



BRUNZELL
HISTORICAL

June 16, 2017

1285 Glenn Street, LLC
Kevin Skiles
111 Janes Street
Mill Valley, Ca 94941

Subject: Compatibility of the Sequoia Green Townhomes Project with Ridgway Historic District, Santa Rosa, California

Dear Kevin,

The letter report that follows discusses the compatibility of the Sequoia Green Townhomes Project with Santa Rosa's Ridgway Historic District, as required by the City of Santa Rosa's Planning Division.

Background and Historic Setting

Santa Rosa's Ridgway neighborhood is 11 ½ blocks bounded by Highway 101 and Ridgway, Mendocino, and College avenues. The historic district is primarily characterized by modest-sized houses constructed for working- and middle-class Santa Rosans mostly between 1910 and the 1940s. In 1977, Dan Peterson surveyed the neighborhood and recommended it eligible as a historic district, noting two expansive landmark houses on Mendocino Avenue. The Queen Anne style W.H. Lumsden house and the Shingle style Oates/Comstock residence were both designed by notable regional architect Brainerd Jones shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. Peterson noted that much of the neighborhood was constructed by local contractors Roberts and Simpson, making particular note of "well-designed 1920s residences" and stated that the neighborhood "provides a panoramic view of the historic progression of building styles." In 2006, Santa Rosa's Cultural Heritage Board recommended the neighborhood's designation as a historic district, and the City Council adopted the district the following year in Resolution #3818.

In 2017, the neighborhood continues to exhibit much of the character first documented by Peterson four decades earlier. The core of the district is dominated by small houses constructed between 1900 and World War II. As Peterson suggested, they are examples of the styles popular for middle-class housing during each decade: American Foursquare and simple folk houses with pyramidal roof from the first decade of the century, Craftsman bungalows beginning about 1910, followed by Spanish Revival, Tudor, and then Minimal Traditional houses built during the Great Depression and World War II. The diversity of style, era, and building type is even greater than Peterson's report suggests: there is infill from every decade after World War II as well. Newer buildings include individually designed houses from the 1950s and a small subdivision with a characteristic bulb cul-de-sac developed in the early 1960s. There are larger lots along College and Mendocino which (particularly in the southern part of the neighborhood) that have been redeveloped with non-contributing apartment buildings from a variety of eras as well as commercial buildings constructed in recent decades, and even a gas station at a prominent corner. Mendocino Avenue features several expansive houses (including those noted by Peterson) as well as pre- and post-war institutional buildings, historic-period houses converted to commercial use, and non-contributing modern commercial structures. In 2006, the City mapped the district and found 75% of its buildings to be contributors. Resurvey is outside the scope of this document, but recent photographs indicate that some resources have likely been lost or significantly altered in the intervening decade. Replacement of original wood and steel casement windows with inappropriate modern vinyl windows is common throughout the district.

Project Evaluation

The Peterson survey and City Council resolution adopting the neighborhood as a historic district do not provide guidelines for compatible infill. In the absence of specific local design guidelines, the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties have been consulted. The Standards are widely accepted nationwide as guidelines for the treatment of historic properties. While originally intended to shape historic preservation of individual landmark buildings, parts of the Standards are relevant to infill construction in historic districts:

New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

The Sequoia Green Townhomes Project conforms to the above standards by not destroying historic materials and by being designed to be both differentiated from and compatible with historic buildings. The most important element of the new buildings is that their massing, size, and scale are carefully designed so as not to overwhelm modest-sized historic dwellings. Setbacks and the rhythm of the neighborhood are also carefully designed. (Out-of-scale modern buildings are one of the greatest threats to historic settings.) Compatibility is further achieved through the use of single-car garages, moderate-pitch gable roofs, and porches. Elements such as board-and-batten and stucco cladding are also compatible with the natural materials common throughout the district. Single-light windows without mullions differentiate the new buildings from their historic neighbors, as do shared side walls.

Recommendations

The Sequoia Green Townhomes project will enhance the Ridgway Historic District by providing compatible residential infill. The neighborhood, like many others in the North Bay region, developed gradually over the course of a century, and the most salient characteristic of this district is its diversity. The construction of new housing on a small scale within the district adds to that diversity and provides a through line to its incremental development.

Preparer's Qualifications

I meet the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualifications for both History and Architectural History. I hold a Master's degree in Public History and have worked in multiple facets of historic preservation and cultural resource evaluation since 2007. My experience includes municipal preservation planning and working as the lead staff member of a non-profit preservation organization. Since 2012, I have worked full-time as a historical consultant, completing dozens of evaluations for CEQA and Section 106 compliance. Additionally, I have completed local and national register nominations, historic context statements, and HAER recordation. The North Bay is the center of my practice, but I frequently work in the greater Sacramento area and other parts of the Bay Area, and have also completed projects in Southern California, Oregon, and New York. In addition to my work with historic-period domestic, agricultural, and commercial properties for private clients, I have evaluated post offices, military bases, university campuses, hospitals, church properties, and a NASA site. I am listed as a Historian and Architectural Historian on the California Office of Historic Preservation's roster of qualified consultants for every county in California.

Please contact me by phone at 707/290-2918 or e-mail at kara.brunzell@yahoo.com with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Kara Brunzell, M.A.
Brunzell Historical