

Hillsdale Terraces LLC

March 31, 2015

Ms. Tricia Schimpp, AICP
Planning Division
City of San Mateo
330 W. 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403

Re: PA13-077 – Hillsdale Terraces Height Concession

Dear Ms. Schimpp:

We request that our proposed project at 2700 South El Camino Real (Hillsdale Terraces) be granted an increased height allowance to 55 feet, as allowed per the City of San Mateo General Plan Building Height Map. We believe we are qualified for this concession because we meet the following criteria set forth in the City of San Mateo General Plan Policy 8.1 Beresford-South Element Camino Real. In addition, the project implements the goals and policies of the El Camino Real Master Plan and newly adopted Hillsdale Station Area Plan.

- a. *The project provides amenities, such as landscaped plazas, covered parking, setbacks from the street, stepbacks of upper stories, and public improvements substantially in excess of City requirements.*

The Hillsdale Terraces project is proposing a substantial amount of public ground level landscaped plazas in multiple areas around the site, covered parking, setbacks of approximately 20 feet from the street on all three sides, and stepbacks at the upper stories, all of which enhance the overall design quality. The stepbacks will diminish the additional building height, yet create residential terraces for which the project name is derived.

The project is also proposing to provide additional community amenities outside of the property lines, and in excess of City requirements, by improving the 2700 block of El Camino Real. Upon approval of this project design, the project sponsor is willing to contribute \$300,000 (an amount derived from previous Caltrans costs obtained from Public Works) directly to the City of San Mateo for surrounding neighborhood improvements of their choice (e.g., bus shelters, bike lanes, or similar amenities approved for 28th Avenue in the Hillsdale Station Area Plan) or to the City via Caltrans for the improved development of El Camino Real, including the creation of a planted central median with irrigation and two new crosswalks across El Camino Real between 27th and 28th Avenues. The

Caltrans community amenity option will be an extension of improvement work already installed on El Camino Real between 28th and 31st Avenues. Continuance of the proposed improvements will utilize existing specifications to create continuity. Either community amenity option will be a tangible benefit to the City of San Mateo and the local community.

b. The building has high design quality, which is enhanced by additional building height.

The revised design has been divided into individual vertical elements to appear like a series of smaller buildings in order to diminish the horizontal nature of the project site. Randomly placed terraces set toward the top floors create setbacks along the top edges of the structure. The quality of the design is emphasized with different materials for the individual vertical separations, a façade that undulates up and down and back and forth to accent balconies and create shadows, and terrace/balcony railings that change in material between the distinct vertical separations, all providing general design interest.

The additional building height has been utilized to accent the vertical rhythm of the design, yet the additional height is set back as a secondary backdrop to the residential terraces. The top building edge is predominately set back at varying levels to create interest and sightlines from the street and sidewalk are designed to make the building appear shorter. The revised design, with individual vertical stylization and varying setbacks, is enhanced by the additional building height.

c. Increased building heights are visually related to surrounding building heights and promote the creation of a coherent City image.

The project site along South El Camino Real (between 27th and 28th Avenues) is an appropriate location for increased building height. The proposed project is consistent with the vision of San Mateo's City image, including a higher density corridor outlined in the City's Transit-Oriented Development plans. The increased building height relates to other surrounding structures in the area, including the Hillsdale Mall, the Mid-Peninsula Residential Building at 2901 South El Camino Real, the newly constructed portions of the Bay Meadows II Specific Plan, including the Nueva High School building and multi-family buildings. This density and height of development is consistent with the newly adopted Hillsdale Station Area Plan.

The proposed project is located adjacent to the Hillsdale Square Apartments, a full-block 3½-story apartment complex. Proposed design setbacks at the top floors (front, back and sides) create a step down quality that provides visual relief to relate to its closest neighbor. Sheet A-3.0 in the submitted drawing set depicts the deliberate step-down design.

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The increased building height anticipates San Mateo Planning's vision for a vibrant El Camino Real. In this project, the increased height is moderated by terrace setbacks and a variety of façade design elements, and is consistent with promoting a coherent City image along the El Camino Real corridor.

- d. *Increased building heights are compatible with surrounding land uses, and will not create adverse shadow or visual impacts on surrounding residential uses.*

The project site is predominately on the north side of the adjacent residential neighbor, Hillsdale Square Apartments. Shadow studies have confirmed that the increased building height will not create adverse shadow or visual impacts on the surrounding residential uses. We have reviewed these shadow study results (sheets A6.1, A6.2 & A6.3) with the owner and property manager of Hillsdale Square Apartments. Upper floor setbacks at the terraces help to offset this request for increased building heights and contribute to fewer shadows and more sunlight cast onto the surrounding area. The proposed project will not create adverse shadows or visual impacts. It actually serves to buffer the existing residential land uses to the west from El Camino Real.

- e. *The City's infrastructure is adequate to accommodate the proposed development.*

The proposed project is located along San Mateo's El Camino Real, near the Hillsdale Station, Hillsdale Mall, and the proposed extension of 28th Avenue. Civil engineering surveys and studies have confirmed that utility and subterranean storm/sewer conditions are appropriate for the project. San Mateo's infrastructure is adequate to accommodate the proposed development.

We respectfully submit this request for increased height for the proposed Hillsdale Terraces project at 2700 El Camino Real. We have come a long way since the initial study session comments and have worked closely with the Planning Staff and City consultants to create the revised design before you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


George Lam
Project Sponsor
3-30-2015