

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS EIR

In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this Environmental Impact Report (EIR) describes the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Northgate Mall Redevelopment Project, also known as “Northgate Town Square” (project) submitted by Merlone Geier Partners, LLC (the project sponsor).¹ The City of San Rafael (City) is the CEQA Lead Agency for environmental review.

The purpose of this EIR is to inform City decision-makers, responsible agencies, and the general public about the proposed project and the potential physical environmental consequences of project implementation. This EIR also examines alternatives to the proposed project and recommends mitigation measures to reduce or avoid potentially significant physical environmental impacts to the extent feasible. This EIR will be used as an informational document by the City’s Planning Commission and City Council, responsible agencies, and the public in their review of the proposed project and associated approvals described below and in more detail in Chapter 3.0, Project Description.

1.2 PROPOSED PROJECT

The approximately 44.76-acre project site consists of the existing Northgate Mall, which is generally located at 5800 Northgate Drive in San Rafael, Marin County, California. The project site is bordered to the north and east by Las Gallinas Avenue and by Northgate Drive to the south and west. The project site is currently developed with the Northgate Mall, which consists of 11 buildings totaling approximately 942,597 square feet of building space, including an approximately 176,090-square-foot parking garage. The remainder of the site consists of surface parking and landscaped areas.

The proposed project would result in the redevelopment of the existing mall through demolition, renovation, and new construction with a mix of commercial and residential land uses. The proposed project would be developed in two phases. Phase 1 (also referred to as the 2025 Master Plan) would generally include the demolition of the RH Outlet building, the HomeGoods building, and the Mall Shops East, which is approximately 144,432 square feet of the main building, and construction of approximately 44,380 square feet of new commercial space and up to 922 residential units. Phase 2 (also referred to as the 2040 Vision Plan) would generally include the demolition of the 254,015-square-foot Macy’s building and 79,051-square-foot Kohl’s building, and the construction of up to 55,440 square feet of new commercial space and up to 500 additional residential units.

At full buildout, the project would include a total of up to approximately 217,520 square feet of commercial space and up to 1,422 residential units in six areas of the project site (1,746,936 square feet of residential area), 147 of which would be affordable units. A total of 648,807 square feet of existing building space would be demolished, and the total commercial area would be reduced by a

¹ Merlone Geier Partners, LLC. 2022. City of San Rafael General Planning Application for the Northgate Town Square Project. June 11. Updated May 2023.

total of 548,987 square feet.² Building heights across the project site would vary, with a maximum of approximately 78 feet. The first phase of the proposed project would include the construction of a Town Square near the center of the project site; additional common open space and landscaped areas would be provided in both the first and second phases. New internal roadways would be built within the project site that would provide access to each of the new buildings and surface parking lots.

Discretionary actions by the City that would be necessary for development of the proposed project include environmental review, rezoning, an Environmental and Design Review Permit, a Development Agreement, a tentative subdivision map, and a Master Sign Program. The project sponsor is also requesting to use the density bonus to modify the development standards for height on the project site.

1.3 EIR SCOPE

The City circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) informing responsible agencies and interested parties that an EIR would be prepared for the proposed project and which indicated the environmental topics anticipated to be addressed in the EIR. The NOP was published on December 9, 2021, and the NOP was mailed to public agencies, neighborhood organizations, property owners within the same zip code as the project site as well as individuals likely to be or who had previously expressed an interest in the potential impacts of the proposed project. A scoping session was held as a public meeting before the Planning Commission on January 11, 2022, to solicit feedback regarding the scope and content of the EIR. Both verbal comments from members of the Planning Commission and the public provided during the scoping session and written comments provided by State, regional, and local agencies and members of the public on the NOP were received by the City and considered during preparation of this EIR. Copies of the NOP, comment letters, and a summary of the verbal comments received are included in Appendix A.

Based on consultation with City staff and review of the comments received during the scoping process, the following environmental topics are addressed in Chapter 4.0, Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures, of this EIR:

- 4.1 Land Use and Planning
- 4.2 Population and Housing
- 4.3 Visual Resources
- 4.4 Cultural Resources
- 4.5 Tribal Cultural Resources
- 4.6 Geology and Soils
- 4.7 Hydrology and Water Quality
- 4.8 Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- 4.9 Transportation
- 4.10 Air Quality

² It should be noted that proposed square footages, residential unit mix, and other elements of the project have been refined since publication of the NOP, and that the project plans may be subject to continued refinement prior to consideration of project approval. The analysis in this EIR evaluates the maximum development potential for the proposed project. None of the project revisions since the NOP publication materially alter the type or scope of potential environmental effects that might arise from the project, or deprive potential responders of an accurate understanding of the project and its potential effects, so as to require revision and republication of the NOP.

- 4.11 Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- 4.12 Noise
- 4.13 Public Services and Recreation
- 4.14 Utilities and Service Systems
- 4.15 Energy

Preliminary analysis determined that development of the proposed project would not result in significant impacts to the following environmental topics: agriculture and forestry resources, biological resources, mineral resources, and wildfire. Consequently, these issues are not examined in Chapter 4.0 of this EIR and are instead briefly addressed in Chapter 5.0, Other CEQA Considerations.

1.4 REPORT ORGANIZATION

This EIR is organized into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1.0 Introduction:** Discusses the overall EIR purpose, provides a summary of the proposed project, describes the EIR scope, and summarizes the organization of the EIR.
- **Chapter 2.0 Summary:** Provides a summary of the impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed project, describes mitigation measures recommended to reduce or avoid potentially significant environmental impacts, and describes the alternatives to the proposed project.
- **Chapter 3.0 Project Description:** Provides a description of the project site, project objectives, proposed project, and uses of this EIR.
- **Chapter 4.0 Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures:** Describes the following for each technical environmental topic: existing conditions (setting), potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and level of significance, and mitigation measures recommended to reduce or avoid identified potential impacts. Potential cumulative impacts are also addressed in each topical section. Potential adverse impacts are identified by levels of significance, as follows: significant impact (S), less than significant impact (LTS), and significant and unavoidable impact (SU). The significance of each potential impact is categorized before and after implementation of any recommended mitigation measure(s).
- **Chapter 5.0 Other CEQA Considerations:** Provides an analysis of effects found not to be significant, including the Initial Study findings, growth-inducing impacts, unavoidable significant environmental impacts, and significant irreversible changes.
- **Chapter 6.0 Alternatives:** Provides an evaluation of two alternatives to the proposed project in addition to the CEQA-required No Project alternative.
- **Chapter 7.0 Report Preparation:** Identifies preparers of the EIR and the references used.

- **Appendices:** The following appendices are available online at: <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/northgate-town-square-rev/>:
 - Appendix A: Notice of Preparation and Comment Letters
 - Appendix B: Archaeological Resources Inventory Report
 - Appendix C: Historical Resources Evaluation
 - Appendix D: Geotechnical Investigation
 - Appendix E: Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
 - Appendix F: Transportation Impact Study
 - Appendix G: Signal Warrant Analysis
 - Appendix H: Transportation Operations Study
 - Appendix I: Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Technical Report
 - Appendix J: Noise and Vibration Technical Report
 - Appendix K: Water Supply Assessment
 - Appendix L: Energy Analysis