Hedgpeth Architects

1650 West Steele Lane Apartments

Conditional Use Permit Project Description

June 2022

Applicant:	McBride Lane Apartments, LLC Patrick O'Neill 19 Leona Drive San Rafael, CA 94903
Owner:	Same as above
Architect:	Hedgpeth Architects 2321 Bethards Drive Santa Rosa, CA 95405
Project Location:	1650 West Steele Lane Santa Rosa, CA 95403
APN:	041-042-012
Site Size:	1 Acre; 43,560 sf
General Plan:	Medium Density Residential
Proposed Land Use:	Medium High Residential
Zoning:	R-3-15-SA
Proposed Zoning:	R-3-15-SA
Total Allowable Units:	18
Total Proposed Units:	36 in three residential buildings, Buildings I, II, and III
Total Proposed Parking:	36 stalls, 25 of which are in an automated parking structure, Building IV and additional 6 of which are covered, and 5 of which are surface.
Required Setbacks:	
Front:	10 feet
Corner Side:	10 feet
Rear:	15 feet at dwelling; 3-5 feet at garage; abutting PD zone
Side:	10 feet, abutting CG-SA zone (a concession of development standard is requested). The project proposal includes a request for a setback reduction at side yard, from 10' to 5' (at the Parking Structure).
Allowable Site Coverage:	55%
Proposed Site Coverage:	35%
Allowable Maximum Height:	35 feet
Proposed Maximum Height:	less than or equal to 45 feet
Garbage Collection:	Trash enclosure positioned at south property line on the drive aisle

Project Design Concept:

1650 West Steele Lane Apartments, (the Project), is located in Northwest Santa Rosa, in the North Santa Rosa Station Area, situated at the corner of West Steele Lane and Meadowbrook Court. The ±0.98-acre site is currently vacant. (See Figure 1, Site Analysis Map) By utilizing the City of Santa Rosa's Resilient City Development Measures and the City's Density Bonus Ordinance, amending chapter 20-31 to allow up to 100% Supplemental Density Bonus above General Plan to sites within the North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan boundaries. The site is within one half mile of mass transit and major retail and business services, parks and cultural institutions. It is located within a housing opportunity district and can be developed with up to 18 units by right. With a State Density Bonus of 50%, the parcel is eligible to develop an additional 9 units, 3 of which are affordable to Very Low Income residents. With the City's Supplemental Density Bonus, the parcel is eligible for an additional 50% Density Bonus or 9 units, 1 of which is affordable to very low income residents. The site is eligible to request a density of 36 units to the acre, 4 units of which are deed restricted. The four affordable units are in three 1- bedroom units at levels 2 and 3, and one 3- bedroom unit at level 1.

The Project comprises 36 units in three 3-story residential buildings, (Buildings I, II and III), and one structure, Building IV, which houses a two level automated parking structure. The unit mix includes (3) three bedroom units, (27) two bedroom units, and (6) one bedroom units. The units are grouped around (7) exterior covered exit stairways/balconies, giving each cluster of units private entries.

The main entrance to the project is an elevated landscaped plaza at the corner of West Steele Lane and Meadowbrook Court, with a ramped and landscaped accessible path up to the plaza center, and under a main archway at Building I, leading into a private inner courtyard which is the visual and active center of the campus of buildings. The plaza acts as a transitional space between the urban public realm and the residential communal open space within. By bringing the facades and ground floor patio walls of Buildings I and II up to the sidewalks on both streets, and by locating the Laundry, Lounge and Office spaces around the plaza and to face the public streets, the design of the courtyard apartments activate the street frontage.

Parking is located at the rear of the site in a 25-stall, two level automated parking structure. Five additional surface parking stalls are located along the entry drive and six additional covered parking stalls are located at the ground floors of Buildings II and III at the rear (south) of the site. The project proposes a parking ratio of 1 stall for every unit. Per the City's parking standard for housing in the North Station Area Specific Plan, 36 stalls are required.

(9) bicycle parking stalls are provided within lockable storage compartments and 9 short term bicycle parking stalls are provided.

A public library, two museums, the ice arena, a major shopping area with a large food stores, a wide variety of local small businesses and services, public rail and bus transit services, bike and pedestrian paths, and local parks are located within walking distance (1/4 mile) of the project. See Figure 1.

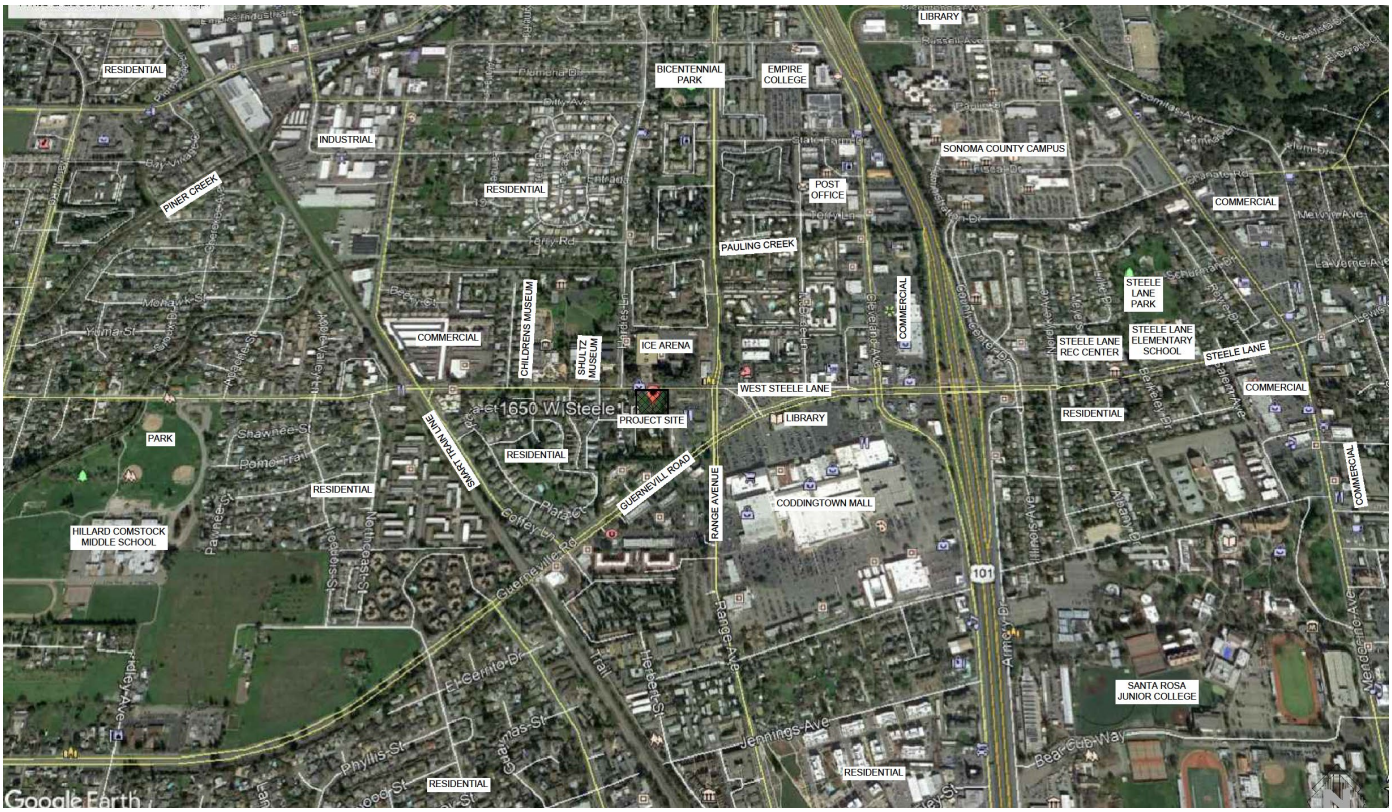

Figure 1.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Location and Setting:
The subject property is one acre in size and consists of one parcel (APN 041-042-012). The site is located in the Northwest quadrant of the city of Santa Rosa, at the southeast corner of the intersection of West Steele Lane and Meadowbrook Court. The parcel is accessible from both streets. The project address is 1650 West Steele Lane.

Topography and Natural Features:
The subject property is moderately vegetated with mature trees, grasses and herbaceous plant material. The site is of relatively flat, sloping down from the southeast corner to the northwest corner at +/- 1/8" per foot.

Surrounding Land and Land Uses:
The site is located at the southeast corner of West Steele Lane and Hardies Lane. Retail and commercial uses exist at the intersection on the south side of West Steele Lane and Range Avenue, and also at the northeast corner of West Steele Lane and Hardies Lane. At the northwest corner of West Steele Lane and Hardies Lane, the uses are Public and Institutional, in the Schulz Museum and Children's Museum campuses. Medium Residential single family dwellings and two story apartment buildings are located south of West Steele Lane between Meadowbrook Court and Naomi Place.

Existing Physical Conditions:
As depicted on Figure 1, above, and in the photographs of the site, below, the parcel is vacant and undeveloped.

Site Interior looking north to ice rink

Site Interior looking south to apartments and carports

Site from West Steele Lane frontage

Site Interior looking west to apartments

Development Plan:

The Supplemental Bonus Density Ordinance creates a sensible development boundary for this last remaining infill lot in its neighborhood. Within a half mile radius of the subject site, there are substantial blocks of parcels zoned R-3-30 SA and TV-R-SA, as well as CG-SA. The increased density proposed for this parcel is also consistent with the pattern of projected overall land development in this district. Increased residential density for the subject parcel would provide superior access opportunities for Santa Rosa residents who want to live in rental housing and contribute additional units for much needed affordable, and affordable by design, dwellings.

The city of Santa Rosa is experiencing a very low vacancy rate, causing rents to escalate above affordable levels for many residents. The vacancy rate is exacerbated by a growing economy concurrent with the loss of thousands of housing units in the Tubbs/Nuns fires of October 2017. Although the Housing Element has identified numerous sites within the city limits for medium to higher density development, many of those sites lack sufficient infrastructure. At the project site, infrastructure is readily available to service residents. The applicant's intention is to develop a market rate project with an affordable rental component.

The site is outside the boundary for CTS, would have superior access from two primary collectors, Guerneville Road and Range Avenue, a major arterial, Highway 101, the SMART train stop, several county and city bus lines, bicycle and pedestrian trails along the SMART line, is serviceable by sewer, water and other utilities, and is without major vegetation, creeks or major drainage swales. The project proposal will include a Traffic Study that addresses on and off-site circulation.

Automated parking in two levels, which is proposed as part of the project development, significantly reduces the area of land given to automobile parking and circulation in comparison to neighboring developments. EV charging for vehicles and a ride share and/or Clipper card amenity for the tenants will also be considered in order to support reduction of automobile traffic from the project.

The courtyard plan utilizes the available land to maximize views from the proposed dwellings to the landmark ice arena and museums to the north, to the neighborhood street, Meadowbrook Court, on the west, and to the interior courtyard semi-private communal open space. Consistent with the Housing Element in the General Plan, the courtyard also optimizes the individual apartments' access to daylight and ventilation at the interior of the site, while creating an appearance of openness to the neighborhood with one major pedestrian point of entry from the public right of ways, one major vehicular point of entry from Meadowbrook Court, and one secondary point of pedestrian entry from Meadowbrook Court.

The character of the area would change from being the last remaining vacant lot to becoming a revitalizing and unifying use of land for multifamily housing. By implementing the Supplemental Bonus Density, the Project effectively supports the surrounding urban infrastructure, rail line, bus transit, and bike/pedestrian paths. The project vision is to be specifically transit oriented and to proactively reduce dependence on the automobile.

The courtyard archetype is associated with rich precedents in imagery and cultural history. It creates an attractive space for social interaction and integrates with the existing urban street fabric by reinforcing a continuum from public to semi-private to private open space. The site is a corner infill lot, allowing for multiple entries from the right of ways on two sides.

The Project's courtyard branches out in three open passages inviting exploration into the spaces beyond and introducing the elements of personal space, surprise and curiosity for visitors and residents. The plaza at the northwest corner of the site, and the internal outdoor open courtyard are also a zone of merging with its neighborhood, providing access from the realm of the private dwelling to semi-private and public outdoor spaces. The plaza and courtyard serve as intermediate links between the scale of the home and the scale of the neighborhood. The project design is developed around two archetypes of urban space—a space enclosed by individual dwellings (the residential courtyard garden apartment) and a space that is a terminus point along a city street (a residential park, square, or plaza).

The geometry of the courtyard's shape and the sense of enclosure it provides differentiate this interior outdoor realm as a private, controlled environment, distinct from the public life of the city beyond. The configuration of the courtyard provides opportunities for social interaction, drawing the life of the city inward into the semi-private open space, away from sidewalk and street.

The car is integrated into the design with the driveway off Meadowbrook, surface parking on site, and the stack parking structure, without allowing its presence to intrude on the courtyard or take precedence in the circulation pattern.

The project has an affordable component and is eligible for up to a 100% density bonus. This proposal is also consistent with the goals of the General Plan to encourage growth through infill development that is within walking distance of, and supports local businesses and to encourage affordable housing in those same zones. The project's location in the North Station area will encourage lifestyle patterns that are consistent with the city's programs to reduce greenhouse gases, positively contribute to the Climate Action Program, and promote economic vitality in a Priority Development Area.

Qualifications of Project to be approved for a Minor Conditional Use Permit:

The land use activity proposed on the site, medium high residential at 36 units to the acre, including four units or 12% of below market rate for Very Low Income residents, is a compatible and desirable use in this zoning district, located in the North Station Plan area. The use is allowed by the State Density Bonus Government Code Section 65915. The site is also eligible for a Supplemental Density Bonus per Santa Rosa Municipal Code Section 20-31.070, because it is in an eligible Land Use area, the North Station Area, within ½ mile of a Major Transit Stop, and within ½ mile of a school. The use proposed is consistent with the General Plan and the North Station Area Specific Plan. The site is flat and physically suitable for multifamily residential medium high residential development at three stories with reduced parking. There is access to existing utilities and there are no physical constraints that would prevent development of the entirety of the parcel or access to the project by emergency vehicles and apparatus. Granting this project a use permit would consistent with the multi-family developments directly to the south and west of it, and with the retail uses to the east, as well as with the recreational facility to the north of it. The proposed project has been reviewed and found to be compliant with the California Environmental Quality Act in an accompanying Addendum to EIR document.