



## Terra Linda Homeowners' Association

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San Rafael Planning Commission  
1400 Fifth Avenue  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Chairman Mercado and Commissioners,

Terra Linda Homeowners Association appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on San Rafael's Draft Plan 2040. We are impressed by how well written the Draft Plan is and how it has incorporated many previously expressed concerns.

We would like to provide the following additional recommendations:

1) **Land Use Element – Land Use Planning Concepts (p. 3-4/pdf 48)  
Growth Management, Complete Community, and Neighborhood**

**Conservation Concepts** need to acknowledge the inherent conflicts between promoting change and preserving the essential character of neighborhoods. When do infill and adjacent new development (and the associated traffic, increased population, need for parking and other services) change the nature of a suburban neighborhood to that of a semi-urban or urban neighborhood? Is this how the City intends suburban neighborhoods to change? If the life quality of suburban neighborhoods is to be preserved, how can this be done? What safeguards, restrictions, density limits or alternative land use policies are needed? These questions deserve serious discussion, in and perhaps in addition to the purview of San Rafael's General Plan. San Rafael residents deserve clear answers about the impacts of the City's intentions.

These three Land Use Concepts need to address parameters for neighborhood conservation as well as for increased housing and growth.

- a. For example, "*Growth management also means balancing job growth and housing growth and providing housing that meets the needs of the local workforce*" should be restated "balancing job growth and housing growth and providing housing that meets the needs of the local workforce *compatible with the essential character of existing neighborhoods.*"
- b. Including wording such as that in CDP4.3 "new development respects the character-defining elements of neighborhoods, including height, scale, materials, and setbacks."

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- c. Re-use of existing commercial buildings (such as underutilized office buildings) for housing should also receive emphasis in these concepts as this is less disruptive to surrounding neighborhoods.

2) **Land Use Element – Land Use Planning Concepts (p. 3-3/pdf 47)**

**Transit-Oriented Development Concept** needs further adaptation to acknowledge that, while TOD may provide benefits in Downtown San Rafael with its “robust network of buses” and SMART train station, TOD may have limited application in suburban neighborhoods, such as North San Rafael, where bus and train service is minimal and automobiles will continue to be primary mode of transportation for much of projected time frame of GP2040. Adding large amounts of new development in these areas will aggravate traffic congestion and gridlock conditions with associated increased GHGs, as well as degraded quality of life as residents struggle to get in and out of their neighborhoods. TOD may accommodate unknown portion (but not all) of trips from new residents near efficient transit hubs but will not decrease trips from surrounding neighborhoods still dependent on automobile transportation. We recommend the following changes:

- a. Omit the words “the suburban context” in the first sentence: “The 2040 Plan adapts the concept of “transit-oriented development” (or “TOD”) to the suburban context of San Rafael.”
- b. **Policy LU 1.3 -- Land Use and Climate Change ((p. 3-18/pdf 62)**  
Relying on Transit-Oriented Development to be the major vehicle of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles ignores a major ‘elephant in the room’. Vehicle Miles Traveled are not all equal. Emissions from cars in idling and stopped traffic have a significant impact that is not considered in TOD concepts and that may actually overbalance or negate benefits derived from decreasing the number of miles traveled. Traffic congestion, particularly in automobile-dependent suburban communities, must be factored into plans for development near inadequate train and bus connections (TOD) in these neighborhoods. We endorse Marin Conservation League’s additions to the following policies:  
**Policy LU 1.3 -- Land Use and Climate Change (p. 3-18/pdf 62)** “Focus future housing and commercial development in areas where alternatives to driving **and minimal increase in traffic congestion** are most viable and shorter trip lengths are possible, especially around transit stations, near services, and on sites with frequent bus service.”  
**Policy LU 1.3A -- Land Use and Climate Change (p. 3-18/pdf 62)** “This should include data on modes of travel, trip origins and destinations, trip lengths, vehicle ownership, **traffic congestion and duration of idling traffic**, greenhouse gas emissions, and other metrics in areas that are well served by transit.

3) **Land Use Element – Land Use Element/Public and Open Space Categories (p. 3-14/pdf 58)**

Descriptions of the “Parks, Recreation, and Open Space” and “Conservation” are very human-centric. Besides being natural resources for human use, these areas are also home to multiple species of non-human residents. Preservation and enhancement of habitat and of wildlife corridors should be high priority uses in these land use categories. Wildlife also inhabit or travel through residential, commercial, industrial, and almost all other land use categories in San Rafael. Careful management of wildlife-human interface should be an important part of all land use policies. (See comments on Conservation Element for recommendations.)

4) **Land Use Element – Goals, Policies, and Programs (p. 3-17/pdf 61) and Mobility Element Goals**

We endorse the recommendations of the Marin Conservation League for adding “*Protecting environmental quality will be an objective in land use planning*” in Goal LU-1, as well as adding “*Protecting environmental quality will be an objective in planning transportation projects*” in Mobility Element Goal M-1. We also endorse changing Goal M-3 to “*Protect environmental quality by coordinating transportation and land use decisions in ways that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, air pollutants, noise, pollution from stormwater runoff and other environmental impacts related to transportation.*” (Mobility Element to be released)

5) **Land Use Element – Policy LU1.9 Clustering (p. 3-20/pdf 64) –**

- a. We endorse Marin Conservation League’s recommendation to add “*Encourage wildlife corridors and habitat preservation in areas where adjacent properties share environmentally sensitive areas.*” See also comments on Conservation Element

6) **Land Use Element – Policy LU2.8 Senior and Disabled Care Facilities (p. 3-30/pdf 74)**

Demographics and everyday experience show that residents of San Rafael are aging. We have a responsibility, as a City, to encourage development of facilities to meet the needs of aging residents for independent living and levels of assisted care. Similarly, disabled residents need facilities tailored to their needs.

The impacts of facilities for these two groups are not equivalent and it is not right to lump them together. Terra Linda has accommodated six major senior housing and care facilities with little problem. However, some neighborhoods in Terra Linda have received a higher density of group homes than other areas of San Rafael, due to the ease of converting single family homes to facilities for physically or mentally disabled adults. While these group homes have been integrated fairly smoothly into the neighborhoods, there is a legitimate question of how many group homes can be accommodated in residential neighborhoods before the neighborhoods begin to feel more “institutional” than “residential.” In

past experience, state regulations limit restrictions on spacing of group homes in a community. However, the City needs to give some consideration to the impacts of excessive numbers of group homes in residential neighborhoods.

- a. Policy LU2.8 is worded too strongly. It should be changed to state: ~~“Accommodate~~ *Encourage* facilities and services to meet the needs of older and disabled residents, including senior housing, assisted living, and convalescent care facilities; ...” Add: *“Encourage community participation and dialogue in development and location of these facilities”*

7) **Land Use Element – Policy LU3.2 New Development in Residential Neighborhoods (p. 3-33/pdf 77)**

- a. This policy should apply to redevelopment and remodeling projects as well as new development. Remodeling of building on small lots can have big impacts on the privacy, views, and solar access in adjacent properties. We recommend that this policy be re-titled **“New Development and Redevelopment in Residential Neighborhoods”**
- b. Add: “Minimize reduction of views, privacy and solar access of *neighboring properties.*”
- c. Add: *“Encourage wildlife corridors and habitat preservation in areas where adjacent properties share environmentally sensitive areas.”*

8) **Land Use Element – Policy LU3.7 On-Street Parking (p. 3-34/pdf 78)** This policy addresses mitigation measures for neighborhoods that already have excessive on-street parking demand.

Why is the City waiting until on-site parking is already saturated before addressing this issue?

Some of the problems with excessive on-street parking is due to overcrowding in apartments and other residences, over which the City has limited control.

However, some excessive on-street parking is due to inadequate on-site parking provided by new development and re-development. In the rush to create more housing and attract business, San Rafael is in danger of encouraging more neighborhoods to have over-saturated on-street parking. This dramatically changes the quality of life in these neighborhoods and poses safety and health issues as motorists seek parking further from their destinations.

- a. **Policy LU3.7** should apply the requirements in **LU3.7A** to ALL neighborhoods, not just to neighborhoods that are already experiencing excessive on-street parking.

9) **Land Use Element – Policy LU3.9A Neighborhood-Serving Uses (p. 3-35/pdf 79)**

Please add “*hardware & household maintenance, household goods, grocery stores, dry-cleaning, hair salons, postal & telecommunications services,*” to the examples of Neighborhood Serving Uses.

10) **Neighborhoods Element/ North San Rafael Town Center**

We want to reiterate previous comments about important revision to some of the policies in this Element, specifically:

- a. **Policy NH 4.2 e) North San Rafael Town Center (p. 4-55/pdf 136)**  
“Strengthen the role of the North San Rafael Town Center... This should include revitalizing Northgate Mall and surrounding business areas by encouraging: ...e) Expanding the Mall, including improving the mix of activities and upgrading the appearance of the buildings and landscaping”  
**It is preemptive of the North San Rafael PDA planning process for GP2040 to state that Northgate Mall should be expanded.** Many changes will be planned for Northgate Mall during the PDA/Precise Plan process—reconfiguration, different composition, and other changes should be planned through this process. It is confusing and potentially harmful for the City to taking a position in the General Plan that the Mall should be expanded. This policy should be changed to read: “*Upgrading*” or “*revitalizing*” rather than “expanding.”
- b. **Policy NH 4.2 j) North San Rafael Town Center (p. 4-55/pdf 136)**  
“Preserving and strengthening Northgate Mall as a significant tax revenue generator for the City.”  
**This policy should be eliminated. This policy is preemptive of the North San Rafael PDA planning process. It also is a biased and unfair policy, which has not been applied to Downtown San Rafael, East San Rafael, or any of the other retail or commercial areas of San Rafael.** What is the City’s intent in including this policy in General Plan 2040? It makes it appear like the City has an underlying agenda for what should be developed at the North San Rafael Town Center and is not entering into the PDA planning process in good faith.
- c. **Policy NH 4.7A [Terra Linda] Community Improvements (p. 4-60/pdf 140)**  
Add the following improvements in the Terra Linda area:
  - g) *Collaborate with Miller Creek School District and San Rafael School District to create additional public recreation opportunities at underutilized sports fields, such as those at Santa Margarita Elementary School.*
  - h) *Encourage safety improvement to infrastructure, including moving overhead power and communications lines underground along Freitas Parkway and Del Ganado Road, and throughout the Terra Linda neighborhoods as opportunities emerge.*
- d. **Policy NH 4.7A Beautification and Restoration Projects (p. 4-60/pdf 140)**

Change the wording of Program item (c) to better reflect the restoration intent for Santa Margarita Creek. Successful tree planting requires sufficient space for the root balls to expand and to access ground water. There are examples of struggling and dying trees along the channelized Las Gallinas Creek in the center of Freitas Parkway because they do not have these necessary resources. Removing the concrete bottom of creeks channel will allow more absorption of water into the water table and creating larger planting areas for new trees will improve odds that they will survive. These are first steps in creek restoration and can be applied to Santa Margarita Creek as well as to Las Gallinas Creek. We recommend the following change in wording:

“Pursue the following beautification and restoration projects in Terra Linda:  
*c) Improvements toward restoring the hydrologic function of Santa Margarita Creek, including possible removal of concrete channel bottom and expansion of planting area for successful tree planting. Tree canopies will help to lower water temperatures and protect water quality.”*

- 11) **Neighborhoods Element/ Terra Linda (p. 4-58, pdf 138)** The narrative description of Terra Linda should be expanded with more context and detailed information, similar to the level of detail of smaller neighborhoods in Central San Rafael and Downtown. We suggest the inclusion of some of the following elements:

Terra Linda occupies the valley floor of the Las Gallinas Creek watershed west and northwest of the Northgate Town Center. Coastal Miwok (Ewu) were the original residents of this valley. In the early 1900s, this valley was occupied by the ranch and dairy farm of the Manuel T. Freitas Family, immigrant Portuguese owners of part of the Rancho San Pedro, Santa Margarita and Las Gallinas Mexican land grant. The Freitas family donated land near the main ranch house where St. Isabella’s Catholic Church and School was built in 1961.

Terra Linda was developed with planned developments of affordable ranch-style homes in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The valley’s main arterials, Manuel T. Freitas Parkway and Del Ganado Road followed Santa Margarita Creek, which was channelized at that time. Many of the first homes were built by Joseph Eichler, exhibiting some of the first “mid-century modern” style of single-story residences with hydronic heat in concrete slab foundations, post and beam construction with glass walls opening to private back yards and internal atriums. About 900 homes in Terra Linda built by Joseph Eichler from 1955 to 1965 now provide a historic element and are complemented by contemporary development of Alliance and Kenney homes. The curvilinear streets in these neighborhoods have long been known for the fall colors of their street trees. The history of Terra Linda’s transition from “ranches to ranch homes” was documented in a 2014 oral history project by several community members in conjunction with the Marin County Library.

Commercial development in Terra Linda began with construction in 1957 of local-service Scotty's Market and Terra Linda Shopping Center. Guide Dogs for the Blind was also an early resident of Terra Linda, moving to its current campus on Las Gallinas Avenue in 1947. The following three decades saw booming development in adjacent areas with construction of the Marin County Civic Center (1960) and Northgate Mall (1966), and expansion of Highway 101 into a freeway. Terra Linda saw the addition of Terra Linda High School (1960) and five public elementary schools, and Kaiser Hospital (1976), a major facility in the Kaiser Permanente Network and one of the three major hospitals in Marin County. These decades also saw condos developed at the western end of Freitas Parkway and the addition of apartment buildings, condominiums, medical and general offices, senior housing, two more shopping centers, and a major hotel boundary where Terra Linda merges with the North San Rafael Town Center.

Terra Linda was annexed to San Rafael in 1972 in conjunction with construction of the Terra Linda Community Center and pool. One of the oldest and largest community gardens in Marin County was created with volunteer effort in 1972. In 1975, Terra Linda residents organized a local bond measure and partnered with the City and County to purchase the hillsides surrounding Terra Linda. This 1172-acre preserve, the Terra Linda-Sleepy Hollow Open Space, is now managed by Marin County and is a major ecosystem and recreation resource, as well as a beautiful backdrop for the Terra Linda community.

Civic spirit and community pride are strong in Terra Linda, with robust volunteer participation in schools, youth organizations, and business, civic, park and environmental groups. Homeowner and neighborhood associations have advocated on the community's behalf with over 200 Terra Linda residents participating in the workshops and activities in 1994 and 2002 to create the North San Rafael Vision. Residents of Terra Linda value the safe, relaxed family-centered community with its mild climate, abundant sunshine, and close interface with the natural environment. Arts and cultural events are also a staple for Terra Linda residents. With their proximity to the County Civic Center and Dominican University, residents enjoy access to events, farmers' markets, festivals and expositions including the award-winning Marin County Fair.

Resident concerns include: preservation of the identity and character of Terra Linda's residential neighborhoods, including safeguarding privacy, views, and solar access; creation of a North San Rafael Town Center with a variety of housing and local-serving businesses that are compatible in scale, mass and quality with the surrounding community; disaster and wildfire preparedness; traffic and neighborhood entryways, including evacuation and emergency vehicle access; pedestrian and cyclist safety, including completion of the North San Rafael Promenade; enhancement of the natural environment, including undergrounding utilities along Freitas Parkway and restoration of Santa Margarita and Gallinas Creeks; mitigation of excessive on-street parking and street trash near high density residential complexes; park maintenance; and services for youth and the elderly.

**12)Conservation and Climate Change Element (p. 6-1, pdf 197)** This Element does a good job describing the abundance of natural environment that San Rafael enjoys and the many benefits that residents enjoy from the close proximity with the surrounding ecosystems. The Element sets goals of protecting and restoring the natural environment but is lacking much detail on how this can be accomplished, particularly with continued growth of the human population and pressures to increase the built environment and activities that are disruptive to natural communities. Now is a critical time to collaborate with County and State, private and public landowners, and other stakeholders (similar to the “One Tam” collaboration on Mt. Tamalpais) to develop a **Wildlife and Ecosystem Master Plan** that will detail how to protect the wildlife and habitats that are part of San Rafael. Many people move to San Rafael because of its unique balance between the human and natural environments. Without specific attention to preserving this balance of human habitat and wildlife habitat, this unique partnership will degrade and dissipate as the human population increases and the climate changes. As San Rafael has been a leader in many other planning measures, the City needs to continue to lead by recognizing rights and needs of their wildlife residents and including them in shaping future growth.

**Goal C-1: Supporting Our Natural Communities** Protect, restore, and enhance San Rafael’s environment and natural communities (p. 6-6, pdf 202)

- a. **Add a policy and program items to create a Wildlife and Ecosystem Master Plan in collaboration with County, State, private landowners, and other stakeholders.** This Master Plan should include an analysis of the habitat and wildlife corridor needs of major species identified in the San Rafael Planning Area, identification of existing areas of habitat and wildlife corridors (see Policy C1.11), identification of priorities for conserving and enhancing necessary habitat and corridors and mitigating wildlife-human conflicts, and action items for implementing these priorities.
- b. **Wetlands (p. 6-6, pdf 202)** Acknowledge the importance of adjacent upland habitat in the descriptions of Wetlands habitat and accompanying policies and program items. During storms and high tides, creatures that live in wetlands seek refuge in adjacent upland areas when their wetland homes are flooded. Preservation of adjacent dry upland areas is a critical part of wetland preservation. These areas must not be converted to built spaces, parking lots, or other uses that render them unusable by sensitive species and other wetland creatures. This needs to be considered in **Wetlands Protection and Mitigation policies** (p. 6-7, pdf 203) and also in planning for individual developments, such as **Canalways** (p. 4-48, pdf 129).

**Goal C-2: Clean Air (p. 6-21, pdf 217)**

**a. Policy C-2.3: Improving Air Quality Through Land Use and Transportation Choices**

As described in comments on LU Policy 1.3A, traffic congestion and prolonged idling traffic can cause increased greenhouse gas emissions. This should be acknowledged in Policy C2.3 by the following insertion: “Implement land use and transportation policies, supportable by objective data, to reduce the number and length of car trips, improve alternatives to driving, *reduce traffic congestion and vehicle idling*, and support the shift to electric and cleaner-fuel vehicles.

**13) Minor Corrections and Changes**

- a. **North San Rafael Town Center (p. 4-54 & 4-55, 134-5)** Delete repeated paragraph.
- b. **Terra Linda (p. 4-58, pdf 138)** Change “Marin Health Surgery Center” to “Marin *Specialty* Surgical Center”
- c. **Community Design and Preservation Element/ Gateways (p. 5-5, pdf 167, 177)** The two SMART stations at the Civic Center and Downtown are also important entryways into San Rafael. The policies and programs for Policy CDP-2.6 should apply to these gateways also.
- d. **Special Use Parks, Table 7-1 (p. 7-6, pdf 242)** The Terra Linda Community Garden should be added to this table.

We appreciate your continued support and consideration.

Thank you.

The Terra Linda Homeowners Association (TLHOA) Board of Directors