

Tuolumne Heritage Committee

Sonora, California 95370

September 23, 2023

Rachelle Kellogg,
Community Development
Director
City of Sonora
94 N. Washington St.
Sonora, CA 95370

Re: Apartments/commercial development on S. Washington St.
at Oregon St.

Rachelle:

This project is at the southern gateway to Sonora's historic district and as such should help set the scene for that area. Today the property is graced with mature willows and oak trees and a swale along S. Washington St. that is a natural feature.

It is discouraging to look at the developer's plot plan and see that virtually all mature trees are proposed to be removed and the swale filled in with a culvert. Those trees help preserve Sonora's rural setting and provide a leafy green approach to the city.

Please send this project back to the drawing board for a more sensitive approach to the challenges this 0.64 acre site presents. For instance, please ask the developer to preserve the trees, perhaps by bridging the swale instead of obliterating it, filling it in and covering a culvert. Perhaps less density is in order.

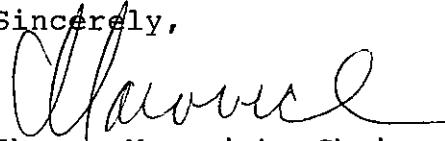
The expanse of parking is not what should be the viewshed from S. Washington St., yet this is what the plan shows. Surely there is a more creative way to accomplish the residential aspect the developer seeks along with a commercial component which was not shown in the advisory agency notice. Actually, only one elevation was shown and that appears to be what faces Oregon St. Oregon St. is a residential street of long standing and is very narrow before it dead ends. The residents along this street need to be protected from the traffic this project will generate.

There appears to be no compelling reason for a use permit to increase the allowable height above 35 feet and such a use permit would affect the viewshed of Oregon St. residents. It appears a variance is only sought to push the density to what is shown on the plan. As you know, variances are only rarely issued by cities and counties and only when a hardship can be shown. I was unable to find a hardship exists, just that the developer needs one for the density he seeks. That does not qualify as a reason for granting a variance.

While Sonora needs more residential units, homes and apartments, the need is in the area of affordable, working class homes. Please consider requiring a set aside for such units in this project.

In summary, the committee sees a project with the kind of density that requires major changes to the natural landscape, removal of heritage trees and a viewshed largely framed by asphalt at the southern gateway to Sonora. Surely the developer would want to make this project the best it can be and would offer to work with the city toward that end.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sharon Marovich".

Sharon Marovich, Chair
(209) 532-1733