

Vikram Seshadri

April 18, 2023

Planning Department
City of San Rafael
1400 5th Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Re: Appeal to The City of San Rafael Planning Department's Approval of
1515 4th Street Mixed Use Project
Project No.(s): PLAN22-039 and ED22-016

To the City of San Rafael Planning Department:

I am a resident of 201 Shaver Street and am formally appealing the April 11, 2023 planning committee approval of the mixed used project proposed at 1515 4th Street, on grounds that it will negatively affect public safety. As one of the closest neighbors of the now approved project, I am in a great position to offer first-hand insight to ensure this project successfully enhances the community without being a liability and danger to us and the city. Development is clearly needed in the area and I welcome the addition of new neighbors and businesses. However, it deeply concerns me that the city has approved this mega project without truly giving any thought or concern to the safety and wellbeing of the Shaver and Latham neighborhood and its residents.

I am requesting that the city deploy a more comprehensive traffic analysis to re-assess the dangerous impact of this project on both our immediate neighborhood and the greater downtown San Rafael area and implement concrete changes to current traffic and parking rules before the project is officially approved. Anything short of that will lead to accidents, injuries, property and vehicular damage and potential loss of life of local residents, pedestrians and commuters, which we want to avoid at all costs.

After consulting with many of my neighbors on Shaver and Latham Streets, below is a quick overview of the primary safety concerns I would like the city to address:

PUBLIC SAFETY

As I understand, the residential parking entrance and exit for 1515 4th Street are going to be built on Shaver Street. The addition of 162 apartment units and 2-3 times as many residents and vehicles will exponentially increase traffic in and out of Shaver and Latham Streets, which in its current form, are not equipped to handle:

- The Local Traffic Analysis published in December 2022 that the City Planners cited in the planning commission meeting on April 11, was conducted at the corners of 4th and Shaver Street and 4th and E Street. None were conducted at the considerably busier and more problematic intersections of 3rd and Shaver, 2nd and Shaver and Shaver and Latham Streets. It baffles me as to why that was not the case, which highlight the below discrepancies and issues.
- 3rd and 4th Streets are major commuter arteries, both into San Rafael and the villages of San Anselmo and Fairfax, as well as out to 101 from the inland hamlets. Traffic moves at fast speeds

on both streets until their approach to Shaver Street, at which time they have to slow down significantly to make left and right hand turns to work their way up on Shaver towards 4th Street, where traffic slows down even further due to work outside the iconic and long-standing local business, Cains Tires. Shaver is a narrow street and filled with parked cars on both sides of the street, usually a combination of local residents, those working downtown and visitors to local 4th Street establishments, all parked in the area.

- The addition of these many housing units will add to increased demand for parking from tenants and guests, despite the developer's fantastic pronouncement that tenants will bike, walk and take public transportation to/from work and home. Tons of more cars will constantly be circulating and driving around Shaver and Latham Streets and I am deeply concerned that this will result increased congestion on those streets, resulting in more traffic backups up beyond these immediate streets.
- The baffling new bump-outs that have been added on Shaver Street at the corners of 3rd and 2nd Streets make for very narrow and dangerous passage at those intersections. When cars are parked on Shaver Street, often only 1 car is able to pass by when turning onto Shaver, meaning the traffic approaching from the other side is backed up further up Shaver. Additionally, traffic lights at 3rd and 2nd Streets and Shaver are poorly timed, leading to frequent traffic backups and cars sometimes extended on to 3rd Street, blocking oncoming traffic quickly barreling along 3rd Street.
- The city refuses to install speed bumps and stop signs on Shaver and Latham Streets, which will lead to traffic barreling on these streets and lead to injuries and accidents. Worse still, it concerns me that traffic backups on and off Shaver Street at the corners of 4th, 3rd and 2nd Streets, as well as between Shaver and Latham Streets will lead to accidents and injury both on and off those streets. During the school year, clusters of bike-riding children wait on Shaver Street to cross 3rd at the signal. A wide swinging car may cause grave injury to those children.

FLOODING AND PROPERTY SAFETY

The neighborhood around Shaver and Latham Streets floods easily, especially with a rainstorm, which we have had a lot these past 6 months. The construction project of 1515 4th Street, addition of a 2 story underground parking garage and the addition of 161 housing units, when complete, will only exacerbate the flooding concerns in its current form and need to be addressed to alleviate my concerns:

- Most of the storm water from the hills and from all of Latham flow down along Shaver and drain in the single storm drain at the intersection of Shaver and Latham Streets, the exact corner of my house. The presence of mature sycamore trees all along Latham and the West side of Shaver Street between 4th and Latham Streets, lead to intense droppage of dry leaves during the fall and winter months, all of which collect at the very intersection of Shave and Latham, directly above the storm drains. For some reason, the city currently does not deploy street cleaning on either street, which means that the burden of clearing the leaves falls on me and my neighbors to go out in the rain when the grates clog up or when the water simply has nowhere to go because of the high tide. At times, it migrates several feet onto the sidewalks on lower Shaver and Latham Streets until the tide recedes.

- The effects of climate change and the addition of this project will only further intensify the risk of flooding to these street corners, one that could cause millions of dollars of damage to private and public property.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- I implore the City Planner involved with this project, Jeff Ballantine, to schedule a time when current residents and I can walk him through the neighborhood during rush hour, during the work day and off hours, so that he can see first-hand what some of these traffic issues look like.
- I request that the city conduct another more comprehensive traffic analysis of the area, this time at the considerably busier and more problematic intersections of 3rd and Shaver, 2nd and Shaver and Shaver and Latham Streets.
- I recommend that the Planning Committee re-examine the developers' plan to build the project parking entrance and exit on Shaver Street and recommend they re-design the garage entrance and exits to be on the wider E Street side of the proposed building, which is better equipped to handle an increase in traffic and residents of this magnitude.
- I would like the city to consider narrowing the size of the sidewalks on Shaver Street to increase the width of Shaver Street's drivable area, so as to reduce traffic backlogs and the likelihood of accidents. This can be done mostly on the Westside of Shaver, especially between 3rd and Latham. The sycamore trees on the Westside of Shaver between Latham and 4th Streets will make it harder to narrow the sidewalk and unless those trees are uprooted, the option will be to narrow the sidewalk on the Eastside. Regardless, this might be the only way to increase the side of the road on Shaver.
- The addition of these many housing units will add to increased demand for parking from tenants and guests - the developer's fantastical pronouncement that tenants will bike, walk and take public transportation notwithstanding - which will result in many more cars constantly circulating and looking for parking. Despite opposing it all these years, the city needs to re-examine Permit Parking as something that should be introduced to protect parking availability for existing neighbors and alleviate circulation for parking spots.
- I recommend the city look into outfitting Latham and Shaver Streets with parking striping, corrected curb cuts and red zones to maximize available on street parking. That the 2-hour parking along 3rd Street-between E and G Streets be returned to 24-hour parking and that the Planning Commission consider making parking on Hayes, Latham, Shaver and F Street (between Latham and 4th Street) limited to 2 hours, with exemptions for resident parking permits (limited to two per residence at a reasonable cost - and that the residents of 1515 4th Street not be allowed resident parking permits as their needs for parking can be accommodated with their on-site underground garage.
- Regardless of the actual parking entrance, a new building means more debris and litter in a small area. The street's existing sycamore trees already exacerbate drainage issues (most noticeable during times of rain). Street cleaning service should be added and supported by the building owner and the city to help alleviate the negative environmental impact of this project.

In summation, as much as I support growth and development in our neighborhood, it needs to be done thoughtfully and with the right intentions. 1515 4th Street, in its current form, will negatively impact the safety and wellbeing of the residents of Shaver and Latham Streets and the overall quality of life of those living and working in downtown and the West End. With this appeal, I implore the San Rafael City Planning Commission to have this project be re-evaluated on the grounds of public safety and community wellbeing and seriously consider the public comments that have been sent in but ignored thus far. That is the only way to ensure the long term success of this and future high-density community projects in the city of San Rafael and to build a thriving community that allows all of us want to live in.

Thank you for your time and earnest consideration.

Respectfully,

Vikram Seshadri
Resident of San Rafael