

# **AVENUE 320 APARTMENTS**

**April 12, 2021**

**320 College Avenue  
Santa Rosa, CA**

## **Design Review and Major Landmark Alteration Application**

### **Project Description:**

The Applicant proposes the adaptive reuse of an existing 3-story office building located at 320 College Avenue into rental housing as well as the construction of a new 3 story apartment building. The site is located just east of Hwy 101, lies within the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan (DSASP) boundary with a General Plan designation of Retail Business Services and a Zoning of CD-5-H. The City has recently adopted an update to the DSASP which among many changes, proposed a new zoning change for this parcel to NMU. (Neighborhood Mixed Use.) The reuse and remodeling of the existing office building will create 20 apartment units; the new building will house an additional 17 units for a total of 37 market rate rental units. The unit mix will consist of (7) Studios, (13) 1-Bedroom and (17) 2-Bedroom units.

The existing office building is currently improved with multiple office suites on floors 2 and 3. Floor one contains the lobby entrance to the office floors, parking garage and vehicular pass-through to the parking lot at the southerly portion of the site. The subject property has suffered from poor occupancy over the past 5-7 years and has gone through 2 ownership changes. These owners did not have the desire to renovate and enhance the office environment. The proposed project is supported within the NMU Zoning District and per Zoning Code Section 20-16.060 A.6, multi-family uses are permitted by right without the need of a Conditional Use Permit. The project will improve the landscaping along College Avenue and Lincoln Street and will provide 36 parking stalls, one short of a 1:1 ratio; 25 stalls will be covered and 11 will be uncovered. The project will provide a common patio area, bike storage, and private outdoor space for some of the units. The new building will also offer a common roof top patio on the southern portion of the building.

The new zoning designation of NMU has no height limit, but instead uses Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to govern development size. (See section 20-23.060) The subject parcel has an FAR designation of 4. For context, and based on the zoning code alone, this would allow for a building size of approximately 110K square feet with parking on ground floor and habitable spaces on floors 2-5. The max unit count with a FAR of 4 for this site, would likely result in about 120 units. The proposed project will be far below this limit. Current calculations show a FAR of about 1.18, which is below the FAR of 2 midpoint guideline. For context only, the midpoint would likely result in a building of about 55K square feet and a unit count near 60. Due to both our adaptive reuse of the 3-story office building and taking into consideration that the property is situated in a historic district of primarily single-family residences, we feel that a FAR of 4 or even the midpoint of 2 is not appropriate. Accordingly, we have designed the project to compliment and respect the neighborhood's architectural context, density, and historic character. This has resulted in a FAR of 1.18.

The existing office building is 3 stories and approximately 35 feet in height. Although the proposed new building will be 3 stories with an approximate height of 37 feet at its highest point, the portion closest to Lincoln Street will be 2 stories and approximately 22 feet in height. This southerly building façade is set back approximately 30 feet from the curb at Lincoln Street. The existing office building has a northerly building frontage that extends the full width of the property along College Avenue. The new building's façade will extend across approximately 43% of the Lincoln Street frontage width. This frontage width was in part determined by our desire to minimize the massing and visual impact of the building on the Lincoln Street neighborhood.

### **Historic Neighborhood:**

Although the property lies in the St. Rose Historic District, this block only contains one contributing historic property. (See contributing/non-contributing map attached.) It is also noteworthy that the project site is one of only two properties in the district with frontage on both College Avenue and Lincoln Street. This creates a unique situation of trying to architecturally transition between the Lincoln Street residential frontage, and the highly trafficked College Avenue commercial frontage. The revised DSASP has language (see section 20-28.110, F) that identifies Neighborhood Transition Standards for residential projects. This parcel is excluded from transition guidelines due to the full block connection. (See attached Figure 2-26)

The College Avenue frontage consists of an existing office building that appears to have been built before the St. Rose District was created. Our design proposes a modest exterior renovation to modernize the façades of the existing building while creating a continuity in overall massing between the existing structure and the proposed structure. We have attempted to be thoughtful with the massing of the new structure and its relationship to the Lincoln Street frontage. Based on comments from the public and the Design Review Board members at our DRB meeting on January 21, 2021, we have substantially redesigned and lowered the new building from 4 stories to 3. In addition, we have increased the setback of the lower level further back from the street curb than previously proposed. This change more closely aligns our building setback to that found at other buildings along Lincoln Street. We have maintained a stepped setback approach to the building height, with 2 story elements placed at the public sidewalk frontage. As previously noted, the two-story portion of the building is approximately 30 feet from the street curb, and the three-story portion is approximately 60 feet back from the curb.

The concept proposed now is a Spanish Colonial Revival style. The building incorporates an arched recessed entry form with Spanish detailing including accent tile work, low stucco walls around ground floor entry courtyards, wooden trellis structures at street facing balconies, a wooden pergola at the third floor roof terrace and traditional Juliet balconies at several west and east facing windows. This Spanish Colonial Revival style is one of the architectural styles associated with the 1930's period in our community, and this particular section of Lincoln has about a half dozen structures utilizing this style. We have considered feedback from the DRB meeting on January 21, 2021 and abandoned the previous Art Deco style in favor of this Spanish Colonial Revival style that was encouraged by neighbors and Board members in that meeting. We feel this new scale, massing and architectural aesthetic better conforms with the neighborhood's primarily single story homes, as well as the common Spanish styling that we have identified along Lincoln Street. This scale also allows us to meet the design intent and residential density of the General Plan and DSASP.

There was some discussion during our DRB meeting about whether an Art Deco or Modern architectural style was appropriate in this district, and perhaps a different style would be better suited. We've listened to that opinion and have modified the architectural style to that of Spanish Colonial Revival. The new architectural style integrates well into this area of Lincoln Street, surrounded by other similarly styled homes (e.g. directly across the street). There are a half dozen or so multifamily properties in the St Rose district that reflect Victorian, Spanish, Italianate, Plantation and Art Deco style. Although there is no clear or dominant architectural style of multifamily properties within this district, this section of Lincoln does have several Spanish style homes and duplexes. The building located at 442 8<sup>th</sup> St, is a multi-story Spanish revival/Mediterranean apartment property, that also provides evidence that this style is already part of the historic district. We feel that the Spanish Colonial Revival style is appropriate for the historic period of the neighborhood and was a commonly used style of that period for multistory commercial and residential buildings. Not only was it a common style, the amended DSASP references this style of building as a "type" found within the district. (20.23.060 section 14, paragraph H). There are no further guidelines outlined in the revised DSASP specific to this historic district.

The proposed building height of the new building is now 3 stories. The NMU zoning designation has no height limit. There were several comments about building height and proximity to the public sidewalk. Our new design has both eliminated a floor and pushed the building back further from the street. We continue to offer a stepped back façade design which softens the building's relationship with the street; additionally, the new landscaping will further enhance the transition from street to building. There are existing multifamily properties in this historic district with 3 story elements much closer to the public sidewalk and street than we are proposing. For example, the building at 616 B Street has 3 story elements within about 15 feet of the sidewalk; this is considerably closer to the street than we are proposing.

Along Lincoln Street we will replace 3 trees in the sidewalk planters and plant an additional 3 trees between the sidewalk and the new building to help further enhance the pedestrian streetscape and visually reduce the height of the new building. The landscape frontage along College Avenue will also be enhanced.

### **Parking and Traffic:**

The parking standards for this site are governed by the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan. The DSASP divides this area into seven sub-sections. According to the DSASP, this area will use the existing land use parking requirements outlined in Zoning Code section 20, Table 3-4. The parking standard has been modified in the recent DSASP update, and there is no requirement for on-site parking. However, due to market conditions and neighborhood concerns, we have always designed the project to include on-site parking. The current project will offer a total of 36 parking spaces, which is just under a 1:1 ratio. Several projects within the DSASP are proposing as much as a 100% onsite parking reduction.

Parking is always a concern for the community, developer and City. However, parking needs can vary greatly depending on the type of development, location and end user. We believe the demand for parking at Avenue320 will be much less than a typical apartment development built outside of the City Center for the following reasons:

1. The unit mix includes 7 studios, 13 one bedroom and 17 two-bedroom units, with approximate sizes of 455 square feet, 572 square feet and 882 square feet respectively. This unit mix with its

small apartments sizes is more appropriate for single people and couples, not for families or extended families that would have a greater need for parking. Demand for parking will be reduced based on the demographic nature of the tenants who will find it attractive to live in units of this size and location.

2. The project is within 0.9 miles of the SMART station and about a ½ mile walk to the transit mall. People who choose to live in a more urban environment will by nature be more receptive to walking and using public transportation. These same residents will be less reliant on a car and less likely to own a car. Also worth pointing out is the fact that the current parking requirements were designed before the widespread implementation of ride share services which are becoming a common mode of alternative transportation for urban residents.
3. We currently also find ourselves in a post-COVID work environment where many, people in the workforce are choosing to work from home on a more permanent basis. This trend appears to have taken root and many employers are offering a permanent work from home option. Large companies like Sales Force, Google and Nationwide have all voiced a shift to abandon many brick and mortar office buildings for the “work from home model”. Other small local office users are doing the same. The demand for office space is anticipated to drop by up to 20% and as a result more residents will work from home and have less of a reliance on cars and the need for parking.
4. The zoning code offers some features to help make existing parking more efficient. One of these options is to “unbundle” parking from rent. Under this model, a tenant who has no car can opt to pay reduced rent and forgo a parking space that can be made available for a guest or another tenant who has a greater parking need. This keeps more of the parking demand on-site rather than in the community. We intend to employ this unbundling strategy.

From a parking supply perspective, our parking and transit report by W-Trans dated March 29, 2021 identifies on-street parking availability on Klute, Lincoln, 10<sup>th</sup> and Washington Streets as well as the 7<sup>th</sup> street parking garage (which is within ¼ mile of the development). Based upon our project’s anticipated reduced demand for parking and the availability of on-street and garage structure parking spaces within ¼ mile of our proposed project, we believe on-site parking demand will be reduced and that our parking needs will be met through a combination of on-site and off-site parking spaces.

There was also some discussion at the neighborhood meeting about traffic flow to and from the property. We wish to point out that the traffic volume and patterns of a 19,000 square foot office building are of greater impact to the surrounding neighborhood than traffic associated with a multifamily development. This can be further reviewed in our Focused Traffic Study by W-Trans dated March 29, 2021. The number of trips to and from the property as a fully occupied office building is far greater than the number of trips generated by a 39-unit multifamily project. Our project is also unique, in that it provides 3 different ways to enter and leave the property. There are driveways on both the College Avenue and Lincoln Street frontages. We understand we may need to limit the turning direction of ingress and/or egress at College Avenue, but these two driveways will both be used to enter and exit the property. Additionally, the northeasterly ground floor parking area is accessed via College Avenue only. This area will provide parking for 12 vehicles and account for almost 25% of the project’s vehicular traffic; these 12 vehicles will only enter and exit onto College Avenue and will not impact Lincoln Street. We are also exploring bicycle share programs and other non-automobile modes of transportation to help decrease short car ride trips and promote a housing community that has easy access to bicycles for these shorter trips.

## **General Plan Goals this project would satisfy:**

### **Section (NSRSA Plan) AH-3.1 “Encourage housing of all types, including students and seniors”.**

This proposed project would provide studio, 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom units, the majority of which would be either located on the ground floor or served by elevator and meet State accessibility requirements.

### **General Plan, Section 4-8: H-A, H-C,**

The proposed project meets the goal of providing housing needs for all Santa Rosa residents by increasing the supply of apartment units.

**Section H-C: Expand the supply of Housing available to Lower Income Households.** The proposed project will be a market rate development that will provide housing near and possibly below the median rent for similar style of housing. Half of this project will not be new construction, units will be compact in size and there will be no pool, work out room or similar amenity. Based on these factors the project will not command the amount of rent achievable in other parts of the community.

**Adaptive Reuse:** This project would meet the definition of Adaptive Reuse in the General Plan. The proposed project would reuse and repurpose the existing building. This approach is significantly better for the local environment than the demolition and dumping of the existing structure’s materials into a landfill. Additionally, the reuse allows us to keep project costs lower, resulting in rents that are more attainable for renters.

### **Summary:**

The applicant has dramatically changed the style of the project based on feedback from the recent DRB meeting. In addition to stylistic changes in both buildings, the new building’s setback was increased and its height was lowered in response neighborhood and Board member feedback. The proposed project will provide 37 units of housing of varying sizes within the downtown core. The project will provide a transition between the non-historic commercial College Avenue frontage and the St. Rose Historic District. Housing continues to be a challenge for the community; the adaptive reuse concept we are proposing for the existing building allows the project to obtain entitlements in less time and at a lower cost than comparable bare land projects. The applicant is targeting a first quarter 2022 construction start, with units available by early 2023. The project will offer in-unit laundry facilities, covered parking, private and public outdoor spaces and elevator service. Additionally, the project is walking distance to downtown shops, restaurants, services and the new Courthouse Square. The project site also has easy access to public transportation, including being located 0.9 miles from the Santa Rosa SMART depot as well as nearby bike paths. The current project brought forth by the applicant, is an exemplary effort that incorporates the feedback of the community and results in a sensitively designed project very fitting for the complex contextual and architectural nuances of this neighborhood.

Exhibit A:

Figure 2-26: Transition Areas

