

## **Lafayette – Narrative**

February 29, 2016

### **Parking:**

In response to Planning Commission comments from February 1, we have re-arranged the parking stall layout, in order to locate a greater number of “public” restaurant or retail parking stalls in close proximity to the elevator and stairs dedicated for those users. As a result, there is also a net gain of two parking stalls, a total of 62 “public” parking stalls. The number of secured residential “private” parking stalls remains unchanged at 109.

### **Loading:**

We responded to the Commissioners’ concern regarding the loading zone on Mt Diablo Blvd, and lengthened it to accommodate valet parking and restaurant drop offs. While preserving a generous plaza and sidewalk in front of the restaurant, we added 4 ft. in length to the loading zone to comfortably fit two passenger cars, and further tapered the curb to allow cars and delivery trucks to pull into the loading zone easily, and pull out of it without having to back-up. This ensures safe and streamlined vehicle movements while preserving the pedestrian realm.

### **Design:**

The current proposed design concept recommended by Staff and endorsed by the Design Review Commission (“DRC”) was based on careful studies of the context of the existing Lafayette downtown community fabric, in keeping with the scale of similar significant downtown projects as The Mercantile, as well as the Lafayette Public Library. In addition, the design concept is also based on the notion of enhancing the pedestrian experience within this transitional section of Mount Diablo Boulevard by integrating a series vibrant plazas and outdoor spaces, in conjunction with fine grain scale quality architecture. In terms of the design process, the design team has, in collaboration with Staff and the DRC, explored many combinations of architectural character options – various roof forms, massing variation, transparency, architectural style variations. After almost three years of dialogues and collaboration with Staff, various city commissions, and large cross sections of the community, the proposed design collective direction was reached. The DRC has encouraged the team to further refine its design development in roof articulations, materials and details, based on a singular “Contemporary Architectural Language”.

Planning Commissioner's comments:

1. The Planning Commission commented and deliberated on whether the proposed architectural character is appropriate to downtown Lafayette – achieving the delicate balance of being timeless but yet distinctive enough to express the unique character of this western gateway district of Lafayette.

Proposed Design Response:

- a. After the aforementioned dialogue and collaboration with various stakeholders over the past years, the proposed design collective direction conclusion was reached: A coherent contemporary architectural language with timeless application is critical for the integrity of this gateway site and the future community character of Lafayette – in lieu of relying on faux stylistic variations and veiled historical references. (Design team will present the many concepts of architectural character schemes presented to community, Staff and DRC Commission in the coming meeting to the Planning Commission for reference)
  - b. The proposed architectural character was actually inspired by such transformative architect as Richard Neutra, Frank Lloyd Wright and Joseph Eichler, whose respected work is well ahead of its time, but yet maintains the integrity of high quality design transcending time and style. Our design team hopes to continue to rely on these important core values to further develop our form, materials, Details and colors and reinforce a timeless and quality architecture.
  - c. Lafayette has also evolved architecturally over its recent history – from the rustic Veterans Hall, the well-mannered Mercantile to the contemporary state of the art Lafayette library; each have enriched the overall character without sacrificing the integrity and quality of design. As the Downtown Plan calls for a western gateway, our team was challenged throughout the entitlement process by all to deliver a memorable mixed use project that reflects the highest aspiration of architecture, and not just simply another respectable residential project downtown.
2. Express more massing variations and contrast on the western building, avoid repetition of massing and avoid the expression of the “room size” architectural module perhaps by expression of a more nuanced blocks:

Proposed Design Response:

- a. Shearing a portion of the western building to further vary the proportion of the building components to avoid equal proportion of the two parts.
- b. Create more contrast between the horizontal and vertical component of the western building – articulate the stair tower as counter point to the simplified horizontal line.

- c. One story balconies further emphasize the horizontal lines, massing layering and interlocking of the building forms.
  - d. Simplify the upper floor form and roof element on the western building in keeping with the large landscape setback and large trees canopies.
  - e. The design team will also need to better utilize building materials, details and color to further enhance the contrast between the distinctive blocks.
3. Commercial area doesn't need to work too hard – perhaps simplify to simple storefront, The angle roof form maybe too “Iconic” and distracting to the overall composition :

Proposed Design Response:

- a. Simplifying the interlocking forms and simply articulating the storefront and canopy elements.
  - b. Explored two options – option 1: “Iconic pavilion concept“- maintain iconic angle roof but simplify storefronts and canopies. Option 2: “Building base concept“- simplify retail roof to be more integrated to the composition of the overall building.
  - c. Beyond the form, the continuation of the design development and the enhancement of material palette is meant to be contemporary but timeless and warm – inspired by such contemporary architects as Richard Neutra or Joseph Eichler, whose work transcend time and style.
4. Each of the four fronts along MDB should have a different feel and the east and the west to read as two separate city blocks, similar in scale to the blocks / building frontage that is seen throughout Downtown Lafayette.

Proposed Design Response:

- a. One of the attached design exhibits illustrates the various scale of the community fabric along the core of downtown Lafayette, with smaller scale blocks such as the adjacent office building up to full block development such as The Mercantile, this variation of scale, massing and character is part of the charm and uniqueness of downtown Lafayette. The proposed revisions of the proposed project emphasize the varying scale of each of the four components while respecting the two primary blocks, in keeping with the overall Lafayette community fabric and scale.
- b. Working through the process with staff, commissions, and community, we have learned that this site is situated in a unique transitional zone from downtown gateway to “semi-

rural” feel; therefore the design of the street character and the architectural frontage design are informed by the desire of an attractive and pleasant pedestrian and bike experience. Therefore, unlike the more urban feel of The Mercantile, the scale and massing of the architecture is working in concert with the scale of the series of public plazas and public open spaces that integrates the indoor and outdoor amenities together. (Illustrated in attached building diagram)

- c. The character of the Eastern building is punctuated by the finer grain scale of the transparent single level base restaurant and retail spaces with Nano doors which inherently activates the public plazas and sidewalks with outdoor seating and pedestrian activities. The residential upper floors are intentionally step backed to allow the retail and restaurant base to be the public downtown gateway.
- d. The character of the western building is well setback from the street edge and punctuated by substantial, large specimen trees buffer. The proposed simplifications of the western building will actually emphasize the landscape buffer rather than drawing attention to the building. The building base is activated by ground level stoops and porches which activates the more “semi-rural” zone of the western building.
- e. The design team will continue to work with DRC to further refine the eastern and western building massing, composition and design informed by these unique urban design characters in an organic ways, which inherently creates more authentic variations in the responses to the architecture. (Please see building diagram for reference)

We understand that in future meetings with the Design Review Commission (DRC), and with additional direction given by the Planning Commission, the design team will use material and detailed articulations to further create variations.