

9/6/23

Letter to City of Los Altos Planning Commission

Re: Multi-family developments at Rancho Shopping Center

To Whom It May Concern:

I've lived in the SF Bay Area for over 40 years and currently live in Los Altos. Los Altos is the best city I've ever lived in. We were drawn to the city because of its small-town feel, rural atmosphere, strong schools, low crime, charming and private neighborhoods, and many other reasons. We are a stone's throw from Rancho Shopping Center ("Rancho"). We love Rancho for the same reason we love Los Altos. It is a microcosm of Los Altos where we can engage with the community, meet neighbors, and develop relationships.

The qualities that drew my family to Los Altos are at risk with the City's apparent desire to let developers build high density apartments at Rancho. I have many concerns including:

1. The safety risks presented by the inevitable increase in traffic, noise, and congestion from high-density, multi-unit developments.
2. Insufficient infrastructure and roads for the added traffic and congestion.
3. A permanent and unwanted change in the character, aesthetic, and atmosphere of central Los Altos.
4. The loss of enjoyment and home value due to the creation of these high-density, multi-unit developments.

These aren't theoretical, pie-in-the-sky concerns. Anyone who has ever spent time at Rancho knows the parking lot gets busy and chaotic. Cars come in from Springer, Foothill Expressway and Fremont Streets. Cars often race through the parking lot. Imagine adding 100 or 200 apartments there. Now add the cars of each of those residents. The current infrastructure cannot handle the corresponding increase in people and cars. It is foreseeable that there will be more cars, traffic and unfortunately accidents. These safety risks are predictable and preventable. We should not build these high-density, multi-unit residences at Rancho.

Preserving the character and nature of Los Altos is our duty. If we don't do it who will? Generations before us have carried and fulfilled this duty. Now we must carry that torch and pass onto future generations what we've been given. We should consider other locations for building multi-unit residences.

It seems fundamentally unfair to me that the Planning Commission and a land developer – whose primary motivation is profits – can permanently and unilaterally alter the character of our neighborhood without the consent of the owners whose homes, families, and lives will be directly impacted. This is not what we signed up for. Many – if not all – of my neighbors share that sentiment.

I have many questions.

- Why is the City targeting Rancho Shopping Center to build these multi-unit complexes given Rancho's close proximity to residential homes?
- What other areas has Los Altos looked at to create housing that complies with SB 35? It seems downtown would be a better fit.
- How many units does Los Altos need to build to comply with SB 35?
- How many units have been built so far and where have those been built?
- How many units does Los Altos envision building at Rancho? Will there be a limit to the number of units that can be built at Rancho? We are embarking on a slippery slope. Once some development begins, it will be that much easier later on to add more development. Soon the cherished nature and character of our City will be gone.

I have many concerns and know my neighbors do as well. We need many more open and honest discussions about the possible multi-unit housing at Rancho before the City takes any further actions. It would be helpful if the Planning Commission publicly shared the above information on its website so that concerned residents are informed and educated about such significant news. I only learned of this information from the newspaper. Our City should be alerting residents of this directly. We have a right to participate in this process and protect the Los Altos way of life for us and future generations.

I look forward to continuing the dialogue and learning from the Planning Commission about how we can best balance all the important interests at stake.

David T. Wang