



City of Sebastopol
Incorporated 1902
Planning Department
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APPROVED MINUTES

TREE/DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
MINUTES OF DECEMBER 21, 2022
4:00 P.M.

The notice of the meeting was posted on December 15, 2022.

DESIGN REVIEW BOARD:

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Luthin called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M. and read a procedural statement.

2. ROLL CALL:

Present:	Ted Luthin, Chair Lars Langberg, Vice Chair Marshall Balfe, Board Member Melissa Hanley, Board Member Cary Bush, Board Member
Absent:	Christine Level, Board Member
Staff:	John Jay, Associate Planner

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: None.

4. PLANNING DEPARTMENT UPDATE ON MATTERS OF GENERAL INTEREST:

Associate Planner Jay reported that:

- The draft Housing Element had been delivered to the Planning Commission for its recommendation to City Council to adopt the draft ordinance and changes to the next cycle of Housing Element policies. Director Svanstrom will provide a report to the City Council on January 3, 2023.
- The City has sent out an Incompleteness Letter to City Ventures regarding its 80-unit housing project at the north end of town. The City will move to the next step in the process after it has received comments back.

5. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC REGARDING ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA: None.

6. STATEMENTS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: None.

7. REGULAR AGENDA:

- A. SIGN EXEMPTION (Continued): 250 Morris Street** –This application includes adding three illuminated wall signs, one free standing sign, one address sign, and three additional non-illuminated directional signs and finds that the project is categorically exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Section 15311, Class 11, in that it involves the installation of on-premises signage.

Associate Planner Jay presented the staff report and was available for questions.

The Board had no questions for Associate Planner Jay.

The applicant gave a presentation and was available for questions.

Chair Luthin asked for questions for staff or the applicant.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

We have three signs up on the canopy on the building, and then I thought the staff report said we don't have a monument sign, so this other sign that's pasted to the CMU wall is not a monument sign, it's just another sign that's part of what we're looking at? Key Auto Body is now Caliber Collision. What is that I'm looking at there?

Sarah Bergh, Applicant

That's just a temporary banner that will be removed once the signs go up.

Chair Luthin asked for further Board questions. Seeing none, he asked for Board deliberation.

The Board discussed the application as follows:

Ted Luthin, Chair

This looks like it responds to most of what we were asking for before, which was better scale on the photo elevations. The flat cutouts look fine and the color scheme looks good.

Cary Bush, Board Member

I'd like to thank the applicant for hearing our comments and responding to them in a most respectful way.

Ted Luthin, Chair

I think this will be a nice addition to this building too and give it a little makeover.

Chair Luthin asked for further Board deliberation. Seeing none, he opened public comment. Seeing none, he asked for a motion.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

Are we being asked to not just approve or deny this, but there's an exception we have to grant?

John Jay, Associate Planner

The exception would be for the third sign. The total square footage is the overall maximum allowed, and the Board's direction was to not exceed that 175 square feet; it was for the additional sign and then removal of the monument sign.

Board Member Bush moved to approve the application as submitted.

Board Member Balfe seconded the motion.

Chair Luthin requested the motion be amended to include a provision that the temporary sign be removed as soon as the permanent signs are installed.

The maker of the motion accepted the amendment to the motion.

The seconder of the motion accepted the amendment to the motion.

AYES: Chair Luthin, Vice Chair Langberg, and Board Members Balfe, Bush,
and Hanley

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Board Member Level

- B. JOINT PLANNING COMMISSION PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF KATHERINE AUSTIN/HEALDSBURG TOWN PROJECT** – The applicant is proposing to build 15 two-story townhomes in the R7 zone and a 3,360 square foot +/- two-story commercial building on the CO zone. The townhomes are planned to be 1,120 square feet with two bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths. The commercial building is proposed to have six 760 square foot one-bedroom, one bath apartments above the commercial space. Both the townhomes and the mixed-use building will have their own separate 20-foot driveways. This is a Preliminary Review, and no decisions or CEQA determination will be made at this time.

Associate Planner Jay presented the staff report and was available for questions.

Chair Luthin asked for Board questions of staff.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

The staff report said staff preferred a driveway all the way through the property rather than two separate dead ends. Just clarifying that that's correct.

John Jay, Associate Planner

Correct. When we had the pre-application conference with the applicant the original design was to have a continuous driveway through the site. Once the applicant got some feedback and started some of the grading work they found that that proposal may not work the best, so the new site plan included in the package as far as the civil plans is what is being proposed.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

We were trying to have a joint meeting of the Design Review Board and Planning Commission, which I assume didn't happen because schedules didn't work out?

John Jay, Associate Planner

Correct.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

So the Planning Commission hasn't seen it yet, correct?

John Jay, Associate Planner

This was originally supposed to go to last week's Planning Commission meeting, however the applicant was ill, so we pushed that to the January 10th Planning Commission meeting, but we wanted to keep the project moving forward as far as the preliminary reviews go to at least get the Design Review Board's initial response to the project.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

The zoning for this, the Healdsburg Avenue side especially, requires commercial space on the ground floor, correct?

John Jay, Associate Planner

Yes, the parcel itself is a split zone. The front half of the lot that faces Healdsburg Avenue is zoned commercial and the back half of the lot is zoned R7 multi-family residential, so that's why they are proposing the commercial building up there. There are some other options that the applicant has brought up, but we'll get into those in her presentation. But yes, the way it is zoned currently it would have to have commercial on the ground floor as a permitted by right. They could do housing on the ground floor, but that would require a use permit within that zone.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Is the twenty-two parking spaces for Healdsburg Avenue the minimum parking required?

John Jay, Associate Planner

Yes, I think it's 21.7 or something like that; it's right at that threshold.

Ted Luthin, Chair

It was nine for the residential and I'm sure I can do the math quickly for the commercial; it's one per 300.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

And street parking along Healdsburg cannot be considered?

John Jay, Associate Planner

Only for affordable housing projects.

Cary Bush, Board Member

There was the previous project next to it, still incomplete, but it looks like there is a residential component still adjacent to Healdsburg Avenue. Is that correct, or how does that work? I know there's the big box building on the corner of Murphy Avenue and Healdsburg Avenue, but next to it it looks like a little Craftsman style residential family. Is that an actual commercial unit on the ground floor?

Ted Luthin, Chair

Yes, that is a single-family home, if I remember correctly.

John Jay, Associate Planner

This was part of the project. It's a mixed-use development, so the commercial aspect is up front here, and then there is a single-family residence on this back part of the lot.

Chair Luthin asked for further Board questions to staff. Seeing none, he invited the applicant to speak.

The applicant gave a presentation and was available for questions.

Chair Luthin asked for Board questions of the applicant.

Ted Luthin, Chair

It's nice to see the site sections; that's something I was hoping to see in the package. If I understand it correctly, we're got a step to retaining wall running east/west down the middle, a total of about 10 feet tall between the upper and lower lots.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

Yes, that's correct.

Ted Luthin, Chair

And that's where you're off haul is coming to cap that front lot down?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

Yes, and that's to provide the minimum amount of parking that's required, the 22 spaces. We're very constrained in the north/south direction; we're really compact and that is what's causing the off haul. It's a very challenging site there.

Ted Luthin, Chair

It is challenging and deceiving when you drive by it. Because there are so many trees, you don't notice that it slopes significantly, especially at the back of the site. If you were to go fully residential would it just be townhomes across Healdsburg Avenue or would you go with a two-story, more apartment style?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I was thinking of keeping the building looking almost exactly the same way it is and keeping the same footprint, but revised. I might bring the second floor down 2 feet, because I was keeping a 12-foot clearance on the shortest portion and it winds up being 14 feet of clearance in the other end, and I think I could afford to go down a couple of feet. It depends on your input. I live in Bend, Oregon and worked with the Central Advisory Board, and what we've done is recognized housing is really needed and our zoning code is written similarly with mixed-use having commercial on the first floor, and we revised it to be commercial-ready so that it could be residential but could convert to commercial at some future date should it make sense to do so, and so the intention there is to keep the pre-ceiling height 12 feet, assuming that a commercial space would need that kind of room, but that it's allowed to be residential in the meantime to meet the need. I would be willing to do that kind of an approach here if that were desired. I wasn't thinking of completely redesigning that building; I was thinking of working with the footprint that I have in the commercial portion. We step in two places because we're following the slope, and so we could do three three-bedroom apartments, or a couple of studios and some three-bedroom apartments; I could create variety there. I was curious what your feedback would be on even going residential, if we should keep it looking like it could be commercial at a future date; we're really open. The need is clearly for more residences and less commercial space.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Yes, and I think the idea of what you classified as "commercial ready" makes a lot of sense for this part of town, specifically if the need does arise at some point for more commercial space; we've seen that ebb and flow over time, so that might be an interesting approach.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

It's so exciting to see a housing project with some density coming to town, and I would be super supportive of seeing this go all residential. I actually asked Associate Planner Jay

earlier today what the commercial vacancy rate is, and then I called the Chamber of Commerce and they don't have data on it, but you can drive around town and see that there is plenty of available commercial space that is not used right now, so I would love to see it be housing instead. What would that do to your parking count?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I didn't do the calculations, but the way that the State is moving towards reducing parking in your new Housing Element it actually would certainly meet it, if not make it a little better.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

It would be terrific to see some dedicated open green space and park-like component that was more community driven, especially if your application references young families. You've done an excellent job of shoehorning a lot of program into a pretty challenging site. I walked over to the site this afternoon and that slope is no joke. It doesn't appear that the retaining wall on the adjacent site is as tall as the 10-foot retaining wall. How do we anticipate these two walls meeting up?

Paul Peck, LACO Associates, Applicant

There is a stair in between that breaks them up and makes them not meet. I believe that wall is also segmental, like a geo-grid type of wall. I think when that project got started this project was not anticipated, but what we'll be doing is just raising that wall a foot or two, and that may require that wall to be taken down, but since it's segmental you can use all the same material and potentially a little more geo-grid in order to be able to build it up a little higher.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I was the architect on that one, so I can speak to it a little more than Paul. It's about a 4-foot retaining wall, but the reason it's so much less is that we stepped that site. The commercial building on the corner is low, but there's a retaining wall behind it that goes up, and so the parking is up another couple of feet and then it angles up a bit and then we have that retaining wall, and so the amount of slope isn't as great overall on that corner as it gets further into the site we're working on now. I don't anticipate that we would have to do anything to the existing wall, but I'm going to defer to Paul on that. My intention is to have stairs coming from the upper area down between the two parking lots and the little house that's there, and then it gets leveled by our new commercial building so that there is easy access from above to below.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

It would be great to have access to the Healdsburg side, especially that nice bus stop that's there to connect those things.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

We'll work with the bus people to design the bus stop, but we're happy to have a bus stop right in front. This is such an ideal location for this kind of housing, because you can walk to Parkside and Brookhaven schools, the park at Brookhaven, Fiesta Market and Safeway, you can walk to everything and you've got a bus stop right in front. I'm all for disconnecting the cost of parking to an apartment so that if somebody doesn't have a car they're not subsidizing people who do have a car. If we can reduce some of the parking to create more green space I'll do what I can, but I'm also very cognizant of my client wanting to have sufficient parking for the people living there, and so it's a balance and it's difficult to find much space to have a common green area there, but it is really close to Brookhaven Park and the playground is right there too.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

People over parking, for sure. This retaining wall that's going in, did you look at the road access from the west side versus the east side? It looks like there's a 7-foot grade change along Healdsburg Avenue from one end to the other, so that could mitigate some of the climb needed if we wanted to create through access on the site.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

It has to do with locating your access far away from the intersection. I'm going to let Paul talk to that, but are you talking about putting the driveway between the existing building that's finishing up construction and ours?

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

Correct.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I think it's too close to the intersection of Murphy and Healdsburg for Caltrans to allow us to put it there. Because of the queuing of traffic that happens at that intersection it's best to be as far east as possible.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

Have you spoken with the trash hauler to make sure the turnaround is okay?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

If it works for a fire truck it usually works for the hauler, but one of the first things we have to do is talk to the hauler. We showed two arcs, two radii, and one is to provide pedestrian sidewalk, but it's going to be flush with the driveway and rolled curbs so that it's easy for a fire truck or the trash hauler to make that turn.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

If this stays commercial the stair access to a commercial property is not as convenient as a street level or grade level, and especially if we're thinking about mobility challenges it feels punitive to have them go to the back of the building from the public way. I understand we're dealing with a super-challenging site, but is it possible to reengineer to perhaps a continuous front porch or a more front-facing ramp?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

A continuous ramp might work. The reason it's raised is it saves two more feet from the retaining wall in the back. The retaining wall would have to go to 12 feet if we lowered the building to be flush with the sidewalk along Healdsburg Avenue, so we made the decision to deal with the storm water at the back of the building and make it all flush with the parking, because of course it had to have the accessible parking flush with the elevator and the sidewalk in the back. Your idea of a continuous ramp would mean more paving, but it could work and we could look at that. I agree that having stairs at the front isn't great. At the same time my thought was that mobility challenged people might drive to the site and park in the parking lot, in which case the level entrance was there. Again, it all comes down to the fact that it's such a sloped site and it is a balancing act.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

I think the stairs as currently designed lends itself more to the privacy and separation of public and private for a residential component. If we are going to go commercial though I think we have to emphasize the transparency of the public face and at the public level, and we want to activate the street. If we're going to be pulling downtown north then we want to activate at the street level. I would say we could be a little bit more overt with the glazing,

maybe a little less set back, a little less elevated to make it more activated at the public level. It's really destination retail that is being created and I think that's contrary to what we want to see.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

That's a good point. There's going to be a different approach depending on whether we go with the residential or the commercial, but I do think the overall building is going to remain the same so it could convert to commercial at some later date if we are residential, and you'd probably redo the whole frontage or the window areas at that time.

Paul Peck, LACO Associates, Applicant

Like Kathy was saying, if we were to drop that building down the whole parking lot would have to come down with it, so that whole front area would drop 2 feet and that would all be export and would be a bunch of trucks hauling dirt off, and everyone knows what that looks like; not only is it costly but it's greenhouse gases. But again, it's doable, it's just dollars, greenhouse gases, and traffic.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

If we are going to continue with the same footprint, I think the second story is very top heavy, so maybe there's some more articulation, more transparency, more glazing, something that could be done to lighten that up, especially from the street level looking at that setback, which is quite shallow. That solid mass is going to feel quite oppressive at the pedestrian scale, so I'd love to see something a little more articulated, maybe a change of materiality, something that could give it a little more change in plane would be great. Are these units intended for rent or for sale?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

The apartments are definitely for rent. Generally speaking, I do the townhomes as subdivisions, so there's an opportunity for ownership at some point. The economics right now are that it makes more sense for the owner to hold on to them and rent them out, and unfortunately the cost to sell them now is so high that it would become a pretty exclusive development if it were all for sale versus being more affordable as apartment rentals, so I'm pretty sure that the owner is going to rent them out, but that doesn't mean that over time there wouldn't be an opportunity for ownership. It gives the most flexibility to do it that way.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

But these are not affordable housing?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

No, we're not deed-restricted. There will be deed-restricted units within it because of the inclusionary requirements; we haven't chosen what those are yet or worked at what level. There's a negotiation that we can do to figure out what makes the most sense. I read an interesting article recently about a gentleman who owns a property in Sebastopol that's been Section 8, and that's something that I could suggest my client consider to help with affordability. It's not deed-restricted, but working with Section 8 applicants might be something that could happen there.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

The photovoltaic service seems undersized for the need. What is the goal for sustainability on this site? Are we looking for net zero? Are we trying to completely cover our need? Is there onsite battery storage?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

The way the code is written now is a really specific number, and I'd have to go back to see what that is. If you check out The Barlow Crossing townhomes and look at the roofs, that's how much solar, and they're on both sides. I was concerned about the fact that a lot of the roofing is on the north side, but it appears that that can still work. You may be seeing the panels, but you won't be seeing the water heater. We'll probably do heat pump water heaters. Obviously we might use mini-splits. We're not going for net zero, but as of January we have the new code cycle and the new green building code tier one is what we're going to be working with, and generally speaking we'd like to go 10% above base Title 24, so we will be exceeding code, I can't tell you by how much, and we may need to have more solar than I'm indicating. On the mixed-use building we'd probably have plenty of room to have it without it being visible, but on the townhomes you might be seeing some of the solar.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

Have you looked into covered parking with PV, or perhaps some sort of green element in covered parking for those commercial spots?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

No, we haven't, but we could on the exposed. Half the parking is already tucked under, so obviously we can't do it there, but on the others we could talk to the client about if that's a good way of doing it. The thing with the townhomes is they're on individual lots, and so they wouldn't be able to take advantage of any of the solar that's on another lot that's on the parking lot; that would have to go towards the apartment portion and I think they have a roof area already to serve what's needed. In a subdivision situation the solar has to be on the house that it's serving on that lot, and so we would just maximize it on the roof area of the townhomes.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

Yes, it would be great if we could find another way to improve on that, even if it's on the project level and not at the individual level.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

We are going to have at least 40% EV charging stations, and so those could be underneath a solar canopy there in the parking lot.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

And if not that, then some sort of greening so that we could get some more green back onto this project.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

And we'll work with the landscape architect on that as much as we can.

Chair Luthin asked for further Board questions of the applicant. Seeing none, he opened public comment.

Carol Capria

I live on Healdsburg Avenue across the street from the proposed development. I wanted to give a history of how the process has been in terms of the corner development that is hopefully almost completed. I walked the property with Kenyon Webster when it first came up that it was being developed, but we were never notified about the project in any way and we were quite surprised. That property had been for sale for many years and it wasn't until it had been preapproved design approval for close to what it is now that it sold right away. When I walked the property I noted the beautiful piece of property right next door that is

quite forested that this developer or someone else could buy this piece and then add on or continue to develop. So it has come to pass, and yes, we need housing big time and we totally support it. I'm very happy to hear about the commercial. I don't know what's going to happen across the street with those commercial spaces, so I would definitely support the idea of moving them over to residential units to add to the living spaces. The other thing about those units on Healdsburg Avenue, I'm not sure about the setback, but I know the one on the corner does not appear to have much of a setback on those commercial units. We have not been able to tell if any landscaping is going to be done, or trees, or any kind of buffer between that building and the sidewalk. Right now it looks like no buffer, just sidewalk and building. Yes, the location is ideal for walking to everything. I used to be able to drive to work in about four minutes, and now the traffic in front of our house between 8:00am and 8:45am is stopped bumper-to-bumper traffic as a result of the high schools consolidating and the bike lanes and it's really a nightmare. The traffic on Murphy Avenue is another story with no turning lanes there. If you're coming out of Murphy and you want to travel east to downtown, sometimes you're stuck behind a car that is taking up the whole lane and the traffic becomes backed up on Murphy. I don't know if a turning lane could be suggested for Murphy so there would be a much better traffic flow coming out of Murphy as there is enough room for two lanes. Then of course turning onto Dufranc Avenue and onto Murphy there has been a lot of confusion in that area with accidents and near accidents ever since Caltrans redid the bike lanes and the lines. Is a traffic study in the works for this project in terms of congestion and safety? With respect to housing versus affordable housing, because it's not affordable housing I'm not clear on the number of units that need to be affordable housing, or if any need to be, and I wanted to know how many of those units would be designated for affordable and whether they would be apartments or townhouses, or both? I also support the reduced parking and more green space.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Traffic is an issue in town and turning in and out of Murphy Avenue is a challenge; I'm not sure that this is going to dramatically affect it, but it's not going to reduce it by any means. Associate Planner Jay, in terms of affordable housing, would a percentage of those be required to be affordable?

John Jay, Associate Planner

There is a percentage that the project would have to meet based off of whatever income level they are set at, and that's in our inclusionary code section that I don't have in front of me right now. If it's 120% of AMI, it's X percentage of the units need to fit that requirement. I will note on the traffic that the intersection of Healdsburg Avenue and Murphy Avenue has been identified as a potential spot that would have a signal put in, so the City has identified it as an intersection that receives a lot of complaints. Then further north along Highway 116 where Covert Lane is, changing that intersection to either be a three-way or some sort of roundabout intersection to help mitigate some of the traffic.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Those things are always a tradeoff. It will reduce the risk coming out of Murphy, but it will back traffic up in both directions on the highway as a result of it.

John Jay, Associate Planner

As far as a traffic study goes, we would go through and determine a CEQA level for this project moving forward, and some of those CEQA level determinations include traffic studies. Typically we don't determine that in the preliminary review until we get a complete design in front of us, and then we'll make that determination.

Ted Luthin, Chair

That probably will fall under the umbrella of the Planning Commission, not necessarily this board.

John Jay, Associate Planner

Yes, the Planning Commission would deal with that. There is a possibility to reduce the amount of parking for a project at the Planning Commission level, so if there is a need for parking spots to be reduced to add in those green spaces the applicant could make that request to the Planning Commission, or a recommendation that staff could make based on input from even the Design Review Board.

Ted Luthin, Chair

A reminder that this is a preliminary review, so we're not making any decisions today, we're just giving guidance and our general input.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I also wanted to answer Carol's concern about landscaping in setback. The way that the Certificate of Occupancy is written is it's a zero setback from the sidewalk, and I never do that because I think there should be some buffer, so our stairs go up and they are 5 feet back and then the building is another 5 feet back, and we have street trees proposed to work with the modules at the building, so there will be setback and landscaping provided. I know the building next door is a sad story, but there will be landscaping between the sidewalk and that building as well when it's complete in order for them to get their CO, so it will be done eventually.

Chair Luthin asked for further public comments. Seeing none, he asked for Board deliberations.

The Board discussed the application as follows:

Ted Luthin, Chair

What are the Board's thoughts on residential versus commercial? Do we have a preference we want as a group to give to this applicant?

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

I'd love to see it go residential.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

I like what Board Member Hanley said. Going residential for that lower floor makes a lot of sense. Obviously "commercial ready" has a certain meaning at a floor plan level, but I would advocate that from an elevation and a design perspective that it still has a commercial sense and it does not become a cutesy little townhouses on that elevation.

Cary Bush, Board Member

Lars said that really well. The idea of it being a residential component is wonderful, we need more housing, and I'm supportive of that on general principle, but the notion is that Healdsburg Avenue is that corridor and it would be nice to see it have a dual function, but also read as such. I think it really extends the long-term notion of it being a real kind of commercial corridor, however I'm still not opposed to it being a residential component.

Marshall Balfe, Board Member

My preference is seeing it as commercial long-term.

Ted Luthin, Chair

My preference is commercial-ready, but residential today. That brings us to the next thing, which is parking. My kneejerk reaction to parking would be to reduce it as much as possible. If we can count the spaces along Healdsburg Avenue, I'm all for that, and if we can save a couple of park spaces, and as Board Member Hanley said, get some sort of usable outdoor community space, that would be a very nice thing.

Cary Bush, Board Member

I have a question for Associate Planner Jay or our applicant. Is it a red zone out front? I think there is an actual bus stop almost in front of this spot.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

There's a bike path. There's no parking on Healdsburg, but on the higher part of Murphy there's room for about four parallel parking spaces.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

We'd all like to see less parking and more parks, but how do you penalize one rental unit and say they can't have a car? It seems like there's not enough street parking to reduce the onsite parking.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

The bike lane is directly in front, but even if it weren't, the parking has been eliminated because of the bike path, that whole lane.

Cary Bush, Board Member

It's a fairly brutal parking lot in general. You're looking at 12 stalls to one side uncovered, and then the covered is still there. You're actually trying to mitigate pervious to impervious, accepting water versus shedding water. I think what we're seeing in this application is quite a bit of hardscape in conjunction with your impervious to pervious calculations on Sheet 15 of the submittal; it probably will push it over the 50%. My guess is you're around 56,000 square feet of area and it's pretty much all impervious at this point, and then an impervious to pervious calculation or material choice, it's still a pretty big brushstroke in impervious, so even if you're an upper townhouse looking down over that retaining wall you're seeing still a pretty good greyfield there. It's a big program shoehorned into a very difficult site and your challenge as a site development approach and overall project is going to be tricky. It's going to also be tricky just to manage the level of impact on the site with that type of program, and the trees in this calculation identify that as well. You're looking at a significant reduction in tree canopy. You're also having probably high impact on a lot of the trees that still exist, as was noted in the report. Parking is part of site development, and site development is part of this proposal, and as a whole it's a significant impact and something is going to give, either reduction of units or the parking requirements, but I think pulling into that parking lot off of Healdsburg Avenue is a deathtrap; I would never want to park in there, because taking either a left or a right out of it would be a real challenge, and our public comment clearly made note of that as well.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

To me it points to the sense of there's kind of a park there now and it's going away, and planting a few trees along the edge is not going to give us that character back at all. It's a beautiful site with those amazing trees. So can you reduce a couple of units and would that bring some of that back, or what is that formula that not trying to put so much onto this property that actually allows some of the character that we see there now to remain?

Ted Luthin, Chair

It does feel like it is shoehorned in there, especially looking at the southeast corner where that one little spur comes to an end there at unit 15; it's really getting tight back there.

Cary Bush, Board Member

The grading plan suggests it is significant slopes up to the pads. I saw one that was pushing at 12% and that's a significant incline as an approach to a garage, hard parking without fighting doors. I'm trying to understand the level of complexity. What is a resident in these units on a second floor looking down on? I'm seeing a lot of hardscape.

Paul Peck, LACO Associates, Applicant

Can I ask one question? It's going to be parking lot and it's going to be drive aisle. Is a pervious pavement, whether it be an asphalt or a pervious concrete, something that is used a lot and popular in Sebastopol, or is that something that is not really seen as a benefit?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I think we're going to have to ask staff, Paul, because there hasn't been all that much development that could use it. I'm not familiar with any that actually use that in Sebastopol yet.

Cary Bush, Board Member

It's been used at the Florence Lofts and it's got permeability to it, and I think they've tried to reduce the compaction rate with a different aggregate to find some level of permeability. It's my understanding a lot of the dust and debris that usually collects over time clogs those pores, so to call it impervious is a little tricky.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

That's my concern. I prefer to see almost a crown off to a vegetated swale to deal with it. If you need to remediate it over time, then you want to do it in a vegetated swale. Obviously, we're taking in all your comments and we'll come back with what we think is the best approach, and we'll do a little bit more research on the permeability issue. I agree that there is a lot of hardscape; I'm hoping we can mitigate it to a certain degree.

Ted Luthin, Chair

What are thoughts on architecture and building design, starting with the mixed-use building along Healdsburg Avenue?

Cary Bush, Board Member

I think Board Member Hanley made a nod to it a little bit earlier, but I didn't see much of a push and pull on a horizontal plane; it reads as a static, monochromatic building. It's a big façade to a big volume, and it reads as three different pieces, so maybe if there's a change in plane, that would be my overarching thought.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

I'd also like to see variety in the materiality. I know this Board before my time pushed back on the Habitat for Humanity project and asked for something more interesting, change in plane, change in materiality, something with more of a modern approach, and I think all of those comments would ring true here too. I'd like to see more articulation, more interest, change in scale, especially at the pedestrian level so that we can avoid this blockitecture kind of vibe that we're getting right now.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

I'd echo that. To me the front building on Healdsburg Avenue has a little more going for it. The back building is really plain and a little scary actually. The front doors are these kind of caves that you go past the garage to get to. The way the flat roof goes to the pitched roof in the back has a very strange sense of scale, or lack of scale. I'm not sure why double hung windows would be in this kind of a project; those look out of place. It feels like you'd spend more time in the front than in the back; I'm trying to resolve the architecture of these buildings. Then the side elevations, which are still going to be seen, have this sort of striping pattern; it's very flat and it's kind of this one stripe that's trying to give it some character.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

It's very car-centric with the garage out front, and I wonder if there is an opportunity to put parking in the back so the pedestrian access at the front door is hospitable, and maybe that's a way to concentrate some of the building on the site so it's less long and linear and spread out and we get a greater density?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

One reason I have the garage where I have it is I wanted the private outdoor space of the townhomes to be underneath the oak trees, and so if I were to switch the driveway to the back it would be underneath the oak trees and there would be even more looking over a parking lot for all of the homes. There's just no way unless we turn the townhomes backwards, but that wouldn't achieve anything. I did look at that and I think the tradeoff for having the private outdoor space under the oaks overshadows the idea of trying to have a garage in the back.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

Did you look at an option with centralizing all of the building towards the center of the site rather than breaking it up into these three discrete bars?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

The zoning is for this site is divided into two. The front part is commercial on Healdsburg Avenue and the back part is multi-family, and that drove the two separate parts. I never considered having one central building. I wanted to give a commercial feel to Healdsburg Avenue, I felt that that was a continuation of the vision for Healdsburg, and it wasn't until Monday that I thought about turning any of that into residential. As far as the back part, I wanted to soften and have the least massive type of housing by having townhouses as opposed to an apartment building, which is really what the R7 is geared towards. I don't think I'd like to throw this all out and start over. I'd like to hear how I could make this plan work as opposed to relooking at the whole thing. I wanted to have the private outdoor space underneath those oak trees, so the back yard is important.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

They're so small though, those back yards.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I love having a back yard myself. I have trees and watch the critters and it's a nice place to sit out as opposed to a more urban approach, which would be a garage in the back and no back yard, so it's a personal preference I have.

Ted Luthin, Chair

I agree that in elevation the perception with the garages kind of snouting forward coming down that driveway, that you're going to have a wall of garages, and I agree with Lars'

assessment that the doors are going to be down these tunnels. I get why that's happening, where you've got a very narrow unit that's barely wider than your garage so you have to do that to get around the garage and the end result is these tunnels leading to your doors and you have this big, flat roof projecting out. That also gives you that odd side elevation with the appendage making it look like a house that's been added onto with a flat roof. I like the ground floor of the Healdsburg elevation. I think the upper floor feels a little like a fortress and unwelcoming; maybe it's the little slot window, but it seems like the upper elevation could become more pleasant.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

Do you have input on the landscaping or the trees?

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

There's not very much of it.

Ted Luthin, Chair

I appreciate that we're keeping some old trees there, but in terms of landscaping there isn't a lot of usable space. I like the pedestrian connector out to Healdsburg Avenue; that will be a nice crosswalk and down the stairs, and then those stairs give an opportunity to resolve the grade between you and the neighbor.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

Generally it feels like the building on Healdsburg has a lot more detail and could have more to make a good streetscape, but the building in the back feels like it's not very resolved, there's not a lot of detail to that, and the entries next to the garages don't feel very welcoming. I guess dealing with the grade back there is obviously a more challenging concern.

Ted Luthin, Chair

That's a good point, and I think it's also the width of the units, which are so narrow that you kind of have to put the front door in a tunnel.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

And with the grade there you're going to be entering at different heights to your neighbors or railing that's next to you, and it feels like a shoehorn within a shoehorn.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Because it looks like you're got maybe four or five feet.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

Not quite that much. Are you talking about the steps up?

Ted Luthin, Chair

Yes, the width of the stoops.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

With the two together it's about 10 feet, and I tried to have them be equal steps up so it stays that size. There would not need to be a separation between the two if they're at the same grade and I'm hoping to do that, so that's why I've paired the entries together to try to make it wider, because yes, it is very narrow. I can also bring the doors forward more, it just means more hallway inside, but I was trying to create an in-between.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

I think we're asking for a rethink of it though, perhaps a more structural change to the approach of the project.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

Is that just you, or is that everyone?

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

Everything I've heard so far.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Yeah.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I mean you had suggested putting one building in the middle of the site.

Melissa Hanley, Board Member

Or two, or something that doesn't have such a spread out parking-heavy approach to the site.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

The way that Certificate of Occupancy is written is zero setback on the sidewalk, and I've given us 10 feet. I've tried to create a commercial building at the street level, but have enough to have some landscaping and street trees. Are you saying not doing that and pushing further back, and having one building sort of raised up in the middle of the site, and not having as much grading? Cary, I see you nodding. What is your thought on that?

Cary Bush, Board Member

Some of the information would be just a notion of the density of the program, and I think what's being asked here is to not just look at monster blocks of what's been created, it's how the blocks articulate and what the site allows. Seeing the process in your presentation helped me understand where you were, where you are, and where you want to go, so for me at least I'm trying to see what the opportunity really allows in relationship to grading, drainage, parking, and site development, because it's all tied to the volumes. We're always looking at the car and how the car approaches and enters a site and how it precedes, so the architecture to the volume, but the dynamic that creates is I think what the Board is asking for, and it's not our job to give you that specific feedback, it's to respond to your presentation.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

My concern is the split zoning and the fact that there are two different zones to the site and so my approach was two different areas, and now we're talking about 100% residential on the front one, so that does change it a little bit. I guess maybe just direction on whether you think there still should be two separate zones, given the commercial and the residential, or if you're thinking of a completely different way of looking at that, and then I can go one way or the other based on that input. I see Associate Planner Jay has been nodding.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

To me that's for the Planning Commission. If it's residential or commercial it's still architecture, it's still building, so if you put six buildings or one building, what's the best approach for this very difficult site? It's not a zoning question.

Ted Luthin, Chair

If the Planning Commission resolves that question and says green light on full residential, that may trigger a completely different concept, because I think the concept we're looking at is a result of mixed zoning and wanting to accommodate the zoning as it is, so if the Planning Commission gives you the green light to proceed with residential is there another solution that gets us some shared green space, a little nicer views, that sort of thinking?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

That's very helpful, because that's my confusion and we'll definitely ask for the Planning Commission's input on that and that will help drive what we do. That's the whole point of having a preliminary review like this, to flesh this out. I don't want to give the impression that I'm not going to make changes.

Ted Luthin, Chair

What you've done reads very clearly as you wanted to accommodate the existing zoning and you fit it and made it work. It took some shoehorning and a 10-foot retaining wall and all these things to accommodate the existing zoning, so if the Planning Commission takes that barrier off of you and says now get creative with something, then is there a better solution that's a little less hardscape and little more people space?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I asked Associate Planner Jay if you can go higher than 30 feet for two stories unless you're deed restricted affordable housing, and currently the answer is no, in order to go higher you have to be deed restricted, like the Burbank Housing development, so just keeping that in mind. No matter what I do we don't want to trigger that deed restricting affordable housing component, just because a private developer can't afford to do that because the subsidies are too enormous and not available.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

Are you honestly willing to make changes? When we did a preliminary review on The Barlow townhomes project we gave you a lot of feedback and you brought back pretty much the same design. We've given you a lot of feedback, so are you willing to take that and try something else?

Katherine Austin, Applicant

I am, because it's a very different circumstance. The floodplain issue over in The Barlow was a huge driver of what I could and could not do, and the client I was working for had a very strong feeling of the look he wanted, whereas my client here is giving me cart blanche to design. They're both extremely challenging sites, but the constraints on me to meet the needs of both the Corps of Engineers and my client versus this site is quite different. There still needs to be enough of a return on the investment, so a lot of what drives the density has to do with the incredibly expensive cost of the land. I have a duty to provide my client with something that works financially for him, and so that drives the density, but as far as the design I've got cart blanche on that and I don't have to deal with the Corps of Engineers. I still have to deal with Caltrans though. Also, there was no flexibility at that time in terms of reducing parking; there weren't the avenues that the State is going for now in terms of reducing parking, and so did what I could do with the constraints I had. It's a challenging site because of the slope, access issues, density, and height restrictions, and I'm curious to see how you measure height on a sloped site, because it becomes challenging to stay within that 30-foot height on a sloped site. I'm going to try to have not as much paving and work with the landscape architect on good ideas to increase landscape. This site is a perfect location for the kind of housing I proposed, but it has been so wooded for so long and no matter what we do we're going to take out a lot of trees, which will be tough for

people. I'm going to try to give my client what he needs on the site, address the need for the commercial view of Healdsburg Avenue and the residential view in the back, and see what I can come up with.

Ted Luthin, Chair

We look forward to seeing what comes back to us after the Planning Commission.

Katherine Austin, Applicant

The Planning Commission will see the same thing you saw. I'm not going to change anything between now and then, but we'll hear what they say about the zoning issues and that will make a difference on what we come back with.

Chair Luthin ask for further Board comments. Seeing none, he moved to the next item.

- C. VOTE ON CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**– A vote will be held to elect a new Chair and Vice Chair and finding this item is not a "Project" pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(5) – Not defined as a project.

Chair Luthin reported that the Chair and Vice Chair election would be postponed until the entire Board is present.

8. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

Design Guidelines Committee. The next meeting of the subcommittee is scheduled for January 12, 2023 with the consultant presenting on their recommendations and findings.

- 9. ADJOURNMENT:** Chair Luthin adjourned the meeting at 6:08 p.m. The next regularly scheduled Tree/Design Review Board meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 18, 2023 at 4:00 P.M.