



March 26, 2024

Mr. Sean Mullin  
Community Development Department  
Town of Los Gatos  
110 E. Main Street  
Los Gatos, CA 95031

**RE: 50 Los Gatos - Saratoga Road**

Dear Sean:

**NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT**

The site is located in a secluded area immediately adjacent to Los Gatos-Saratoga Road, the Highway 17 exit ramp, Los Gatos High School and the Bella Vista Avenue neighborhood. Photos of the site and surrounding neighborhood are shown on the following pages.

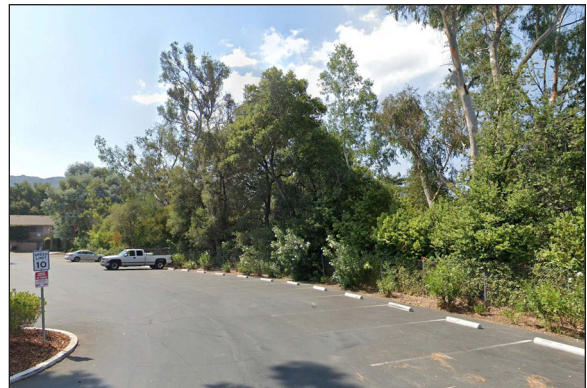




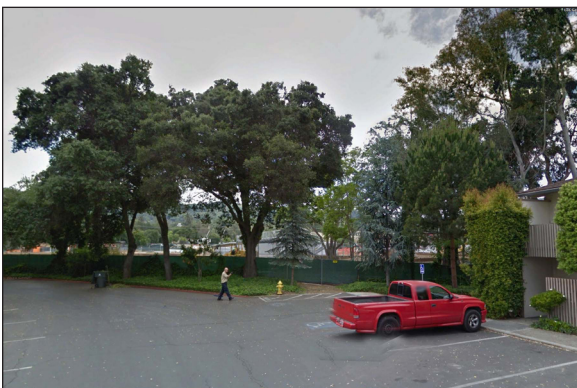
**THE SITE**



*Site East Edge Hillside*



*Site West Side Highway*



*Site South Side Sports Field*



*Site North Side Los Gatos - Saratoga Road*

PROPOSED PROJECT



PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT PLAN



TYPICAL 4 UNIT BUILDING



TYPICAL 5 UNIT BUILDING



TYPICAL 6 UNIT BUILDING



TYPICAL 7 UNIT BUILDING



TYPICAL BUILDING REAR ELEVATION



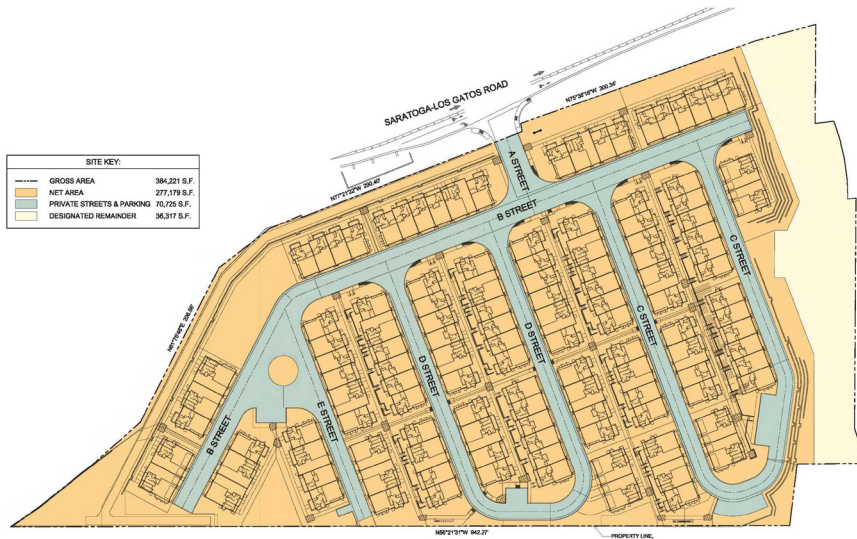
TYPICAL BUILDING SIDE ELEVATION

## ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The proposed development plan may be permitted but is unlikely to result in a very livable neighborhood for its residents. Some of the issues include the following:

### 1. Building Coverage

The proposed number and disposition of residential units is a plan to maximize the number of units but would likely not result in a cohesive neighborhood equivalent to others in Los Gatos. The site itself is substantially separated from other development in the community and will need to rely on its own development for parking and open space. Some specific issues are suggested below.

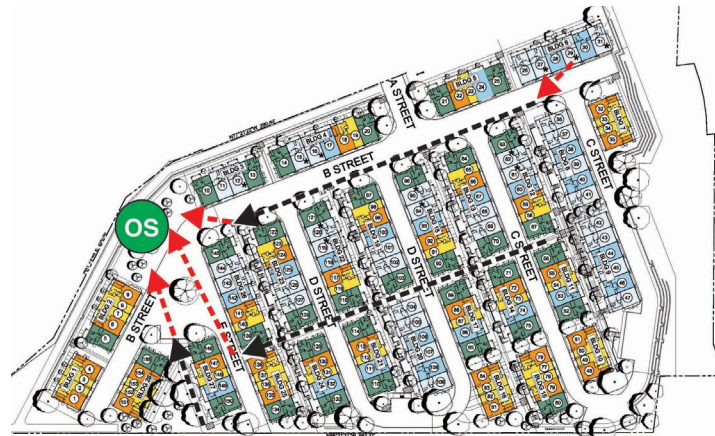


### 2. Open Space, Pathways, and Pedestrian Linkages

The amount of usable common open space is quite limited for a neighborhood of this number of residents and desired quality. It is also not very family and child oriented. Most of the distributed open space is located in the walkways between structures and not suitable for any active uses. The two larger concentrated open spaces are devoted to bioswales which can be visually attractive for passive viewing but usually not suitable for any active uses. I did not find enough information in the application materials to understand the more detailed uses and landscaping proposed for these areas. While the landscaped walkways leading to unit entries will likely be well landscaped, that is also primarily a visual rather than usable amenity - see photo example below of typical walkway for this type of development.



Pedestrian walkways along the entry walkways and passageways between buildings have the potential of being pleasant, continuous landscaped environments, but they are interrupted at the major western bioswale open space where residents must access the open space by walking along and across streets at awkward locations.



**Common open space is limited, remotely located to most units, has limited active use due to bioswale needs and dedicated pedestrian walkways are not fully connected**

### 3. Guest Parking

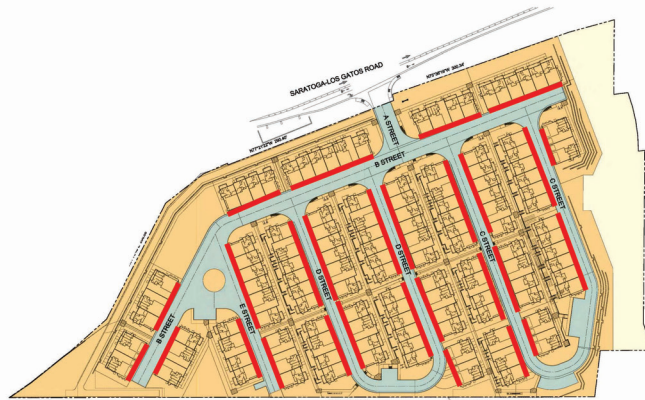
There are only 20 guest parking spaces provided for 155 dwelling units which is one space for every eight units. The spaces are all located on the southern edge of the parcel, far away from the bulk of the homes and not aggregated into interconnected areas. Finding a guest parking space will be difficult and then pedestrian walks to many units would be quite long. The relative isolation of this parcel makes access to any meaningful off-site parking impossible.



**Guest parking is limited to 1 parking space per 8 dwelling units and is inconveniently located**

#### 4. Street Auto Court Frontages

The street frontages experienced by both residents and visitors alike will be dominated by long rows of unit parking garage doors with limited variety or landscaped relief - see illustrations below.



All vehicular access is dominated by continuous garage doors with limited landscaping or facade variations



D Street  
 Facades Facing West

#### 5. Architectural Repetition

The individual residential buildings are well designed with an identifiable architectural style and consistent detailing.

However, they are sited in rows of almost identical buildings with limited variety and color changes. While they are handsome individually, they may as a whole lend a barracks-like feeling and are unlikely to achieve the ambience of individual home identity that has been sought by the town in other multifamily residential developments. The lack of any building height variations contributes to the sameness of the buildings.



B Street  
 Facades Facing North



A Street  
 Entry  
 B Street  
 Facades Facing South

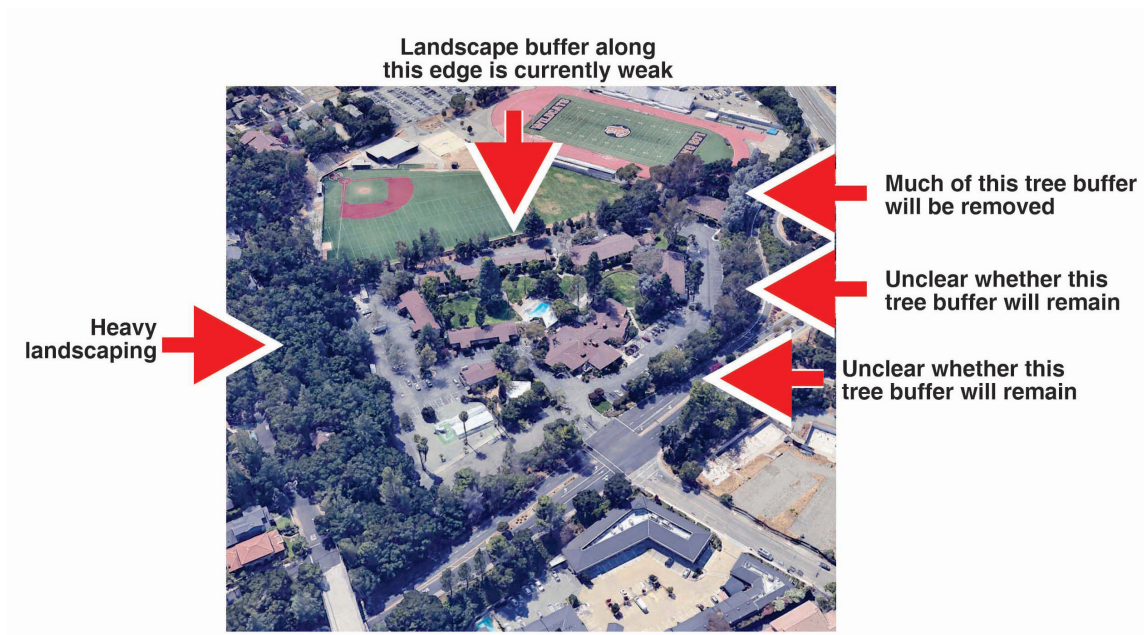


D Street  
 Facades Facing East

## 6. Edge Landscaping

The current site conditions include tall mature landscaping along its north, east and west edges. The southern edge includes some mature landscaping but it is not as complete as a screening buffer to the adjacent sports field as the other edges.

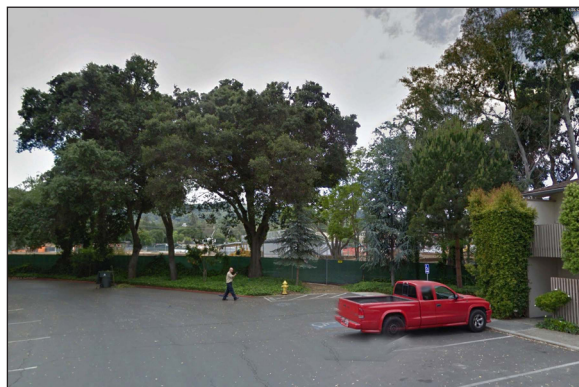
In many cases it is unclear as to what the future landscape edge conditions will be. The north and west edges of the development are especially important because these are major walkway entry points for all units along these edges.



*Site East Edge Hillside*



*Site West Side Highway*



*Site South Side Sports Field*



*Site North Side Los Gatos - Saratoga Road*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the applicant has the ability, by virtue of new state laws encouraging increased housing development, to disregard normal requirements for projects of this type and scale, it would likely not be in their best interest to do so if they are not able to provide the on site amenities and environmental quality of other competing developments and meet the expectations of discerning Los Gatos home buyers.

The following recommendations illustrate some ways in which the applicant might consider changes to improve the development plans consistent with other past similar multifamily developments in nearby Bay Area cities.

### 1. Reduce the Amount of Building Coverage

The proposed three story building heights are appropriate for Los Gatos. However, the relative isolation of this site from nearby residential neighborhoods and the development flexibility provided by state law would allow some additional height on this site without adversely impacting the overall sense of community. One example of a recent San Mateo project is shown below where an additional floor has been added while designing the building to maintain a predominate three story height. The architectural style of this example is much different than proposed on this site, but a denser product type within the proposed architectural style is not out of the ordinary. An example of this is shown below in a project in Pasadena.



*San Mateo Waters Technology Park four story example*



*Pasadena mixed height four story example*



## 2. Refine the Uses and Design of the Open Spaces and Pathways.

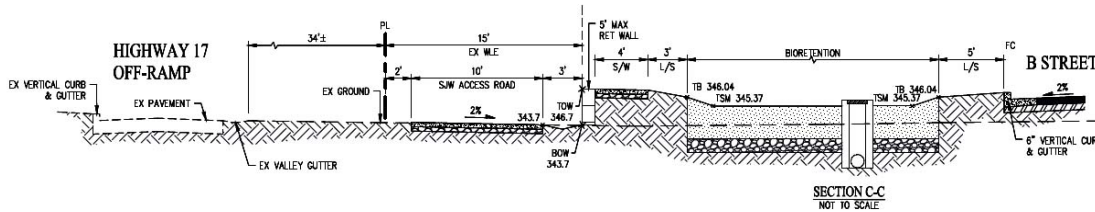
The addition of some taller buildings, as suggested above, would allow more open space on the site to better suite the needs of families with children as well as provide greater social interaction opportunities for resident adults. In terms of location, one needs to recognize the requirements for the bioswale open space elements. However, if possible, other locations might be considered. Two are illustrated below. The first would give it a more central location easily accessible to more units while the second would also be more centrally located while positioning it as a major focal point at the neighborhood entry, establishing a strong sense of shared community identity.



The smaller bioswale is illustrate in the applicant’s drawings package - see below.



However, the intended development of the larger bioswale is unclear. and should be clarified by the applicant. The basic components are shown on the drawings and are consistent with a normal bioswale Building on that engineering base, many other landscape and plan options are available. Some examples are shown below from minimal treatment to inclusion as part of a more fully developed park.



*Bioswale minimal with adjacent passive area*



*Bioswale development example 1*



*Bioswale development example 2*



*Bioswale development example 3: Park*

If some additional open space area can be allotted within the development, there would be opportunities to create small combination active and passive recreational areas for families - one example is shown below.



### 3. Provide Additional Guest Parking

Providing additional guest parking that would be easily accessible to visitors would be highly desirable. Multiple approaches could be considered. However, the best approach might be to widen the Street B width to include parallel parking and landscaping as shown on the diagram and Rivermark development photo example below.



To enhance this approach it would be desirable to have the fronting buildings' entries facing the street,



#### 4. Improve the Street Auto Court Frontages.

Having all street frontages lined with identical garage facades would not be a pleasant community environment. It is monotonous and falls well short of a community expectation that units will have some sense of individual identity. It is also not common for this type of development where units face long alleys parallel to streets with unit entries (e.g., recent North Forty development) or shorter auto courts perpendicular to primary streets are the common plan approaches. Both alternative approaches would be possible on this site but might require some taller buildings to maintain the applicant's proposed unit count. The adjacent illustration shows one approach to this.

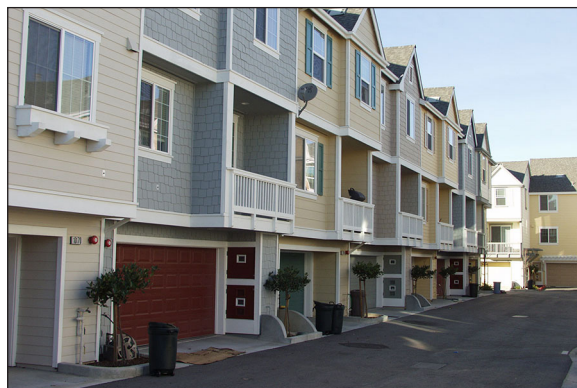
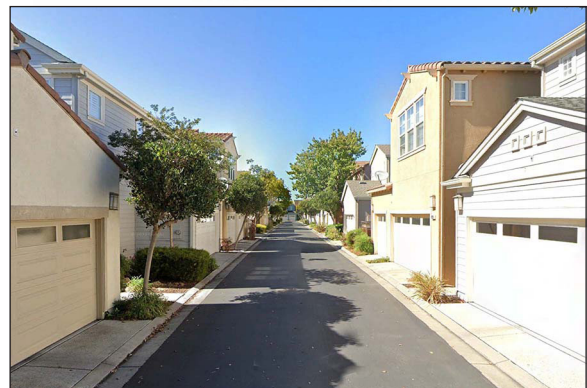
If that approach is not acceptable to the applicant, some effort should be given to softening the repetition along these alley-streets. Some typical approach include:

- Adding more landscaping.
- Providing additional facade variety and offsets.
- Providing balconies along the alley ways.
- Providing larger facade offsets and emphasizing individual unit identities.
- Varying the building heights.

*See example photos below.*



**SITE PLAN REVISED WITH ON-STREET PARKING  
AND RELOCATED OPEN SPACE B**





### 5. Add Architectural Variety and Improve End Elevations

Currently all of the buildings have the same front, rear and side elevations composed in tight rows. Adding some more variety would be welcome. The applicant's architect has done a good job on the structure prototype currently proposed so they should be able to easily adapt their plans to provide more variety. Below are a few photo examples of a similar architectural style with increased facade and height variety.



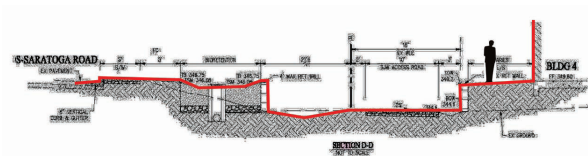
### End Elevations

Currently, all end elevations are similar and uninteresting. The applicant should be encouraged to provide unit entries on the end elevations facing streets or at least provide more interesting facade articulation - see examples below.

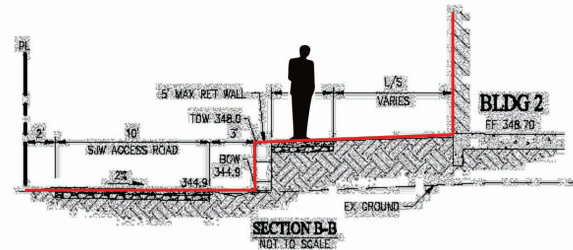


### 6 Enhance the Edge Landscaping.

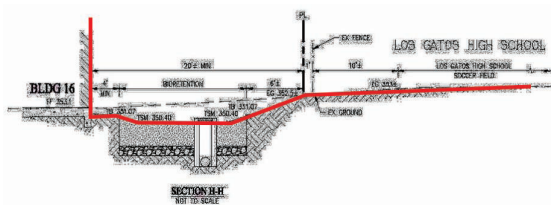
It is unclear from the drawings what the project edge conditions will be after development. The current edges have a great deal of mature landscaping that imparts a special character to the site. The engineering site edge sections below seem to show little potential for any significant retention or addition to that edge treatment. It would be desirable for the applicant to provide more information on the planned site edges - especially since they are immediately adjacent to many walkways leading to unit front door entries.



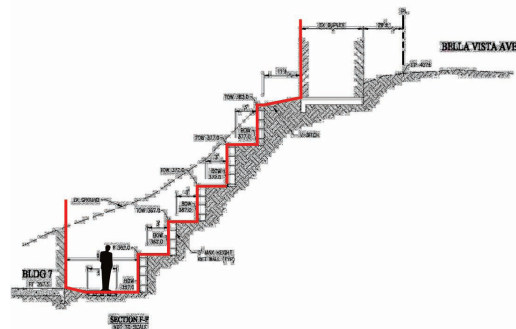
Northern edge adjacent to Los Gatos-Saratoga



Western edge adjacent to Highway 17



Southern edge adjacent to Los Gatos High School



Easterly edge adjacent to hillside

Sean, please let me know if you have any questions, or if here are any staff concerns that I did not address.

Sincerely,  
CANNON DESIGN GROUP

Larry L. Cannon

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