased to be here. As longtime residents raising our family here, owning and operating three small businesses (gas stations) and practicing as a top real estate professional, we have a deep commitment and exceptional knowledge of the community.

We made a family decision to redevelop one of our gas station properties into housing. This decision will allow a better use of our resources at our two remaining stations to help them survive; and it will help invest in our future, as well as the City's, by providing necessary housing and affordable housing. As you know, we are in a housing crisis! Housing is in such short supply and prices are so high, currently for a single-family residence the average sales price is \$4.1M. Children are no longer reasonably able to attain housing in the community they grew up in and love. Unless mitigated, this cycle will have a profound affect on the character of the community and likely affect the enduring and underlying family values and connections that are the foundation supporting Los Altos as a great place to live and raise a family.

In our view, the project location at 4350 El Camino Real is perfect for housing as the site is located in the City's most intensive Thoroughfare Commercial general plan area. The general plan highlights the El Camino Real Corridor as a Special Planning Area, and as such, "one of the few areas with underutilized land and potential to redevelop or intensify existing development without jeopardizing the small-town residential character.¹ As a presently underdeveloped in-fill site, our project will fit in nicely with the surrounding taller buildings, reasonably maximize the development potential, and equally important, help preserve the small-town residential character. The nearby single-family district to the south is progressively buffered from the

¹ Community Design & Historic Resources Element, Los Altos General Plan 2002-2020, page 8.

project's visual impacts by virtue of the adjacent three-story condominiums and two-story townhouses.²

Our project will remove and clean-up the service station and create 47 high quality condominiums including seven affordable units. The building will contain a mix of unit types and sizes to help serve the varied needs of the community including those households that want to downsize, move up, and/or enjoy a more walkable, urban context. A highlight of the project is its open space: the approximately 6,100-square-foot, outdoor living room courtyard behind the building offers community connections and a generous amount of open space, light and air to the project and to the surrounding three-story, multiple-family building; the project exceeds the minimum open space requirement by 500 percent, which we feel is appropriate to help balance the more urban context and provide a quality befitting Los Altos. By foot, the project's residents may enter through an attractive lobby set behind the generously landscaped corner.

The project's residents will access an underground parking garage from El Camino Real via a wide driveway ramp concentrating the project's traffic impacts on the major thoroughfare. The 84 parking spaces located in the parking garage meets the City's regulations, especially so when considering that the project could apply an even more generous density bonus provision requiring only 0.5 parking spaces per unit for the transit oriented development.³ The parking garage has a secure, well appointed bicycle storage area with room for 40 bikes and tools. The bike storage exceeds the Valley Transportation Authority's requirement by 200 percent.

To help ensure the most appropriate and compatible building design we hired Alex Seidel, an architect with excellent experience designing successful, urban and mixed-use residential projects in the City. Seidel Architects has designed some of the most accomplished and contextually challenging projects in the City including 4750 El Camino Real (Colonnade) and 960 N. San Antonio Road (De Anza Properties).

² See Context Plan, Sheet A0.1 and North-South Section, Sheet A3.4 of the project plans for relationship to adjacent single-family district.

³ Per Section 65915 (p) (2) (A) of the Government Code.

The prominent corner site, located at a minor entry point to the City, is bordered by a three-story, multiple-family building to the east and south; across Los Altos Avenue is a three-story hotel; and, across El Camino Real immediately nearby are new five story buildings. To respond to this infill site, we designed a five-story ell shaped building. The ell shape provides an opportunity for a significant open space courtyard element behind it. The building's average setback along El Camino Real exceeds the required setback due to the staggered massing relating to the angle of the roadway. This helps achieve a robust articulation of the building face and respond to the mixture of scales evident in the area.

The staggered massing also allows for more landscape areas along the main frontage. The top floor has deeper setbacks on both the El Camino Real and Los Altos Avenue frontages reducing the scale and adding attractive character to the massing. A generous and inviting landscape plan takes advantage of both frontages to enhance the character of the building and to help create a more pedestrian friendly environment. The project's ground floor stoops enliven the character of Los Altos Avenue frontage by allowing occupants direct exterior access to the street.

The landscape plan includes pedestrian friendly elements such as wider sidewalks, street trees, light standards and a new Bus Stop; as well as including appropriate courtyard platings and buffer screening benefiting the adjacent multiple-family residential building.

An open feeling, transparent building lobby helps to define the corner. The lobby offers a distinctive massing treatment above with projected wood balconies and weathered, corten steel elements. Other high-quality building materials include natural limestone, plaster, composite wood siding, glass railings, and ornamental steel sunshades and metal fasciae help define the architectural elements and soften the building massing.

The proposed building relates very well to the adjacent buildings.⁴ Looking at it from El Camino Real, the second through fourth floor massing nearest Peninsula Real is defined with a similar plaster material and height as the adjacent building parapet. The effect of this element (and other similar ones) create a strong design relationship

⁴ See Perspective Views, Sheets A3.0a through A3.0c, and Streetscape Elevations, Sheet A3.3 of the project plans.

between the buildings. From the Los Altos Avenue perspective, the approach to define the fourth story is similar; also shown well from Los Altos Avenue is how the building's fifth floor massing is softened by the horizontal siding and setback from the lower floors. From both elevations the building design reflects a balanced rhythm of building elements: the building is divided vertically into thirds with each element defined by a different material; horizontally the building is defined by projecting wood and metal elements adding a fine grained pattern to the walls; the use of smaller scaled and deeply recessed windows and projecting balconies help add a richness and distinctive residential quality.

The design maintains a reasonable degree of privacy and exceeds expectations in a typical multiple-family context.⁵ For example, windows are minimized on the closest ends of the building facing its neighbor. The main windows facing the interior are buffered by a very large courtyard and landscape elements.

Overall we feel the architecture presents an interesting, cohesive design that appropriately reflects the context and character of the area and community.

One of the greatest project benefits is affordable housing. The project provides seven affordable housing units, or 28 percent of the project, greatly exceeding the 15 percent minimum. Exceeding the minimum is important since the City is not on track to meet its regional housing needs assessment. This project has two, one-bedroom Moderate Income units, two, two-bedroom Moderate Income units and three, one-bedroom, Very-low Income units. The affordable units generally reflect the size and number of bedrooms of the market rate units in accordance with the general plan. The project's three, Very-Low Income units qualify the project for a density bonus and two development incentives; this is addressed in specific detail in the project's Density Bonus Report.

In addition to helping the City meet its affordable housing needs, the project benefits Los Altos in other ways. The 47 new households to the area will help support the neighborhood businesses and economic vitality by adding approximately 100

⁵ See Perspective View, Sheet A3.0c, and Courtyard Perspective Views, Sheets A3.0e through A3.0h of the project plans.

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persons to the area.⁶ The City will receive a significant increase in ongoing property tax revenue from the net increase in property value from the new housing units. The City's parks will benefit by the project's parkland by dedicating \$1,668,500 in park impact fees. The project will also benefit traffic programs in the City contributing \$177,519 in traffic impact fees.

We look forward to the Planning Commission's favorable response to our project. We also welcome your conversation to address concerns should they arise.

Sincerely,

Angie and Greg Galatolo
Owner/Applicant
4350 El Camino Real

⁶ This assumes 1.7 persons per multiple-family household.