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April 10, 2023

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

RE: 1515 4th Street Housing

Honorable Commissioners,
Sustainable San Rafael supports the proposed housing and retail development at 4th and E Streets. The housing is much needed, and the density is welcome in this key downtown location, where more people will activate the streets, support businesses, and reduce greenhouse gas by making walking, biking, and transit attractive ways to get around.

The design of the building would be improved by stepping down its mass towards the smaller buildings in the West End, while increasing the height at the important E Street intersection. The recommendation of the Design Review Board takes a modest but important step in this direction by requiring a different color or materials to emphasize these two ends of the building, as well as its central entrance. The setback of the top floor also helps reduce the building's scale.

The good-sized maples along 4th Street and columnar oaks along Shaver are also critical to help scale down the building. The City needs to assure that these or similarly sized trees are retained, along with the thoughtful landscape design of the 4th Street sidewalk, including the widened areas and seating.

The constraints placed on the City's design review process by the developer's use of State concessions and bonuses (on twelve occasions for this building!) point to the need for the City to evaluate how it's "objective design standards" can be strengthened to lead to improved designs for future buildings. In addition, Sustainable San Rafael continues to urge the City to derive greater public benefit from such large buildings by returning its inclusionary housing requirement to 20% (from the recent reduction to 10%). If these additional units were for moderate-income households, the requirement would have little impact on development proformas.

We also note with satisfaction that this building will have no gas lines, is EV-ready, and provides the potential for rooftop solar panels. We urge use of clean MCE electricity for the all-electric building, and installing the solar during construction.

Sincerely,

William Carney, President