# City of Sebastopol
# Design Review Board/Tree Board Staff Report

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| Meeting Date: | November 3, 2026 |
| Agenda Item: | 5A |
| To: | Design Review/Tree Board |
| From: | John Jay, Contract Associate Planner |
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| Subject: | Design Review |
| Recommendation: | Approval with Conditions |
| Applicant/Owner: | Rob Toste, Grupe Investment Company, Inc./ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints |
| File Number: | 2025-067 |
| Address: | 8100 Valentine Avenue |
| CEQA Status: | Section 15183 Consistency with the 2016 General Plan EIR |
| General Plan: | Medium Density Residential (MDR) |
| Zoning: | Single-family Residential (R-4) |

**Introduction:**
This is a Design Review permit application from Rob Toste of Grupe Investment Company, Inc. for the construction of 20 single-family homes on a 2.69-acre site at 8100 Valentine Avenue, the former site of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The application includes the design of the homes, detached carports, a trash enclosure, common open space and amenities, landscaping, and site lighting. The Planning Commission reviewed the Vesting Tentative Map and State Density Bonus application on September 22, 2026, and recommended approval to the City Council. On October 20, 2026, the City Council heard a staff report, a presentation from the applicant, and public comment on the item. After a lengthy discussion with staff and the applicant, the City Council adopted the proposed resolution and approved the modified Vesting Tentative Map by a vote of 3-2, in favor.

**Project Description:**
The project proposed homes that will range in size from 1,422 to 1,640, and each will have 3 or 4 bedrooms and 2 or 3 baths. Nineteen of the lots would also include a detached, single-story Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), for a total of up to 39 homes. Three of the primary homes would be deed-restricted for moderate-income households. The ADUs are shown for context but are not subject to Design Review and will be reviewed ministerially in accordance with State ADU law and the City's municipal code.

The Board may discuss the subjective items in the Guidelines and offer design suggestions to the applicant, such as color distribution, entry details, or planting along the shared property lines. The applicant may choose to incorporate these suggestions, but under the

Housing Accountability Act they cannot be required as a condition of approval or used as a reason for denial because the City does not have applicable adopted, objective design standards for these items.

Access to the site would be taken from a single new 26-foot-wide private street off Valentine Avenue that ends in a hammerhead turnaround in the northwest portion of the site. A 12-foot-wide decomposed granite path along the western edge of the site would serve as a secondary evacuation route back to Valentine Avenue. The existing church building and parking lot would be removed.

The project would include a total of 83 surface parking spaces distributed in small groups along the private street, approximately 39 of which would be covered by detached carports. Each home would have at least one assigned covered space with EV charging. The property has been designed so that there is excess parking, which could allow each primary and accessory dwelling unit up to two parking spaces each, with additional spaces for visitors. Pedestrian walkways and landscaped paseos would connect the front door of each home to the parking areas and to a new sidewalk along Valentine Avenue.

Each home would have a small private rear yard. The project would also include approximately 6,500 square feet of common open space maintained by the HOA, including a Central Green lawn, a Redwood Tree Grove with seating under the existing redwoods in the northeast corner of the site, a dog run, and a Community Expression Area whose final use will be decided by the residents. A single centralized trash enclosure would serve all residents.

**Environmental Review:**
Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §15183, the project was evaluated for consistency with the City of Sebastopol General Plan Update Final EIR, certified November 15, 2016 (SCH# 2016032001). The Section 15183 Consistency Checklist evaluated all environmental topics in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines and found that the project is consistent with the development density established by the General Plan and zoning. There are no project-specific significant effects peculiar to the project or its site, no significant effects that were not analyzed in the General Plan EIR, and no impacts that would be more severe than previously disclosed, with uniformly applied development policies and standards.

The Planning Commission recommended this determination to the City Council at their September 22, 2026, meeting. On October 20, 2026, the City Council adopted a resolution approving the Vesting Tentative Map and Density Bonus applications and finding the project statutorily exempt from CEQA subject to §15183 of the Guidelines. The design reviewed by the Board does not change the project that was evaluated in the checklist, and no further environmental review is required.

**General Plan Consistency:**
This project is consistent with the following General Plan policies as shown below:

- Policy LU 1-2: Avoid urban sprawl by concentrating development within the City limits; favor infill development over annexation.
- Policy LU 5-5: Strongly encourage residential development in a balanced and efficient pattern that reduces sprawl, preserves open space, and creates convenient connections to other land uses.

- Policy LU 6-1: Promote increased residential densities.
- Policy LU 6-2: Promote compact urban form that provides residential opportunities in close proximity to jobs, services, and transit.
- Housing Element Policy C-4: The City will encourage development of new housing to meet a range of income levels, including market-rate housing, and a variety of housing sizes and types.
- Housing Element Goal D-1: Promote Housing Affordability for both Renters and Homeowners.

The project redevelops a previously developed infill site within the City limits that is served by existing streets and utilities, and provides smaller-format for-sale homes, ADUs, and three moderate-income homes. The General Plan consistency was reviewed by the Planning Commission as part of its recommendation on the Vesting Tentative Map and State Density Bonus application.

**Zoning Ordinance Consistency:**
The project site is zoned Single-family Residential (R-4). According to Section 17.20.020 of the Sebastopol Municipal Code (SMC), single-family homes and ADUs are permitted uses in the R-4 district. The project's base density of 7.43 units per acre is within the 8.7 units per acre allowed by the R-4 district, and the homes are within the 30-foot, two-story height limit. Under SMC Section 17.450.010, Design Review is required for new single-family homes in subdivisions of three or more units.

Under State Density Bonus Law (Government Code Section 65915), the applicant has requested waivers of the R-4 standards for lot area, lot width, front, side, and rear setbacks, lot coverage, ADU height, mechanical equipment setbacks, and parking stall dimensions. The Planning Commission recommended approval of these waivers, and on October 20, 2026, the City Council adopted a resolution approving the Vesting Tentative Map and Density Bonus application granting the waivers as requested. The standards modified by the waivers are not before the Board.

**Public Comment:**
Public Comments have been included as part of this report.

Pursuant to Section 17.400.050, Table 17.400-2, of the Zoning Ordinance, Design Review applications, subject to approval by the Design Review Board, shall not require a public hearing. As the project was subject to separate public hearings before both the Planning Commission and City Council, scheduling a further public hearing before the Design Review Board is not applicable. However, feedback from neighboring community members during the previous public hearings referenced a desire for additional notice of agenda items related to this project. For this reason, on October 22, 2026, the City sent a courtesy mailed notice of the Design Review Board meeting to all property owners and residents within 600 feet of the project site to notify the community of the meeting in addition to the 72-hour standard agenda noticing requirements. The applicant also updated their on-site project sign to notify the community of the upcoming Design Review Board meeting.

**City Departmental Comment:**
The Planning Department distributed this project to the various City departments and outside agencies, including Engineering and Public Works, the Building Division, the City Arborist, and the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District. Their conditions of approval were

included in the Planning Commission's recommendation and are incorporated by reference in Exhibit B.

**Required Findings:**

Chapter 17.450.030 sets forth the required findings of Design Review permits. For residential projects, the Design Review Board shall determine whether the design conforms to the objective design and development standards. Because this project is a housing development project under the Housing Accountability Act (Government Code Section 65589.5) and was submitted with an SB 330 preliminary application, the Board's review is limited to objective standards in effect on December 23, 2025, the date the preliminary application was submitted. The Board shall determine whether:

1. The design conforms to the applicable objective design and development standards of the Sebastopol Municipal Code and the objective items of the City's Design Review Guidelines, in that the project provides individual ground-level entries and private yards for each home, separate pedestrian walkways to every front door, a single consolidated driveway, pitched roofs with no flat roofs, and a native, low-water landscape plan, as described in the analysis in this report;

2. The design meets the remaining objective items of the Design Review Guidelines as conditioned, in that the conditions of approval require a plotting plan so that identical homes are not placed next to or across from each other, 24-inch box street and parking lot trees, underground utilities, shielded lighting, and screening of trash and mechanical equipment;

3. The development standards modified by density bonus waivers under Government Code Section 65915 have been applied as modified, consistent with the Planning Commission's recommendation;

4. The conditions of approval implement objective standards, do not reduce the density of the project, and do not make the project infeasible; and

5. The project is consistent with the 2016 General Plan EIR, and no further environmental review is required under CEQA Guidelines Section 15183.

**Analysis:**

***Objective Standards Framework***

The Housing Accountability Act (HAA) limits the City's review of housing development projects to objective standards. Government Code Section 65589.5(h)(8) defines objective standards as those that involve no personal or subjective judgment by a public official and are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the applicant and the public official. When a project complies with applicable objective standards, Section 65589.5(j)(1) prohibits the City from denying the project or approving it at a lower density unless it makes written findings demonstrating how there is an adverse impact on public health or safety that cannot be feasibly mitigated. Under Section 65589.5(j)(4), a project is deemed consistent with a standard if there is substantial evidence that would allow a reasonable person to conclude that it is consistent.

SB 330 (Government Code Sections 65941.1 and 66300) adds three related protections. The project is subject only to the ordinances, policies, and standards in effect when the preliminary application was submitted on December 23, 2025. The City may not apply

design standards adopted after January 1, 2020, that are not objective. The City may hold no more than five hearings on a compliant housing project, including this one (Government Code Section 65905.5). “Hearings” include public hearings, workshops, appeals, or similar meetings for the purpose of the five meeting limit.

Consistent with these requirements, SMC Section 17.450.030(D) directs the Board to determine whether residential projects conform to the objective design and development standards, subject to the approved Density Bonus waivers and concessions granted to the project under Density Bonus law.

**Design Review**

All Design Review projects are subject to the Design Review Guidelines. Because this project is limited to objective standards, staff reviewed each item in the Guidelines and applied only those that can be measured or verified against the plans, such as a minimum tree size or a required pedestrian connection. The analysis below follows each section of the Guidelines: Site Planning, Architecture, Landscaping, Special Development Guidelines, and Signs. Most of the Guidelines are written as recommendations using words such as "should" or "compatible." Those items are discussed below for information, but they cannot be used to deny the project, reduce its density, or add conditions. Staff finds that this project meets the objective items of the Guidelines, as proposed or as conditioned, as described in the analysis below:

**SITE PLANNING:**

Neighborhood context: This project meets this requirement in that the site is an infill property in an established single-family neighborhood and the project proposes detached single-family homes within the two-story height limit.

Building placement and orientation: This project meets this requirement in that the homes are laid out on a grid parallel to the private street and Valentine Avenue, and each home has a ground-floor entry that faces a walkway or paseo. The front setback is modified by a density bonus waiver and is not before the Board. Accessible parking and routes to the common facilities are required by the California Building Code and will be verified at building permit, and the Planning Commission conditions require an accessible parking space with EV charging. The Planning Commission also found that the subdivision layout provides opportunities for passive heating and cooling, as required by the Subdivision Map Act.

Circulation and Parking: This project meets this requirement as all vehicle access is consolidated into one driveway on Valentine Avenue. The 26-foot-wide entry meets the Fire District's 20-foot minimum access width and allows two-way traffic. The parking is spread out in small carport groups along the private street instead of one large parking lot, and the Valentine Avenue frontage is taken up by landscaping, a water-quality basin, and street trees rather than parking. The Gold Ridge Fire Protection District has reviewed the site layout and confirmed that the hammerhead turnaround is adequate for emergency vehicle access and has approved the truck turnaround.

Garages and carports: This project meets this requirement in that there are no attached garages. All covered parking is in detached carports along the private street that are separated from the homes.

Pedestrian circulation: This project meets this requirement in that every home has its own walkway to the front door that is separate from the drive aisle. The walkways connect each home to the new sidewalk on Valentine Avenue, and the decomposed granite path along the western edge provides a second connection.

Bicycle parking: The Guidelines call for bicycle parking close to buildings. Bicycle parking is not required for single-family homes, and residents can store bicycles at their homes and in their private yards.

Open space: This project meets this requirement in that each home has a private rear yard that is accessed directly from the living area, and the Planning Commission conditions require each home to meet the usable open space standard in SMC Section 17.20.040. Common open space is not required for this project, but it includes approximately 6,500 square feet of common open space with a Central Green lawn, seating under the redwoods, a dog run, a Community Expression Area, and benches along the walkways. Evergreen trees and shrubs would screen the private yards from the common areas. Staff has included a condition prohibiting mirrored or reflective glass facing the street and common areas.

Grading and Storm Water: This project meets this requirement in that the site is a previously developed parcel and no tall retaining walls are proposed. The project would reduce the amount of impervious surface on the site from approximately 85,000 square feet to 66,000 square feet and would treat runoff in two vegetated water-quality basins and bioswale planting designed to Low Impact Development (LID) standards. Staff has included a condition requiring grading near protected trees to be shown on the grading plans and reviewed by the City Arborist before a grading permit is issued.

Trash enclosures: This project will provide one centralized trash enclosure for all residents under an HOA-managed contract, and the trash hauler has conceptually approved the enclosure location and truck turnaround. A condition has been included to ensure that the final design is reviewed and approved by the trash hauler for meeting collection requirements.

Mechanical and utility equipment: This project meets this requirement in that no rooftop mechanical equipment is proposed, and air conditioning equipment is ground-mounted. Staff has included conditions requiring ground-mounted equipment to be screened, kept out of the area between the front of each home and the private street, and designed to reduce noise at the property line. All new utility lines will be placed underground, and transformers will be undergrounded or located away from the Valentine Avenue frontage and screened along with meters and backflow devices.

Lighting: The photometric plan shows pole-mounted fixtures at 20 feet and smaller fixtures at 10 feet. Staff has included a condition requiring all fixtures to be LED, fully shielded, and directed downward so that light does not spill onto neighboring properties.

Noise and privacy: The Guidelines ask projects to consider the privacy of adjacent homes and to orient living areas away from noise sources, which are subjective standards. The site is not next to a major noise source, and the homes are within

the same two-story height limit that applies to the neighboring R-4 properties. The rear setbacks are modified by a density bonus waiver and are not before the Board.

**ARCHITECTURE:**

Relationship to surrounding architecture: The Guidelines ask that architecture be compatible with the character of the area, which is a subjective standard. The proposed homes are to use Craftsman and Ranch styles with pitched composite shingle roofs.

Variety: This project meets this requirement as conditioned. The Guidelines state that homes with identical elevations and floor plans should not be placed on adjacent lots or directly across the street.

Massing: This project meets this requirement in that no building exceeds two stories and there are no long horizontal buildings. The homes are detached buildings on their own lots, which breaks the development into 20 smaller structures rather than larger attached buildings. Each home has its own ground-level entry and will receive an individual address.

Elements: This project meets this requirement in that there are no garage doors facing the street or paseos, and the plans provide alternate street-facing window locations for the homes on the front lots.

Materials: This project meets this requirement in that the proposed roofing is a non-reflective composite shingle, and staff has included a condition prohibiting mirrored, reflective, or opaque tinted glass. The exterior materials include stucco, board and batt siding, and stone veneer.

Roofs: This project meets this requirement in that all of the homes have pitched roofs and no flat roofs or parapets are proposed.

Solar Access/Energy Conservation: As this project will be required to include solar on each home under the California Energy Code and all homes have windows on multiple sides for natural light and ventilation, the project meets this requirement.

**LANDSCAPING:**

General: This project meets the general landscaping requirements in that it promotes a landscape plan that is predominantly native and low-water, including coast live oak, California sycamore, coast redwood, manzanita, ceanothus, and native grasses. All landscape areas are planted or covered with cobble or decomposed granite so that there are no large unplanted areas, and shrubs and groundcovers are sized to fill in quickly. The plan includes seating and walking paths, and staff has included a condition requiring transformers, meters, and other equipment to be screened with landscaping or an enclosure.

Water conservation and erosion control: This project meets this requirement in that lawn is limited to the 3,275-square-foot Central Green. The plan uses drip irrigation with a smart controller and meets the State's Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (WELO), with an estimated water use of 412,220 gallons per year compared to the maximum allowance of 430,551 gallons per year.

Trees: The Guidelines require all street trees and parking lot trees to be a minimum 24-inch box size. The preliminary landscape plan shows 15-gallon trees, so staff has included a condition requiring the upsize along with root barriers where trees are near paving or foundations. Street trees are provided along the Valentine Avenue frontage. Nine of the 18 protected trees are proposed for removal, and the Planning Commission conditions require tree protection and a tree replacement and mitigation plan approved by the City Arborist under SMC Chapter 8.12. The landscape plan places non-irrigated cobble around the retained trees, and staff has included a condition prohibiting irrigation within the driplines of the retained oaks and redwoods.

Parking lot landscaping: This project meets this requirement in that it provides 17 parking lot shade trees, or one tree for every five spaces, and an evergreen hedge along the edges of the parking areas. Staff has included a condition requiring parking lot planters to be at least 4 feet wide on the inside and protected by concrete curbing.

Trellises and arbors: The Guidelines encourage trellises and arbors to soften buildings and provide shade, which is a subjective standard. For information, the carports and the covered patios on Plan 3 provide shade.

**SIGNS:**

The subdivision monument sign shown at the entry is not part of this approval. Staff has included a condition requiring separate sign approval under SMC Chapter 17.120.

**Recommendation:**

If it is the consensus of the Board that the proposed 20 single-family homes conform to the applicable objective design standards, staff recommends that the application be approved based on the facts, findings, and analysis set forth in this staff report, and subject to the conditions of approval outlined in Exhibit B.

The Board may discuss the subjective items in the Guidelines and offer design suggestions to the applicant, such as color distribution, entry details, or planting along the shared property lines. The applicant may choose to incorporate these suggestions, but under the Housing Accountability Act, they cannot be required as a condition of approval or used as a reason for denial.

**Attachments:**

Exhibit A – Draft Resolution
Exhibit B – Conditions of Approval
Exhibit C – Standard Conditions of Approval
Site Plan, Architectural Elevations, and Floor Plans
Photometric Plan
Revised Site Plan
Revised Landscape Plan
Public Comments
CEQA Section 15183 Consistency Checklist, with Exhibits A-D