

Debbie Pedro, Community Development Director,
City of Saratoga, California

March 14, 2023

Cc:

J. James Lindsay, City Manger
Cynthia Richardson, Consultant for proposed SRC project
Mayor Fitzsimmons
Vice Mayor Zhao
Council members Aftab, Page, and Walia

Dear Debbie,

Table III-2 in the Housing Element Draft EIR shows a Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) for the Above Moderate-Income category of 719 units with a total of 864 units planned, with a 20% buffer, the highest percentage buffer of any other income category.

Residents of the Saratoga Retirement Community (SRC) understand that the SRC expansion project proposed by Pacific Retirement Services (PRS) is listed in the Draft EIR as a "pipeline project" and that the City of Saratoga is required to list it as a development project recently approved or under review. However, we believe that the single advantage for the city from the 52 proposed new units is to satisfy state-mandated housing requirements. Because there is already a huge surplus of Above Moderate-Income units, we feel there is little justification to approve the proposed expansion at all.

This letter represents a concerted effort by many SRC residents. The following is a summary of their issues and comments to the Housing Element Draft EIR:

- The addition of 52 housing units at SRC would significantly increase the amount of traffic congestion on Odd Fellows Dr., the single access road. More residents means more personal vehicle traffic for residents and additional employees as well as increased truck traffic for deliveries, services, and maintenance. Congestion will already be greatly increased as a result of the 80 additional low-income housing units approved for Fellowship Plaza, for which Odd Fellows Dr. is also the single access road. (Draft EIR sections IV. M, IV. N)
- Additional vehicle traffic will proportionally increase noise and air pollution. (Draft EIR section IV. B)
- SRC is already the number one initiator of fire and ambulance response in Saratoga. Adding 52 housing units means around 75 new residents, with the potential to significantly increase the current number of calls. Note that because the Odd Fellows is a nonprofit organization, there would be no additional property tax revenue from an increase in housing units to cover the anticipated increase in service requests. (Draft EIR sections IV. L, IV. M)
- Access for timely emergency evacuation for SRC and Fellowship Plaza is already strained. Adding 52 units to SRC and 80 units to Fellowship Plaza would push successful evacuation efforts beyond possibility on a single, one-lane access road (there is a one-lane emergency access path to Chester Ave., but it is too narrow for emergency vehicles and too steep and rugged for average passenger cars). Consider that in addition to personal vehicles, 30 to 40 ambulance-trips would be required to evacuate skilled nursing patients and assisted living residents. The Draft EIR

studied general evacuation routes for the city but did not specifically address these senior communities. (Draft EIR sections IV. L, IV. M, IV. N)

- The PRS proposal to add 52 housing units to the SRC campus requires the removal of approximately 68 mature trees, mostly native oaks and redwoods. Many of these trees are over 100 years old, and some are up to 6 feet in diameter and over 100 feet high. The green open space known as Odd Fellows Historical Park would also be covered by building sites. Although the development plan promises to plant new trees around the campus, the aesthetics of mature trees would not be regained for decades. Many SRC residents made the decision to move to the community based on the tranquil, rural setting of the campus. Saratoga prides itself on being “the Tree City,” and Saratoga Municipal Code Article 15-50 safeguards these trees. (Draft EIR sections IV. A, IV. C, IV. I, IV. K)
- The aesthetic value of the 1912 Manor building, listed in Saratoga’s Heritage Resource Inventory, would be completely obliterated under the PRS proposal. A two-story apartment building with two-level underground garage is planned within a few yards of the front entrance, completely obscuring the scenic vista of this landmark building. A huge new annex, including an auditorium and underground parking garage, would be added to one side of the building, ruining the architectural balance for which the building is famous. The Draft EIR should explain the effect of these visual changes and explore realistic alternatives. (Draft EIR sections IV. A, IV. D)
- Massive excavation required for the proposed apartment building, annex, and underground garage must be evaluated to determine potential destabilization to the Manor building. (Draft EIR sections IV. E, IV. H)
- An increase of 75 residents at SRC means an increase of approximately 75 low-income employees to staff and service positions. Saratoga already needs more Low-Income category housing units to maintain an acceptable jobs-to-housing balance. As previously stated, the current plan has a 20% buffer of 145 Above Average-Income housing units. Please consider denying approval of the 52 Above Average-Income units to increase the jobs-to-housing balance in Saratoga.

The SRC residents signing this letter do understand that PRS, our out-of-state management company, against the objections of many of the residents, would like the extra income generated by building more apartment units. However, for the reasons stated here, residents do not believe it is in the best interests of the City of Saratoga to approve the project.

Please confirm by written response to info@preservesrccampus.org your receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,

The following Independent Living Saratoga Retirement Community residents (who confirmed permission to sign this letter by email)

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