

# AVENUE 320 APARTMENTS

December 17, 2020

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 level office building located at 320 College Avenue into rental housing as well as the construction of a new 4 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 19 units for a total of 39 market rate rental units. The unit mix will consist of (7) Studios, (15) 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 had not had 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 1 parking stall per unit; 34 stalls will be covered and 6 will be uncovered. The project will also provide a common patio area, bike storage, and private outdoor space for some of the units.

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 sq.ft 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 118 units. The proposed project will be far below this limit. Current calculations show a FAR of about 1.31, which is below the FAR 2.0 midpoint guideline. For context only, the midpoint would likely result in a building of about 55K sq.ft and a unit count near 59. 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 2.0 is not appropriate. Accordingly, we have designed the project to compliment and respect the neighborhoods architectural context, density and historic character. This has resulted in a FAR of 1.31.

The existing office building is 3 levels and approximately 35 feet in height. Although the proposed new building will be 4 levels with an approximate height of 45 feet at its highest point, the portion closest to Lincoln Street will be 2 levels and approximately 24 feet in height. This southerly building façade is set back approximately 23 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 determined by three considerations: our desire to minimize the massing and visual impact of the building on Lincoln Street neighborhood, the need for vehicular access at the street and the need for an unobstructed paved Fire Department approved aerial access along the westerly portion of the site.

### **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 figure 2-6)

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 College Avenue façade of the existing building while creating a continuity in overall massing between our original 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. This was carried out by a stepped setback approach to the building height, with 2 story elements placed adjacent to the public sidewalk. As previously noted, the two-story portion of the building is approximately 23 feet from the street curb, and the four-story portion is approximately 33 feet back from the curb. The new building also incorporates a recessed entry form with a vertical stair tower element and vertical glazing reminiscent of Art Deco apartment buildings from the 1930's which is one of the architectural periods associated with this neighborhood. We have taken into account feedback from the neighborhood meeting on May 29, 2019 and softened some of the building edges with radiused and incorporated additional architectural features associated with Art Deco and Moderne buildings. We feel this scale, massing and architectural aesthetic is more in keeping with both the visual connection to the existing office building and the historic neighborhood than conforming to the primarily single-story scale of the adjacent homes. 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 neighborhood meeting about whether an Art Deco or Moderne architectural style was appropriate in this district, and perhaps a different style would be better suited. We do not agree with this opinion and make note of the following facts. There are a half dozen or so multifamily properties in the St Rose district that reflect Victorian, Spanish, Italianate, Plantation and Art Deco style. Additionally, there are several Art Deco style office buildings on B Street. There is no clear or dominant architectural style of multifamily properties within this district. We feel that the Art Deco

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 4 stories. The NMU zoning designation has no height limit. There were several comments about building height and proximity to the public sidewalk. We believe the stepped back façade design outlined above successfully softens this relationship; 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 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 40 parking spaces, which is 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, 15 one bedroom and 17 two bedroom units, with approximate sizes of 455 sq.ft, 572 sq.ft and 882 sq.ft respectively. This unit mix 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 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 current parking requirements were designed before the 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 reduce 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 November 25, 2019 identifies on-street parking availability on Klute, Lincoln, 10<sup>th</sup>, 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 July 30, 2019. 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 deliver 25 studio and 1-bedroom units all of which would be 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 proposed project will provide 39 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 for a housing project to obtain entitlements in less time, and at a lower cost than comparable bare land projects. The applicant is targeting a third quarter 2021 construction start, with units available by mid- 2022. 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 to the Santa Rosa SMART depot as well as nearby bike paths. The Applicant believes these housing units will be well received by the market and add to the vibrancy of the downtown core.

Exhibit A:

Figure 2-26: Transition Areas





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## RESPONSE TO CITY DESIGN GUIDELINE GOALS

Project: Avenue 320 Apartments 320 College Avenue, Santa Rosa

Date: October 29, 2020

### INTRODUCTION

#### PURPOSE

*B. A purpose of the design guidelines is to implement the Urban Design Element of Santa Rosa's General Plan.*

*The Santa Rosa 2020: General Plan envisions: "Santa Rosa's downtown as the heart of the City in year 2020. The scale of downtown relates to the pedestrian through ground-floor commercial, wide sidewalks, benches, street trees, and trash and recycling bins. Entertainment uses, offices, and restaurants provide a vibrant economic base for the downtown, which draws residents and visitors both in the daytime and in the evening.*

*The City also features safe, livable neighborhoods. Residents are able to walk comfortably from their homes to local markets and convenience services. Neighborhood parks provide youth and adults with varied recreational options. The physical form of a neighborhood--the character and pattern of streets, the land use pattern, the quality of public spaces, the landscape and natural features and the massing of materials of its built form--contributes significantly to its livability and long term success as a neighborhood."*

*Santa Rosa also features districts that build on their unique natural and historical features to achieve identity. Newer neighborhoods feature distinct architectural identities, while street and path connections provide linkages between different areas. New development respects the City's natural setting, located between the Sonoma Mountains and Laguna de Santa Rosa, and builds on its landscape qualities".*

The Avenue 320 project furthers the goals of the General Plan by providing additional higher density housing in an existing neighborhood on the edge of downtown. This will allow the residents to be within walking distance of existing services and neighborhood amenities. It also allows the project to utilize existing transportation and utility infrastructure and leverage all the economic and social advantages inherent in infill development. The downtown transit mall, the Guerneville Road SMART station, Santa Rosa High School and Santa Rosa Junior College are all within an approximate 1-mile radius of the project site. The proposed project reflects the historic neighborhood's unique architectural identity and strives to fill a void in the existing urban fabric and streetscape created by an underutilized commercial building and parking lot.

*F. One of the purposes of these guidelines is to facilitate Santa Rosa's transition from a community with development predominantly occurring at the periphery, to one where infill on vacant lots and increased density of the Core Area becomes more prominent.*

The Avenue 320 project is proposing to develop an existing site in a residential neighborhood fulfilling the city's desire to increase density in the Core Area. The project not only is creating additional much needed housing by repurposing an existing underutilized office building into rental apartments, it will be constructing a new apartment building in a portion of an existing parking lot.

*G. These Design Guidelines incorporate such traditional development patterns as: pedestrian oriented residential neighborhoods organized around centers that include mixed uses and open space; interconnected street systems; a variety of home sizes within a neighborhood; and mixed uses in the downtown area.*

The project is pedestrian orientated in that it is walking distance to downtown, schools, and transit centers which can assist in reducing automobile congestion in the city. The project, with its mix of studio, 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom rental units also meets the Guidelines' goal of providing a variety of home sizes and types in neighborhoods.

## **1.1 Neighborhood Design**

### **I. Goals**

*A. To promote the development of new "neighborhoods" that incorporate a variety of uses as opposed to subdivisions that feature single-family homes exclusively.*

*C. To promote neighborhoods that feature a variety of housing types (both single-family and multiple-family) as well as a variety of price ranges.*

The Avenue 320 project increases the diversity of the neighborhood with the addition of the multi-family housing type in a predominately single housing family neighborhood. This higher density in the city center also helps support the downtown commercial establishments, takes

advantage of downtown parks and plazas and is within easy access of public transit. The mix of studio, 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom apartments will provide a wider variety of rental price ranges in the neighborhood.

*G. To create neighborhoods that are safe and support Police and Fire Department efforts to promote public safety.*

The proposed project will provide a use on the site that is occupied at all hours of the day, seven days a week. This will increase eyes on the street and reduces the problems associated with having an empty commercial building nights and weekends.

## II. Guidelines

### B. Block and street pattern:

*5. Design streets to accommodate the pedestrian as well as bicycle and automobile use. A planter strip with street trees should be provided between the street and the sidewalk*

The current street frontage at the site has not been maintained or updated in many years. This project will incorporate a landscaped planter strip with street trees and improve the public sidewalks. City approved street trees in the landscape strip will provide summer shade for pedestrians and texture and pattern in the winter. They will also assist in reducing the visual impact of the new building on Lincoln Street.

## 1.3 Streetscapes

### I. Goals

*A. To create a pleasing environment that encourages pedestrian activity along our streets.*

The southerly site frontage along Lincoln Street is currently a parking lot. The new building will eliminate a portion of the spatial void currently created by having no building(s) on the southerly two-thirds of the site. The new building will also create visual interest for pedestrians and help maintain the rhythm of development along the street.

## 1.4 Transit

### I. Goals

*A. To increase use of the City's transit systems.*

The project's development within the downtown area will allow residents to potentially bicycle or walk to work and services and also live closer to transit facilities.

## **2.1 Downtown Area / Station Area**

### **Goal 2.1.1**

*Encourage dense development in the downtown area and station area, redirecting the focus of current growth away from the periphery and concentrating uses in an area with existing infrastructure and services.*

As previously stated, the proposed project will meet this goal by creating higher density infill residential development within an existing neighborhood near the downtown core. This type of development allows for efficient use of existing infrastructure and services.

## **2.4 Historic Districts within the Downtown Area and Station Area**

### **Goal 2.4.1**

*Design buildings to be sensitive to the neighborhood with regard to scale, architectural style, use or materials, bulk and historic context. This is especially important in designated historic districts.*

The project is located within the St. Rose Preservation District. As described in the City's Zoning Ordinance, "the St. Rose Preservation District is significant for its architecture as a cross-section of Santa Rosa's residential building types and some institutional and commercial types. Though primarily residential, the district has this variety because it is adjacent to Santa Rosa's commercial core ..." The historic St. Rose neighborhood is a primarily residential neighborhood with homes dating from 1872 to the 1940's in a variety of styles. The neighborhood also includes some larger commercial and institutional buildings. The 320 College project, whose site rather uniquely extends from a commercial College Avenue frontage to its residential Lincoln Street frontage, strives to provide a transition in both architectural style and massing between the two streets and the commercial versus residential uses.

The height and scale of the proposed multifamily residential structure at 320 College Avenue is consistent with that of other existing large buildings within the neighborhood, including the existing building on the northerly portion of the parcel. The mass of the building has been broken up and steps down to two stories in height along its Lincoln Street façade to integrate more gracefully with the smaller neighboring single-family residences. The 4-story portion of the new building's façade is set back approximately 34 feet from the face of curb on Lincoln Street.

The overall style of the building is reminiscent of the vernacular architecture in the neighborhood with intricate cornices as are seen in other large scale buildings nearby, windows in similar sizes, patterns and spacing, and a color and materials palette that is compatible with large and small buildings in the area including horizontal hardie board siding which mimics siding seen on many adjacent residences. The proposed building also has a high level of detail which is frequently seen in neighboring historic structures. The neighborhood has a wide variety of architectural styles, including bungalow, craftsman, Victorian, Italianate and art deco. The unique detailing on the front façade including vertical strip windows, horizontal awnings and railing elements adds visual interest and evokes a feeling of art moderne architecture which is a style of building represented in the St. Rose historic neighborhood and was a common style in that period for multifamily apartment buildings.

## **Section 3.2 - Multiple-Family Residential**

### **II. SITE DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

*1. Incorporate existing natural features such as trees, topography, creeks and riparian vegetation into the site plan. These and similar natural elements should be considered when developing a site plan. Every effort should be made to preserve dominant elements, such as mature trees, for example.*

A large existing oak tree on the property will be maintained and provide a focus for a communal outdoor courtyard for residents of the building. Additional planting in front of the building will add landscaping and interest from the street and will create a pleasant entry to the new building on Lincoln Street. Bicycle parking and utilities will be screened from the street by the building and vehicle parking will be under the building and hidden from the street view.

## **Section 4.3 - Infill Development**

### **II. GUIDELINES**

*1. Integrate new development carefully into existing neighborhoods with respect to scale, level of detailing, use of materials, landscaping, and other characteristics of the neighborhood.*

The new building on Lincoln Street is designed to relate to the existing historical architecture, massing, style, materiality and landscaping that exists in the neighborhood, while still providing the density of development required by the City's General plan and Design Guideline's goals.

*4. Design infill development at its edges to:*  
*a. approximate the scale and mass of adjacent existing residences;*

*b. include buildings which are detailed and articulated on at least the side facing adjacent existing residences (and preferably on all four sides). Long blank back or side walls are undesirable.*

In addition being designed to architecturally complement the historic neighborhood, the new building is detailed and articulated on all four sides and exhibits superior architecture with a distinctive and attractive form, including its curved front façade and horizontal windows, sunshades and banding which are elements often seen in moderne architecture. The building façade is reduced in height to two stories at the Lincoln Street Frontage to better relate to the street and the adjacent home in terms of massing and visual scale.

The project will provide a quality living for tenants, and its architecture and will enhance the public realm by replacing a unattractive parking lot.