

February 7, 2024

Ms. Jocelyn Shoopman  
Community Development Department  
Town of Los Gatos  
110 E. Main Street  
Los Gatos, CA 95031

**RE: North Forty Phase 2**

Dear Jocelyn:

I reviewed the drawings and evaluated the site context. My comments and recommendations are as follows:

**PHASE 2 CONTEXT**



**SPECIFIC PLAN FRAMEWORK**

The North 40 Specific Plan, adopted in 2015, set forth the town's vision, goals, policies, land uses, development standards and design guidelines for this project. While the specific plan documents sets out several detailed expectations, the overriding principle guiding the more detailed plans, standards and guidelines is, as has been over many past decades, the goal of incorporating new development, large and small, into the unique development fabric of the community. This expectation is set forth in the opening pages of the document, as summarized below.

**VISION STATEMENT**

*The North 40 reflects the special nature of our hometown. It celebrates our history, agricultural heritage, hillside views, and small town character. The North 40 is seamlessly woven into the fabric of our community, complementing other Los Gatos residential and business neighborhoods. It*

*is respectful of precious community resources and offers unique attributes that enrich the quality of life of all of our residents.*

*Guiding Principles to achieve this vision:*

- *The North 40 will look and feel like Los Gatos. (Emphasis added)*
- *The North 40 will embrace hillside views, trees, and open space.*
- *The North 40 will address the Town's residential and/or commercial unmet needs.*
- *The North 40 will minimize or mitigate impacts on town infrastructure, schools, and other community services.*

#### *1.2.1 Context*

*Although the Town is situated within one of the largest metropolitan areas of Northern California and is closely tied to the fast paced economy of Silicon Valley, the Town still retains its small town character. (emphasis added)*

There are a few concessions and waivers being requested by the applicant based on the provision of affordable housing units and governing state law. Increased density will affect the physical design and appearance of the Phase 2 development. However, the most visual impact will be seen in the application of the requested waiver of the specific plan's building height limit standards - see below.

#### **2.5.2 Building Height**

- The maximum height of any building, excluding affordable housing and hotel uses, is 35 feet ...*
- The maximum height is 45 feet for a hotel and/or a mixed-use and/or mixed-income development including a minimum of 40% extremely low, very low, or low income.*

**Note: The project applicant has requested a maximum height increase as follows.**

#### ***Waivers***

***1. Increased Maximum Height. Section 2.5.2 of the North 40 Specific Plan and referenced in Policy LU5 sets a maximum building height of 30 feet across the Project site and Section 2.5.7(b) sets a maximum building height of 25 feet for buildings located within 50 feet of Los Gatos Boulevard. The Project requires a waiver to allow the Affordable Multifamily (Building G) units to achieve a maximum height of 63 feet, the Town home units to achieve a maximum height of 49 feet, and the Mixed-Income Multifamily (Building E) units to achieve a maximum height of 100 feet. The Specific Plan's development standards do not accommodate the Project's proposed density, which is allowed pursuant to the adopted Housing Element. Increased height is necessary for each proposed building typology to accommodate the proposed unit count and necessary parking facilities across the Project site.***

## PHASE 1 DEVELOPMENT

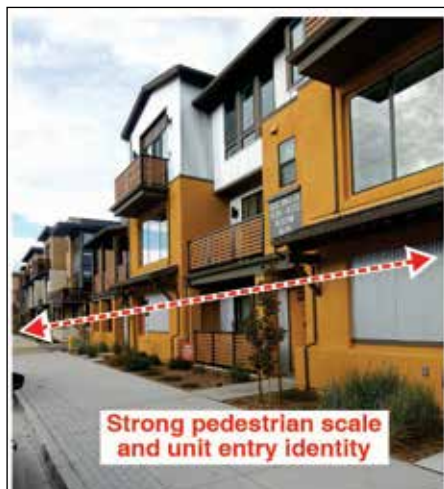
Phase 1 of the North 40 Specific Plan area is nearing construction completion. While some construction remains, enough has been completed to evaluate the degree to which this portion of the overall development has been successful in adapting to the specific plan document's vision, standards and guidelines. Design approaches within Phase 1 may be helpful in assessing the Phase 2 design.

### Common features worth noting include the following.

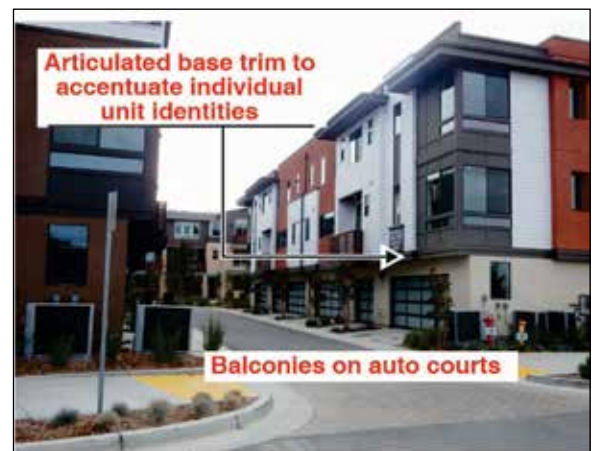
- Strong individual unit identities.
- Well articulated and varied facades.
- Strong pedestrian scale.
- Facade color variety.
- Balance of horizontal and vertical emphasis.
- Strong building corners with large overhangs.
- Visually interesting and varied end elevations.
- Varied building heights.
- Strong building tops.
- Abundant balconies.
- Strong horizontal building elements.
- Corner balconies.
- Outdoor entry porch areas.
- Balconies on auto courts.
- Articulated base trim on auto courts to accentuate individual building identities.
- Large buildings broken into smaller distinctive masses.

Annotated Phase 1 photos illustrating these features are shown below.

## PHASE 2 OVERVIEW









## PROJECT



**PHASE 2 AERIAL SKETCH**



The proposed project is composed of a variety of townhome complexes, an affordable housing structure, a mixed use building with partial ground floor commercial/retail uses, a separate commercial/retail structure, and three individual amenity buildings.



## TOWNHOMES



TOWNHOME A | 7 PLEX | STYLE 1



TOWNHOME A | 7 PLEX | STYLE 2



TOWNHOME A | 8 PLEX | STYLE 1



TOWNHOME A | 8 PLEX | STYLE 2



TOWNHOME B | 7 PLEX | STYLE 3



TOWNHOME B | 7 PLEX | STYLE 4

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING



## MIXED USE HOUSING





## COMMERCIAL/RETAIL BUILDING



## BARN



## PAVILION A



## PAVILION B



## THE MEADOW COMMON SPACE





## PROJECT EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The proposed scale and texture of Phase 2 is much larger than Phase 1 while the mix of development types, excluding the mixed use structure, are much the same as those in Phase 1. My reaction to the Phase 1 structures is that, while adopting an architectural design style that is more contemporary than residential development as a whole in Los Gatos, they have done an admirable job in reflecting the *“look, feel and small town character”* of Los Gatos. The proposed Phase 2 development seems to fall short of those goals. Each project type is explored individually below, but some of the overriding concerns include the following.

### Townhomes

Unit sizes are larger, but that is understandable and acceptable in the context of providing a wide range of housing choices in the North 40 Area. However, while they are similar to the five, six and seven-plexes of Phase 1, they all look very much the same with very little of the individual identity seen in the Phase 1 townhomes.



### Affordable Housing

The Phase 2 structure is one story taller than the senior housing in Phase 1, but has a roughly similar or smaller building footprint. The design approach of the affordable housing is quite different in Phase 2. The Phase 1 affordable housing structure approach was to break down the building mass into identifiable sections with differing facade treatments and facade variations to resemble several smaller buildings constructed over time. The Phase 2 approach has a more uniform horizontal structure to which projecting bay elements are applied. Both approaches are reasonable, but as currently presented, the Phase 2 affordable housing project lacks the feel and scale of Los Gatos which is a main goal of the specific plan.





### Mixed Use Housing

This portion of the project poses the biggest challenge to meeting the “look, feel and small town scale of Los Gatos”. The height and mass of the structure are magnitudes larger than any other residential or commercial development in the community. While an effort has been made to break down the scale of the building, its size and character feels more suitable to larger cities on the Peninsula. While recognizing the need for additional housing at this scale, the staff, the applicant should be encouraged in finding approaches and techniques that are more suitable to better achieve the community’s goals and expectations.





## TOWNHOME REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Townhomes dominate the buildings in Phase 2 but all are pretty much the same in design and appearance without the richer variety of the residential buildings in Phase 1. A basic repetitive base structure is used with minor variations. Units have less individual identity than in Phase 1 and the colors are rather limited and the design approach is repetitive. Some comparisons of Phase 1 and Phase 2 townhomes are illustrated below.

### SOME DIFFERENCES

#### PHASE 2

Great deal of sameness



7 Plex A S1



7 Plex A S2

Repetitive modules



8 Plex A S1



8 Plex A S2



8 Plex B S3



7 Plex B S4

#### PHASE 1

Greater individual unit identity



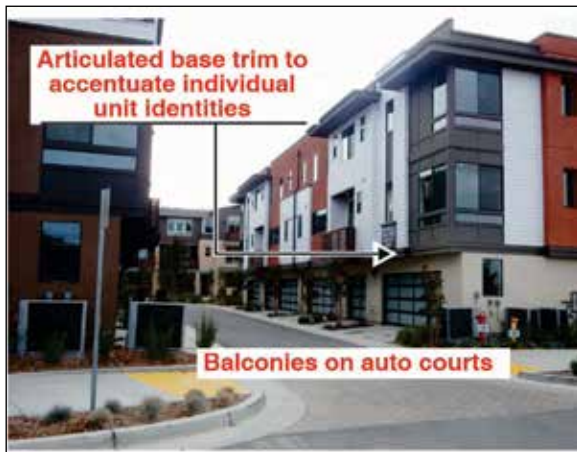
6 Plex



7 Plex

## Townhome Recommendations

1. Provide more individual unit identities.
2. Reduce the visual repetitiveness of the facades.
3. Enhance and vary the end facades.
4. Vary and strengthen building tops.
5. Reduce the strong vertical emphasis with a better balance between horizontal and vertical forms and architectural details.
6. Provide more color variations.
7. Enhance the pedestrian scale with stronger entry porches, canopies and projecting second floor balconies.
8. Provide some height variety at the ends of buildings.
9. Enhance the sense of unit identity on the auto courts with additional balconies and facade offsets, as was done in the Phase 1 townhomes.



## SOME OTHER EXAMPLES OF AUTO COURT ARTICULATION

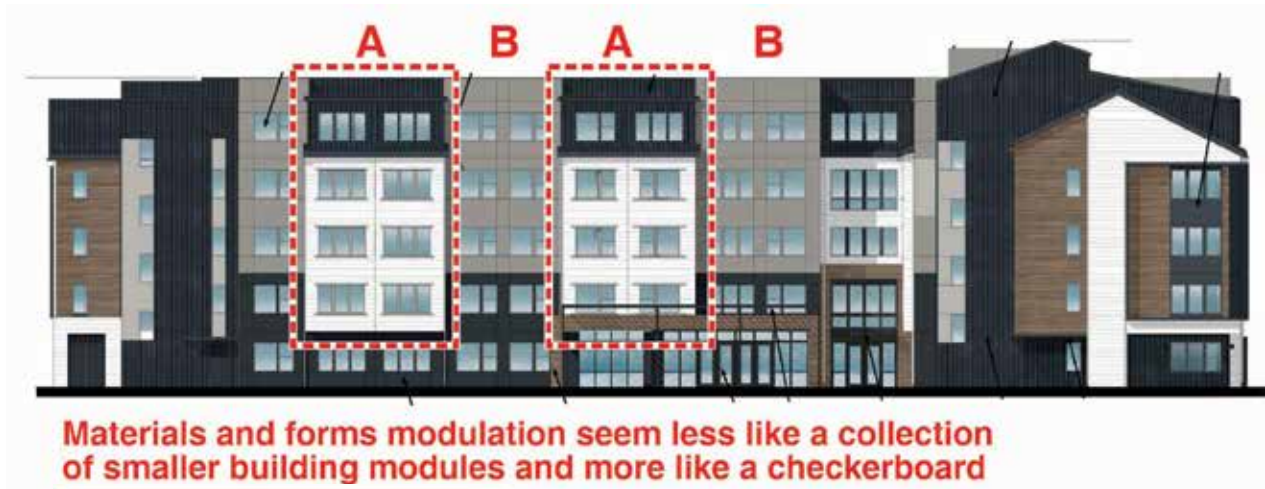




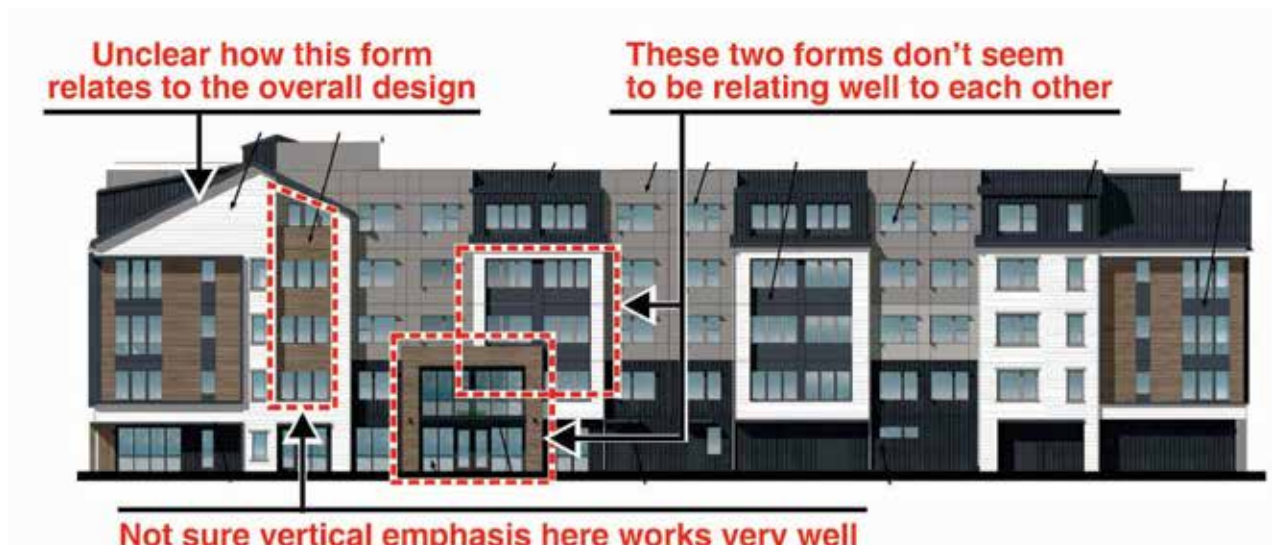
## AFFORDABLE HOUSING REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The affordable housing portion of Phase 2 appears to aspire to a physical design relationship with the adjacent townhomes, all of which have similar tall applique projecting bay elements. While this might be a reasonable design concept, it seems large in scale for the “look and feel of Los Gatos”, and it continues a repetitiveness that already seems overdone in the townhome clusters.

Some specific issues are noted on the illustrations below.



Somewhat similar approach in San Mateo Bay Meadows



**Effort to reduce visual height  
is defeated by the intermediate wall forms top**



① SOUTH EAST VIEW

**While affordable housing projects often do not  
have balconies, that is not always the case.  
See Mid-Peninsula affordable projects below.**





### Affordable Housing Recommendations

My recommendation would be to step back and consider other approaches to this building. It would be preferable to avoid the appearance of one big building with superimposed appliques in favor of varied facade elements. A few examples are illustrated below.



*Less dramatic bay contrast with more unified facade treatment and setback upper floor to reduce visual building height*





*Varied building forms and colors to reduce appearance of one larger repetitive design*



*Varied bay widths and colors to reduce the building's visual scale*



*Separate building forms with unified materials and fenestration*



*Separate building forms with unified materials, colors, substantial horizontal and vertical setbacks, strong top overhangs/trellises and abundant architectural details*





## RETAIL BUILDING REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed retail building on the Los Gatos Blvd. frontage appears cold and unwelcoming at the Los Gatos Blvd. entry to the Paseo compared to the adjacent Phase 1 Building B2 - see elevation comparisons and sketch below.



### Retail Building Recommendations

- Revise to provide a more welcoming facade facing Los Gatos Blvd.
- Consider providing activity space such as outdoor dining on the Los Gatos Blvd. frontage.
- Consider warmer building materials in lieu of the proposed metal siding.
- Consider lowering the building scale with a sloped roof or awning on the Los Gatos Blvd. facade.

## MIXED USE HOUSING REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Adapting the design of the Mixed Use Building to the Town of Los Gatos North 40 Specific Plan's vision and goals is without doubt the most challenging portion of the Phase 2 development. The currently proposed design falls arguably short of accommodating a building of this size and height into the "Look and feel of Los Gatos". The design seeks to apply some techniques to break up the building masses, but the building is not significantly different than many recent projects in larger Bay Area cities along El Camino Real and other high transportation corridors. Some of the positive and negative characteristics of the proposed mixed use structure's design include the following.

### POSITIVE DESIGN FEATURES

- *Broken facade on Los Gatos Blvd. (second floor courtyard terrace).*
- *Overall facades broken into smaller building units.*
- *Some upper level setbacks on the Los Gatos Blvd. facade.*
- *Building mass reduced at upper levels.*

### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN BUILDING DESIGN

- *Podium format.*
- *Commercial frontage character.*
- *Very tall facades very close to Los Gatos Blvd.*
- *Relatively strong vertical emphasis.*
- *Little scale transition with adjacent development.*
- *Boxiness through limited building height variations.*
- *Limited balconies and other clear residential features.*
- *Visual blandness of Los Gatos Blvd. ground floor facade.*

Collection of individual building modules but does not yet have the character or scale to give it the "Look and feel of Los Gatos"







*Hard podium line does not contribute to the Look and Feel of Los Gatos or to its small town character*

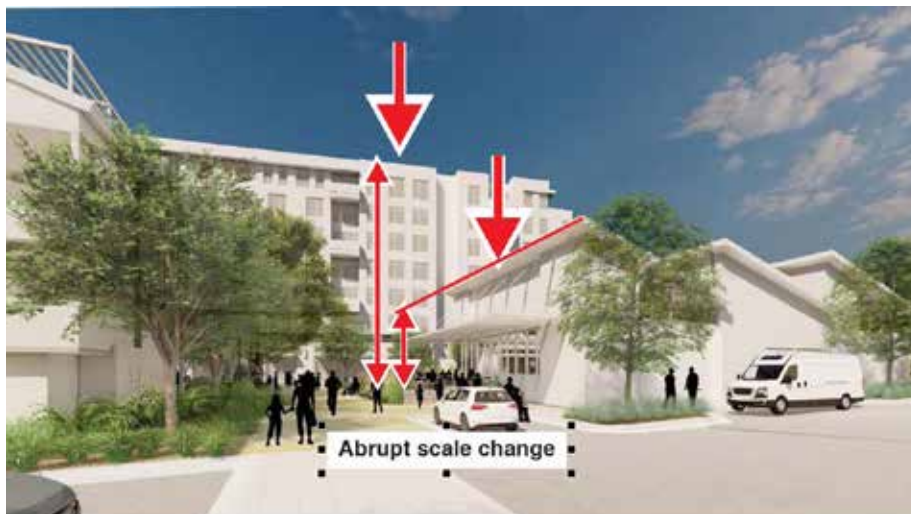
**Long uninteresting facade with very small (30 ft.) setback from Los Gatos Blvd. frontage**



**Lack of significant height variation increases the perception of one large box-like structure**



**These elements seem like appliques rather than part of an organic building volume**



**Abrupt scale change**





In addition to the overall form, scale and character of the larger residential portion of the structure, the treatment of the ground floor commercial/ retail space seems quite at odds with the specific plan. It currently stretches along the pedestrian Paseo, wraps around onto the Los Gatos Blvd. frontage, and is highly constrained by the standard “podium” framework approach. It is more typical of shopping center design or very urban ground floor office mixed use retail spaces.



**Rigid commercial frontage framework is more like a typical shopping center and not as envisioned by the North 40 Specific Plan**

In contrast, the visual images included in the specific plan as a statement of community expectations reflect a more individualistic approach that have elements in common with store frontages in downtown Los Gatos - see specific plan image excerpts below



*Contemporary metal awning defines window and entry to cafe.*



*Fabric awnings are encouraged.*



*Awning and typeface should vary in size and color among tenants.*

3-12



*Separate awnings over windows and doors are encouraged.*

While many taller mixed use buildings have generic base commercial frontages to allow flexibility in leasing, there are many other examples of newer mixed use developments emphasizing individuality of uses and design on ground floor commercial spaces. A few examples are shown below. The majority shown come from Emeryville's Bay Street, San Jose's Santana Row, Valencia's Town Center and The American at Brand in Glendale.



Note that base and upper floors have a better relationship, less of a residential project sitting on a uniform base and more integration of base and residential





Given the community expectations that even this much larger structure will be designed and built in a manner that has the *"Look and feel of Los Gatos"*, some examination may be useful of other examples of development where larger buildings used techniques to reduce the visual size of larger buildings to better fit into their community context. The photographs below, some historic and some contemporary, illustrate some of these approaches.



### Mixed Use Housing Recommendations

The Mixed Use building will likely require considerable more study and testing if it is to achieve the community's expectations and the vision of the North 40 Specific Plan. The prior pages address some of the issues and approach precedents for discussion. While I do not have a definitive recommendation regarding the final design of the mixed use building, I do have a few suggestions for consideration as the design refinement progresses.

#### 1. Horizontal and vertical balance

I do believe that the project will be more successful if the current strong vertical elements of the design are more subdued. The comparison illustration below shows the introduction of more horizontally proportioned window patterns.



**PROPOSED**  
All vertical window proportions



**ALTERNATIVE APPROACH**  
Mix of horizontal window proportions (dominant) with some vertical window proportions



## 2. Building Base

While the “residential structure on top of a garage podium” is quite common, I think in this instance it creates a great deal of rigidity in conflict with the scale and character goals of the specific plan and divorces the residential units from the pedestrian environment. My strong suggestion would be to bring the residential structure and details down to grade level in lieu of using the podium formant. Further, I would suggest that plans be implemented to allow greater user individuality and variety that better reflects the scale and character of Los Gatos. Two examples are shown below,



### 3. Balconies

Increase the number of balconies to more strongly enhance the residential character of the structure.



### 4. Greater Articulation

Reduce the boxiness of the building forms by more height variations and by taking advantage of special building corner designs - especially at the pedestrian Paseo - two examples are shown below.



**Typical proposed Paseo building corner**



*Note also building bases*



**Opportunities for enhanced Paseo building corners**



## SUMMARY

Overall the plan for Phase 2 seems well thought out in terms of the open space framework. The Townhome and Affordable Housing components are a good start but seem to fall short of the successful Phase 1 structures in terms of individual unit identity, visual variety and their fidelity to the “look, feel and small town character of Los Gatos” vision. Further refinements should be encouraged.

The biggest concern is the abrupt change of scale for the Mixed Use Building compared to not only adjacent development but also to all other portions of the town’s community fabric. The proposed height and bulk of the mixed use housing project would be a major departure from the wishes of the community over the past several decades. It’s size is more suited to urban and transit oriented cities and transportation corridors in the Bay Area than to a small town context. All of the mixed use building recommendations and suggestions above are focused on improving the project’s compliance with the North 40 Specific Plan community expectation, but they cannot fully mitigate the building’s visual impact on the community.

The mixed use examples shown above are intended to show that there are a variety of ways to approach taller residential buildings in a smaller scale context. The following examples are provided to focus attention on some specific concepts that staff might wish to explore further with the applicant to address the mixed use building. These are not design recommendations but rather concepts on how others have approached similar specific design and massing issues.



- Facade variety and articulation within smaller building width increments.
- Clearly defined pedestrian scale base with related but different upper floors.
- Window recesses and varied residential character windows.
- Varied top silhouette and special treatment to provide a residential top.



- Facade variety and articulation within smaller building width increments.
- Clearly defined pedestrian smaller scale base with related but different upper floors.
- Prominent residential balconies.



- Building division into base, middle and top.
- Upper floors facade change to minimize visual vertical building height.
- Prominent residential balconies.



- Upper floor articulation and varied silhouette.
- Prominent residential balconies and facade depth.
- Varied and differentiated building base.



- Separate buildings treatment with varied facade treatments and articulation.
- Prominent residential balconies.



- Separate buildings treatment with varied facade treatments and articulation.
- Prominent residential balconies and other architectural details.



- Separate buildings treatment with varied facade treatments and articulation.
- Prominent residential balconies and other architectural details.
- Varied top building silhouette.



- Separate buildings treatment with varied facade treatments and articulation.
- Prominent residential balconies and other architectural details.
- Varied building top silhouette.
- Buildings firmly linked to grade with varied ground floor facade treatments.





- Buildings firmly linked to grade with varied ground floor facade treatments.
- Prominent second floor residential living space related to the ground floor facades.

- Upper floor setbacks along the Los Gato Blvd. and Paseo frontages.



- Varied ground floor facade treatments with more of a “Look and Feel of Los Gatos”.
- Stronger landscaping and sense of residential activity at second floor terrace.



- More unique building corners with clear residential character.

While the above concepts could reduce the mixed use building’s impact on the scale and feel of the North 40 project, they could not fully mitigate its height and bulk. While the applicant has wide latitude to fashion the development to meet their increased housing goals, some consideration could be given to reallocating some of the units to other portions of the site to reduce the overall height of the building along the Los Gatos Blvd. and Paseo frontages.

Jocelyn, please let me know if you have any questions, or if there are other issues that I did not address.

Sincerely,  
CANNON DESIGN GROUP

Larry L. Cannon

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