



January 29, 2025

Historic Preservation Committee
110 E. Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95030

Project: **RH – Los Gatos**
Location: 31 University Ave

Subject: **Supplemental Letter of Justification for Architecture and Site Approval; Planned Development Ordinance Amendment**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & REQUEST

RH is proposing a remodel to a 15,330 sq. ft. building located at 31 University Avenue, which will feature an innovative retail experience seamlessly integrating luxury home furnishings collections within a curated hospitality program (the “Proposed Project”). The existing building at 31 University Avenue is governed by a Planned Development Ordinance and is also located within the University/Edelen Historic District (“Historic District”) of Los Gatos as a non-contributing structure.

Due to these overlays, **RH is requesting architecture and site approval from the Historic Preservation Committee, as well as an amendment to Planned Development Ordinance 2025, adopted on December 16, 1996.** Specifically, RH is seeking to remove the requirements set forth in the Ordinance that states the building be designed “so that it appears to be a collective of individual structures that abut each other,” to allow a more harmonious façade that better relates to its surroundings.

Please refer to the Letter of Justification dated January 8, 2025 for further information on RH, site details and our proposed uses.

LANDMARK AND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION OVERLAY - STANDARDS FOR REVIEW AND FINDINGS

The Proposed Project is located within a landmark and historic preservation overlay as a non-contributing structure, specifically the University/Edelen Historic District (“Historic District”). As such it is subject to Division 3 – Historic Preservation and LHP or Landmark and Historic Preservation Overlay Zone of the Town’s Code of Ordinances, specifically Section 29.80.290 (2), shown below in **bold**.

Sec. 29.80.290. Standards for review.

In evaluating applications, the deciding body shall consider the architectural style, design, arrangement, texture, materials and color, and any other pertinent factors. Applications shall

not be granted unless:

(1) On landmark sites, the proposed work will neither adversely affect the exterior architectural characteristics or other features of the landmark (and, where specified in the designating ordinance for a publicly owned landmark, its major interior architectural features) nor adversely affect the character of historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value of the landmark and its site.

(2) In historic districts, the proposed work will neither adversely affect the exterior architectural characteristics or other features of the property which is the subject of the application, nor adversely affect its relationship, in terms of harmony and appropriateness, with its surroundings, including neighboring structures, nor adversely affect the character, or the historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value of the district.

(3) For pre-1941 structures, the proposed work will neither adversely affect the exterior architectural characteristics or other features of the property which is the subject of the application.

In designing a remodel of the existing non-contributing building at 31 University Ave, RH prioritized harmony and compatibility in the facade design as well as with its surrounding context. The Proposed Project is sensitive to and supportive of the larger Historic District as it expands the Mediterranean components of the existing building's style while maintaining the existing building's footprint, setbacks, massing, and density. This expansion of the Mediterranean style is represented by the Proposed Project's building material, stucco, as well as in the doors and window rhythm, type and proportions, which are consistent with both the existing building's Mediterranean style, as well as that of the larger Old Town Shopping Center across University Ave.

The plaster material, rectangular and arched windows, and rhythm of roof/window line individually and together relate to the existing structure at 31 University and the larger Old Town Shopping Center. In particular, the stucco and proposed openings evoke the style of 50 University Ave, a significant commercial structure within the University/Edelen Historic District. The Proposed Project limits decorative details and scale however, in sensitivity and support of the Historic District's contributing structures.

As a result of these limited stylistic choices, the Proposed Project successfully creates a harmonious façade design that assimilates into, rather than competes with, its surroundings and the larger Historic District. Consequently, the Proposed Project does not adversely change the exterior of the existing building or adversely impact its relationship with its neighboring structures and the larger Historic District.

Thank you for your consideration of this application.



January 8, 2025

Sean Mullin, Planning Manager
Community Development Department
110 E. Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95030

Project: **RH – Los Gatos**

Location: 31 University Ave

Subject: **Letter of Justification for Architecture and Site Approval; Conditional Use Permit; Planned Development Ordinance Amendment**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & REQUEST

RH is requesting architecture and site approval, as well as a conditional use permit (“CUP”) for 1) formula retail use exceeding 10,000 sf, and 2) for restaurant use with the selling of alcoholic beverages for consumption on-premises. Additionally, RH is requesting an amendment to Planned Development Ordinance 2025, adopted on December 16, 1996. RH is seeking these approvals to allow for the remodel of a 15,330 sq. ft. building located at 31 University Avenue, which will feature an innovative retail experience seamlessly integrating luxury home furnishings collections within a curated hospitality program (the “Proposed Project”).

BACKGROUND

A curator of design, taste and style in the luxury lifestyle market, RH offers collections through its retail galleries, sourcebooks and online at [RH.com](https://rh.com), RHContemporary.com, RHModern.com, RHBabyandChild.com, RHTEEN.com, and Waterworks.com.

Committed to creating architecturally inspiring and immersive retail spaces that blur the lines between residential and retail, indoors and outdoors, home and hospitality, RH Design Galleries are bespoke design destinations presenting the largest curated and fully integrated assortment of luxury home furnishings in the world. From restored landmark buildings to grand-scale contemporary structures, these architecturally inspiring spaces reimagine and redefine the shopping experience.

Designed with sensory-inspiring spaces that cannot be replicated online, these innovative and architecturally significant retail environments include lush gardens, professional design services, one-of-a-kind culinary experiences, and artistic installations of curated RH Collections by internationally acclaimed designers and artisans across the globe.

In addition to RH Madrid, the Gallery at Plaza del Marqués de Salamanca, RH Aynho Park, a magnificent 17th-century estate in the English countryside, and RH Brussels, a grand 18th century French baroque mansion prominently situated on the premier Boulevard de Waterloo, RH chairman & CEO Gary Friedman has revitalized several landmark properties across North America, including the former Museum of Natural History in Boston, the historic Three Arts Club in Chicago, the Historic Post Office in Greenwich, Connecticut; the Bethlehem Steel Building in San Francisco, and the brand's impressive Gallery in New York's Meatpacking District.

The plan for a RH Design Gallery, together with a food and beverage program, allows for the reimagination of an exceptional building that is appropriately scaled and sited on a key intersection of Old Town Los Gatos.

SITE DETAILS

The existing 15,330 sf building for the Proposed Project is sited at the corner of University Ave and Elm St, and sits on a 4.18 acre parcel that spans both sides of University Ave which houses an outdoor retail center known as the Old Town Shopping Center.

The Proposed Project will combine two previously separate tenant spaces within the existing building, which were previously home to a 6,400 sf Steamers of Los Gatos and a 8,641 sf Gap.

The zoning for the site is C-2:LHP:PD: Central Business District with a Landmark & Historic Preservation and Planned Development overlay. The Proposed Project's uses are allowed per zoning with a Conditional Use Permit. The Proposed Project will maintain the existing square footage of the existing building and would comply with the zoning ordinance standards for setbacks and building height.

ARCHITECTURE

The primary proposed building material is a multi-coat cement plaster system with steel and aluminum decorative building elements. The existing structural system is maintained in place. Architectural aluminum windows line the exterior elevations and provide transparency across the facades facing Elm St, University Ave, and along the pedestrian pass-through on the building's southern side.

The length of the facades across University Ave and Elm St are scaled down through sections that alternatively step back in ground plane from each other. These wall panels also alternatively feature rectangular- or semicircular- topped windows, as well as a parapet line that steps up and down in height in line with the panels. These features ultimately provide a sense of rhythm, symmetry, visual relief, and interest to the length of the existing building. Further, the fenestration sits materially inside the edge of the exterior wall, providing for deep shadows, which along with projected louvered awnings add additional textural detail across the facades.

Finally, the full-service restaurant sits centrally inside the Proposed Project and is covered by a pyramidal skylight that brings in light and highlights the cafe as a central gathering space. Barrel-vaulted hallways bookend both sides of the cafe, which add an uncommon architectural expression, facilitates a unique play of light, and creates a sense of place as customers enter the Gallery or exit the cafe.

USES

A majority of the Proposed Project will display furniture and décor in a series of complete living, bath, and bed rooms. There will also be a restaurant on the ground floor beyond the entryway, along with a kitchen and other back of house. An Interior Design Studio room will also be sited toward the back of the store, where interior designers can provide customers further assistance. The vision within the building is to reimagine the retail experience by blurring the lines between residential and retail, hospitality and home, indoors and outdoors – creating an immersive retail environment that is more home than store. All amenities will be made available to the public during the hours of store operation.

CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT FINDINGS

In the C-2 zone, Town code requires a CUP for a formula retail business exceeding 10,000 sf and for restaurant use with the selling of alcoholic beverages for consumption on-premises (Section 29.20.185). Los Gatos stipulates terms for the approval or denial of conditional use permits under Section 29.20.190. The Proposed Project and its uses will comply with the objectives in the following manner:

- (1) The proposed uses of the property are essential or desirable to the public convenience or welfare;

The proposed uses provide for a bespoke dining and shopping experience which will be desirable to both residents and visitors as a destination within Los Gatos. Further, the Proposed Project will be an addition to an existing RH gallery at 26 N Santa Cruz Ave, which has been an integral part of the Los Gatos community for over 10 years.

- (2) The proposed uses will not impair the integrity and character of the zone;

The proposed use will not impair the integrity and character of the zone as it is a commercial use located in a commercial zone.

Further, the Proposed Project is consistent with the Commercial Design Guidelines for C-2A zones and as a non-contributing structure within a historic preservation district. The Proposed Project maintains the existing building's massing and density, reimagines the existing facade variation, and maintains the pedestrian pass-through along the southern wall.

- (3) The proposed uses would not be detrimental to public health, safety or general welfare;

The proposed uses, formula retail use and restaurant use with the selling of alcoholic beverages for consumption on-premises, represent no change from the current uses of the most recent tenants at the existing building (Gap and Steamer's), and would not be detrimental to public health, safety, and general welfare.

- (4) The proposed uses of the property are in harmony with the various elements or objectives of the general plan and the purposes of this chapter.

The proposed uses are in harmony with the General Plan and the Town Code because they contribute to the variety of commercial uses in the Central Business District.

The goals and policies of the 2040 General Plan (2020 Land Use and Community Development Elements) applicable to this project include, but are not limited to:

Policy LU-1.4: Infill projects shall be designed in context with the neighborhood and surrounding zoning with respect to the existing scale and character of surrounding structures, and should blend rather than compete with the established character of the area.

Policy LU-9.3: Encourage a mix of retail and office uses in commercial areas, except in the Central Business District designation, where retail should be emphasized and office should be limited to upper floors and other areas as defined by the Town Code.

Policy LU-9.6: Encourage development that maintains and expands resident-oriented services and/or creates employment opportunities for local residents consistent with overall land use policies of the Town.

Policy CD-1.4: Development on all elevations shall be of high quality design and construction, a positive addition to and compatible with the Town's ambiance. Development shall enhance the character and unique identity of existing commercial and/or residential neighborhoods.

- (5) A hazardous waste facility proposal is subject to the California Health and Safety Code, Article 8.7, Section 25199—25199.14 and shall be consistent with the Santa Clara County Hazardous Waste Management Plan.

Not Applicable

PD ORDINANCE AMENDMENT FINDINGS

The Proposed Project is located within a landmark and historic preservation overlay ("LHP") as a non-contributing structure. The Proposed Project is also governed by a planned development overlay ("PD"), specifically PD Ordinance 2025, adopted on December 16, 1996. RH seeks to amend the PD Ordinance as proposed. Town code Section 29.80.120 allows for amendments to PD's, provided the proposed amendment meets the requirements and findings of Town code Section 29.80.095. The proposed PD Amendment and the Proposed Project comply with the required findings in the following manner:

- (1) The proposed PD is in compliance with all sections of this division.

The proposed PD amendment is within the limitations of use of a planned development as it pertains to property within an LHP overlay zone, and serves to enhance the Town's historic resources that provide a public benefit to the citizens of the Town.

- (2) The proposed PD is in conformance with the goals, policies, and applicable land use designation(s) and standards of the Town's general plan.

The proposed PD amendment maintains a baseline set of requirements consistent with the Town's general plan. The policies consistent with the PD amendment include, but are not limited to:

Policy LU-6.5: The type, density, and intensity of new land use shall be consistent with that of the immediate neighborhood.

Policy LU-9.3: Maintain a variety of commercial uses, including a strong Downtown commercial area combined with Los Gatos Boulevard and strong neighborhood commercial centers to meet the shopping needs of residents and to preserve the small-town atmosphere.

Policy CD-9.1: Exterior building materials in the Central Business District should be consistent with those used in existing, tastefully executed surrounding buildings.

Policy CD-12.2: Encourage the preservation, maintenance, and adaptive reuse of existing residential, commercial or public buildings.

- (3) The proposed PD is in conformance with all other applicable land use regulations, including but not limited to Town Council adopted guidelines, except as otherwise provided in section 29.80.095(4).

The PD amendment seeks a modification to specifically to requirements in PD Ordinance 2025 but otherwise maintains a baseline set of requirements consistent with the Town's land use regulations and design guidelines, including Ordinance 1920 and 2168, which governs over the University/Edelen Historic District, and which includes the Proposed Project's site.

The Proposed Project is consistent with the design guidelines for the remodel of a non-contributing structures within the University/Edelen Historic District. The Proposed Project is sensitive to and supportive of the larger District as it expands the Mediterranean components of the existing building's style while maintaining the existing building's footprint, setbacks, massing, and density. The Proposed Project's stucco building material, as well as doors and window rhythm, type and proportions, are consistent to the existing building's Mediterranean style, as well as that of the larger Old Town Shopping Center across University Ave. In particular, the stucco and proposed openings evoke the style of 50 University Ave, a significant commercial structure within the LHP. The Proposed Project limits decorative details and scale however, to in sensitivity and support of the District's contributing structures.

The proposed PD amendment and Proposed Project also conform with required findings for LHP applications per Town Code Section 29.80.290, as the proposed work does not adversely affect the exterior architecture or its relationship with its surroundings:

Sec. 29.80.290. Standards for review. In evaluating applications, the deciding body shall consider the architectural style, design, arrangement, texture, materials and color, and any other pertinent factors. Applications shall not be granted unless:

- (2) In historic districts, the proposed work will neither adversely affect the exterior architectural characteristics or other features of the property which is the subject of the

application, nor adversely affect its relationship, in terms of harmony and appropriateness, with its surroundings, including neighboring structures, nor adversely affect the character, or the historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value of the district.

(4) Any proposed use or development standards that deviate from the underlying zoning district(s) result in innovative and creative site planning to develop:

- b. Mixed commercial, or mixed residential, or mixed commercial and residential development; or
- e. The proposed PD provides a public benefit to the citizens of the Town.

The proposed PD amendment facilitates the revitalization of a vacant storefront into a mixed commercial amenity of innovative and creative use programming for the benefit of both residents and visitors, which satisfies conditions (b) and (e) above.

CONCLUSION

We believe the Proposed Project will enhance the corner of University Ave and Elm St in Old Town Los Gatos by at once seamlessly fitting into the character and scale of the neighborhood surrounding, while also providing visual interest through harmonious, textured, and elevated design. While the Proposed Project's programming does not represent a change of use from the existing use at the building, the reimagined dining and shopping space will help improve customer experience, thereby helping to activate pedestrian activity in this area.

The Proposed Project:

- Respects the existing scale and character of surrounding structures, and blends rather than competes with the established character of the area.
- Presents elevations that are of high-quality design and construction, and a positive addition to and compatible with the Town's ambiance. The Proposed Project enhances the character and unique identity of the existing commercial neighborhood.
- Represents no change in use from the former tenants at the existing building; rather the Proposed Project will improve and reimagine a blend of both uses under one roof.

DEVELOPER and DESIGN FIRM INFORMATION

RH

RH is a curator of design, taste and style in the luxury lifestyle market. The company offers collections through its retail galleries, sourcebooks and online at RH.com, RHContemporary.com, RHModern.com, RHBabyandChild.com, RHTEEN.com, and Waterworks.com.

RH operates Galleries and outlets throughout the U.S., Canada, UK and Europe.

There are places you visit and those you remember™

Awards and Recognition

Award of Merit - Interior/Tenant Improvement – ENR Mountain States - RH Denver - 2016

Connecticut Preservation Award - Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation – Former Greenwich Post Office - 2015

Preservation Excellence Award (Adaptive Reuse) – Chicago Landmarks – Three Arts Club - 2016

MBH Architects

MBH Architects is a full service architecture and integrated services firm building innovative solutions from offices in the San Francisco Bay Area, New York City, Denver, Mumbai and Bengaluru since 1989.

MBH Architects is a Minority-Owned Business Enterprise (MBE) with staff from around the world. Their wide array of experience includes over 10,000 projects of nearly every project type, and their global reach spans more than 96 countries worldwide. MBH Architects take incredible pride in our work and clients' satisfaction.

Awards and Recognition

Gold - Shop! Design Awards - Bucherer Time Machine Flagship Store - 2023

Commercial Construction & Renovation Project Profile Award - 300 Grant - 2021

AIA East Bay Design Awards - 930 Brittan - 2021

Urban Confluence Design Competition - Breeze of Innovation - 2021

Honorable Mention - MNSD's Retail Renovation Competition - Peet's Coffee Georgetown - 2017

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