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ARCHITECTURE PLANNING URBAN DESIGN

June 17, 2014

Ms. Lorraine Weiss
Department of Community Development
City of San Mateo
330 West 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403-1388

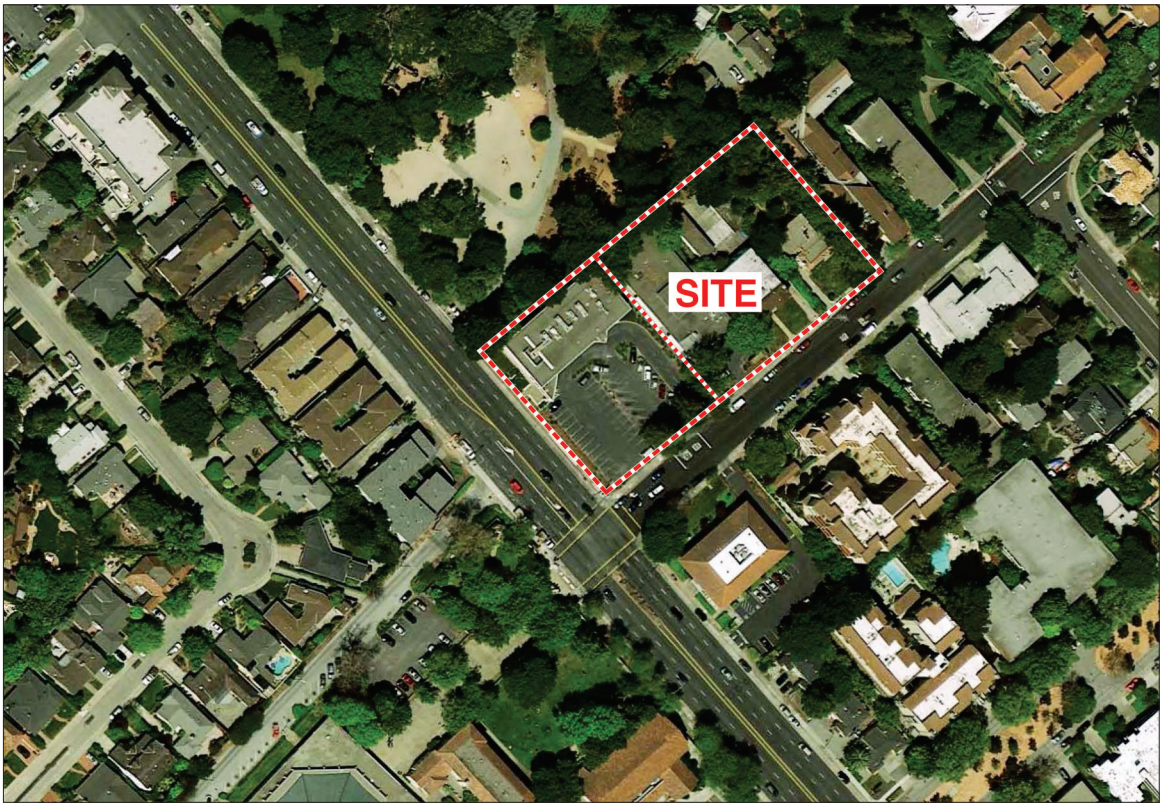
**RE: Central Park South**

Dear Lorraine:

I reviewed the revised drawings that have been submitted with the formal planning application. My comments and recommendations are summarized below.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The site is located adjacent to Downtown San Mateo within the large block containing Central Park. The surrounding area contains a mix of uses with a substantial number of multifamily residential buildings. The site currently contains an office and three smaller residential structures. It also contains a substantial amount of mature landscaping which visually blends with the landscaping within Central Park. Photographs of the site and surrounding context are shown below and on the following page.

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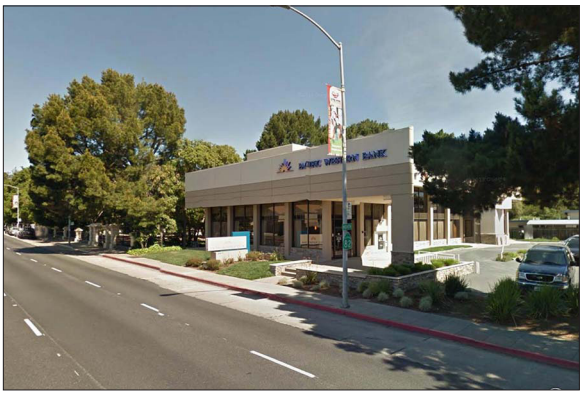


*Existing office building on the site and adjacent Central Park landscaping*

*Existing residential building on the site and existing mature trees*

*Nearby multifamily housing*

*Nearby multifamily housing*

*Nearby multifamily housing*

*Nearby multifamily housing*

## ISSUES AND SUGGESTIONS

I prepared a review letter for both buildings on March 24 after reviewing the video of the Planning Commission study session of October 8, 2013. At that study session, the Planning Commission provided the applicant with their concerns and preferences regarding both the site plan and the design of the buildings. The commissioners were generally in agreement with the design of the apartment structure, supported the concept of its single front building entry, and provided direction on the treatment of the residential auto forecourt. They had more concerns about the office portion of the project. My comments and recommendations on the formal application design are summarized below.

## SITE PLAN

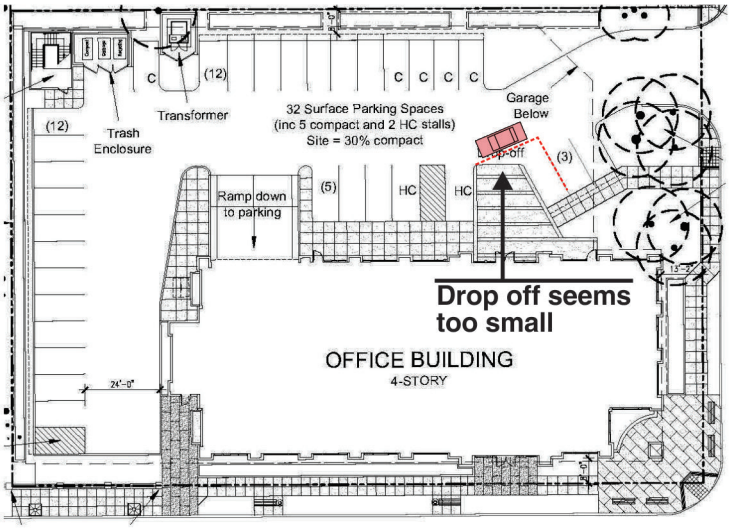
Most of the suggestions included in the March 24 letter have been implemented. They include:

- The dead end drive aisle on the north side of the office building was modified to provide for a vehicle turn-around.
- The Central Park fence has been extended across the front of the parking lot on El Camino Real which conforms to the Planning Commission's desire to relate the sidewalk and landscaping of the project to the Central Park street frontage.
- Benches have been provided along the El Camino Real frontage and at the small plaza at the corner of El Camino Real and Ninth Avenue.
- A clear pedestrian link has been provided between the northern office parking lot and the office entry on El Camino Real.
- The treatment of the auto forecourt at the residential building has been modified to provide a more visually unified paving solution.
- A low wall with brick pilasters and open wrought iron railings has been added along the Ninth Avenue frontage of the residential building to relate the streetscape design to Central Park and existing residential frontages on Laurel Avenue.
- The landscaping between the office and residential buildings has been refined.

There were two items that were not addressed in the formal application drawings. I believe they are important, and still recommend that staff discuss them further with the applicant. They are as follows"

1. The drop-off area at the east side of the office building, being shorter than the length of a car, seems too small. Larger cars parked adjacent to the drop off might overhang the space at the drive aisle. This could make it difficult for a passenger to be dropped off near the curb.

   Recommendation: Consider increasing the length of the drop-off area by eliminating one parking space.




2. The view at the residential auto forecourt and garage entry is not the best as it focuses on the ramp to the garage.

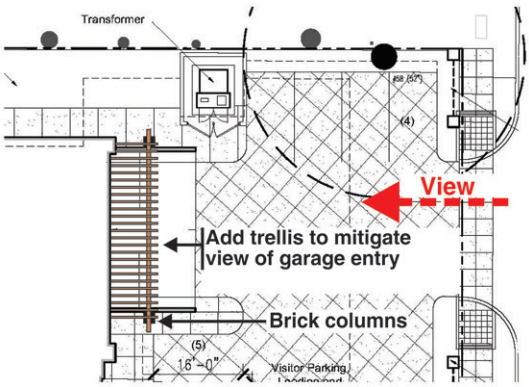
   Recommendation: See the recommendation in the residential comments section below for this condition.

## RESIDENTIAL BUILDING

The residential building is well designed, and appropriate to its setting in close proximity to Central Park. I have only two concerns and recommendations:

1. The view at the entry to the auto forecourt and the garage, mentioned in the site plan comments above, is important. Almost everyone will enter the project via the driveway at the east end of the parcel frontage - either to access the garage or to drop off a passenger at the building entry on the right side of the car. This view currently focuses on the garage entry.

Recommendation: Design an element to mitigate this view. A landscaped trellis feature supported on brick columns to match the building base is shown on the plan and elevation illustrations above and below.
*See the photo to the right of a similar condition at a multifamily building on Laurel Avenue.*



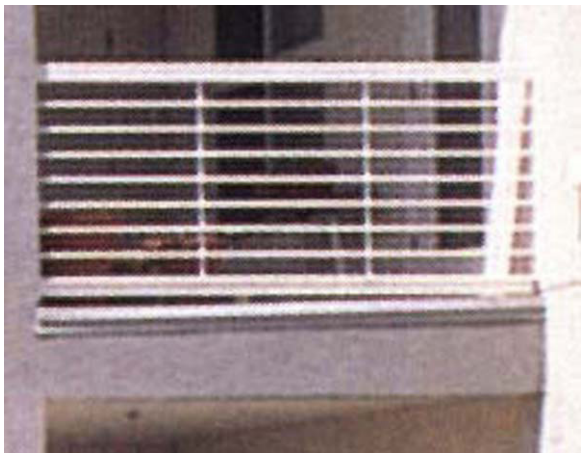
*Example of trellis as mitigation for view of garage entry / Laurel Avenue*

2. The Planning Commission in its October study session raised a concern that the balconies seemed too ordinary, and that one might be seeing residents' possessions stored on the balconies.

   Recommendation: Refine the balconies to incorporate more interesting metal railings. Also consider decreasing the amount of open railing at the bottom of the balcony fronts to provide more visual screening of items placed on the balconies. There are numerous design solutions. A few examples are shown on the following page.

*Gently curved balcony fronts*

*Railing members variation*



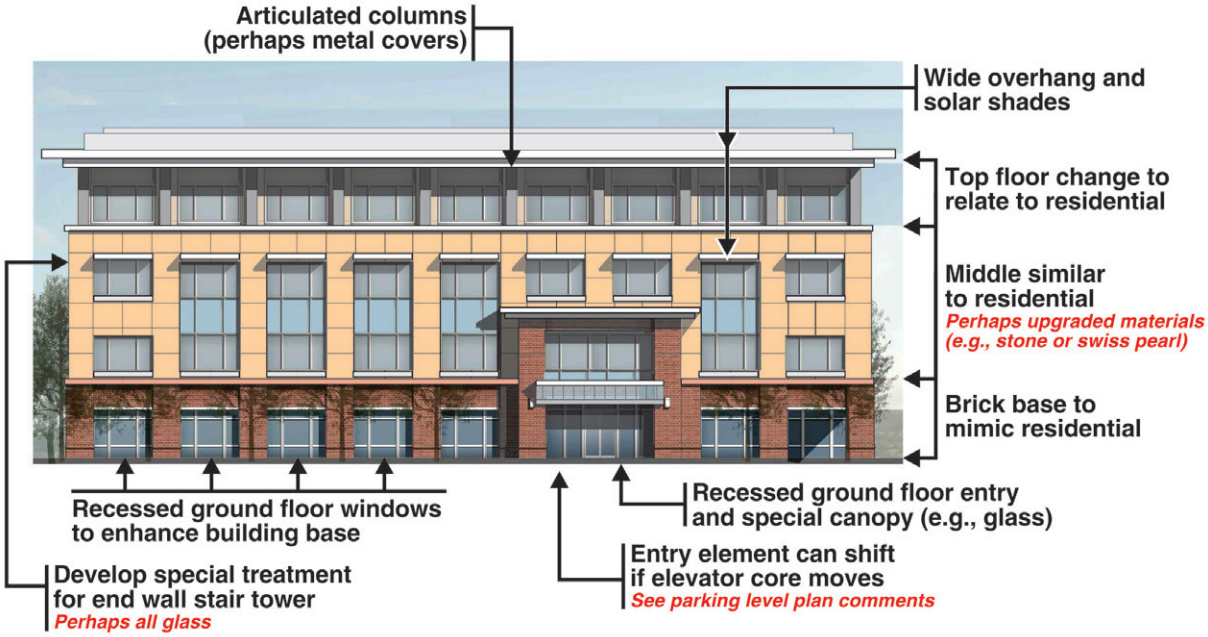
*Railing members variation*

## OFFICE BUILDING

The Planning Commission asked at their October study session for substantial additional design study of the office building. Specific concerns were identified in my March letter. Many of those have been addressed. However, the exterior design seems quite heavy, and not well suited to its location adjacent to Central park where it will serve as a significant entry landmark for Downtown San Mateo. The evolution of the office building is shown in the comparison of the El Camino Real facade designs below.

*Proposed El Camino Real Elevation (Reviewed by the Planning Commission in October)*

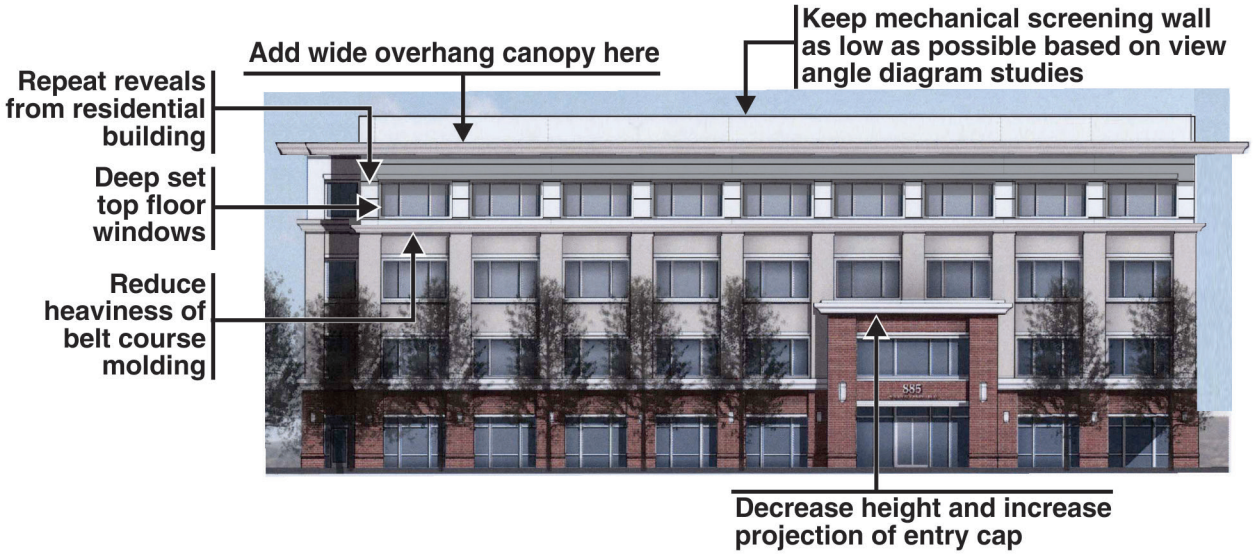
*Proposed El Camino Real Elevation (March 2014)*




*El Camino Real Elevation Recommendations (March Review Letter)*

*Currently Proposed Office Building Design (El Camino Real side)*

The applicant has strongly expressed a desire to use the facade design pattern and materials from the original conceptual design reviewed by the Planning Commission. While I generally believe that the character of El Camino Real and the Downtown Area would benefit from a fresher design approach, I looked at the proposed design, and have offered only some modest recommendations for changes to reduce the visual bulkiness of the building. These are shown on the illustration below.




*El Camino Real Elevation Recommendations*

One additional desirable design change, not shown on the illustration, which I would encourage is the addition of a well designed entry canopy for both the El Camino Real and parking lot entries. One example is shown in the photo to the right.

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

Sincerely,
CANNON DESIGN GROUP

Larry Cannon