



12/08/2017

Garrett Norman, Assistant Planner  
City of Sacramento Community Development Department  
300 Richards Blvd., 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95811

**RE: Natomas Crossing (P17-062)**

Dear Mr. Norman,

WALKSacramento has reviewed the November 2, 2017 project routing for the Natomas Crossing project. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the project.

WALKSacramento works to support increased physical activity such as walking and bicycling in local neighborhoods as well as helping to create community environments that support walking and bicycling. The benefits include improved physical fitness, less motor vehicle traffic congestion, better air quality, and a stronger sense of cohesion and safety in local neighborhoods.

The Natomas Crossing project proposes development of 293 multi-family apartment units on a 10.3 acre parcel. The project site is located within walking distance to potential resident destinations including commercial businesses and future uses of the Sleep Train Arena site to the north; a school, park, and commercial businesses to the south; and future commercial uses on the adjacent parcel to the east. Two bus routes and a future proposed light rail stop are located east on Truxel Road and within walking distance of the project site.

This project as currently proposed does not conform to several City policies and design guidelines that are intended to support pedestrian-friendly community development in North Natomas and the City. For example, the North Natomas Community Plan in the 2035 General Plan (NN.LU. 1.14) indicates that the maximum size of apartment complexes should be 200 units and 8 acres. If in excess of 200 units and 8 acres, the project must "create multiple apartment complexes separated by a local street or other linkage." This policy helps improve overall circulation throughout the community by breaking up large lot sizes and providing direct pedestrian and bicycle connections to destinations such as transit and commercial development, both of which are adjacent to the project site.

Additionally, the City of Sacramento Multifamily Residential Design Principles notes that multi-family buildings should have pedestrian access to adjacent streets and are encouraged to be oriented toward the street in order to make walking as convenient as possible. The Natomas Crossing project does not follow either of these guidelines and further reduces pedestrian connectivity by enclosing the site with a gate. In comparison, the condominiums across Prosper Road to the south are completely open around the property and have buildings oriented toward the street as well as numerous sidewalks leading directly to the street from building entrances and parking zones.

It should be noted that Villagio Apartments to the west of the project site is another gated multi-family development in excess of 200 units and 8 acres that does not provide open, through access across the site. However, the development also implemented several strategies to improve pedestrian circulation. Each apartment building provides entryways facing adjacent streets as well as at least seventeen pedestrian access gates around the site. Additionally, a separated pedestrian and bike path on the west side of the project and detached sidewalk to the north on Arena Boulevard provide a comfortable and safe pedestrian experience that improves north-south and east-west connectivity.

Given the limitations of the proposed site layout and that past projects have been approved with exceptions to the NN.LU. 1.14 policy, it is unlikely that the Natomas Crossing project will be able to conform to that policy without drastic changes to the proposal. Therefore, WALKSacramento offers the following recommendations to help improve pedestrian circulation in and around the project site in order to achieve the intent of policies and guidelines and to create pedestrian-friendly outcomes.

The Natomas Crossing project has the opportunity to support high levels of pedestrian activity given the number of walkable destinations and access to existing and future transit. However, poor pedestrian access to the street, interior-facing entryways, and gates surrounding the site severely limit and discourage walking. As identified in the landscape drawing, there are only three pedestrian access points – one on the west by the gated vehicle entryway from Innovator Drive, one on the east by the gated vehicle entryway from the proposed private road, and one on the east further north near Arena Boulevard and the dog-run area. Each building has three pedestrian entries for a total of fifteen across the development, and of those fifteen only five are easily accessible to the pedestrian access points (all three on Bldg. 2 and the eastern entries on Bldg. 3 and 5). Bldg. 1 and 4 are both furthest from any pedestrian access, as residents of those buildings would need to either walk across the parking lot to the eastern pedestrian gates or walk through the parking lot and around other buildings to reach the western pedestrian gate.

**WALKSacramento recommends placement of pedestrian access gates around the site in order to promote walking as a viable and convenient alternative to driving. This can be done by, at minimum, adding the following pedestrian access gates:**

- **Between the clubhouse and Bldg. 1**
- **On the south side on Prosper Road at the southern entryway to Bldg. 1**
- **On the east side between the two existing pedestrian gates where there is a potential crossing to access the eastern future commercial site**
- **On the north side between Bldg. 4 and 5**
- **On the north side at the eastern entryway to Bldg. 5**
- **On the west side between Bldg. 3 and 4**

Pedestrian access to the east is important due to potential future commercial development in the vacant lot as well as existing bus service and future proposed light rail. Given that separating the complex with an open thoroughfare is not feasible with the proposed site plan, an alternative is to enhance the pathway along Arena Boulevard to provide a convenient and comfortable pedestrian east-west connection. **WALKSacramento recommends developing a detached pedestrian path along Arena Boulevard that is separated from the roadway by landscaping and is well shaded and lit.**

The site plan currently shows where potential driveways may exist to access the site to the east, with potential crossing zones shaded. However, the site plan shows a gap between the sidewalk

and the crossing where landscaping will be a barrier to pedestrians accessing the crossing. This gap is most evident at the northern crossing, where pedestrians who exit from the nearby pedestrian gate will need to walk north to Arena Blvd., cross, and walk back south along the private road instead of walking directly across the private road at the crossing.

**WALKSacramento recommends connecting the sidewalk to future crossings and adding curb ramps to improve pedestrian convenience and off-site access.**

Pedestrian circulation throughout the complex must also be improved in order to more conveniently provide connections to site amenities and off-site access. The proposed path of travel as indicated on the site plan appears circuitous for pedestrians navigating the parking lot. Additionally, most buildings have only one path of travel provided from the main entrance and none from the side entrances. Since the path of travel to amenities within the development and to access points is indirect, pedestrians may choose to take the most direct route through the parking lot rather than utilize the sidewalks and crossings provided. This reduces traffic safety and may lead to pedestrian and car conflict. **WALKSacramento recommends providing more direct pedestrian paths of travel from all building entries to site amenities and access points in order to improve safety while traversing the parking lot areas. This can be done by:**

- **Continuing the crosswalk from Bldg. 3's main entrance to amenity area 4**
- **Adding a sidewalk at the southern end of Bldg. 1 for residents to reach amenity area 2 and the southeastern pedestrian access to the private road**
- **Adding a crosswalk from the southeastern end of the clubhouse to the sidewalk leading to the southeastern pedestrian access to the private road**
- **Adding a sidewalk and crosswalk between the eastern entryway of Bldg. 5 to the sidewalk along the northern side of Bldg. 2**

In addition to making pedestrian access throughout the complex convenient, it should also be a comfortable and safe experience. **WALKSacramento recommends ensuring that all pedestrian crossings and paths of travel within the project site be well lit to enhance pedestrian safety and comfort.**

The project has done well with providing tree shading along the proposed walkways. Tree shading improves the pedestrian experience by providing protection from the sun and heat as well as aesthetic appeal. **WALKSacramento would like to see tree shading replicated along any additionally proposed walkways.**

Natural surveillance, or "eyes on the street", is an important strategy to enhance the perception of safety while walking, since pedestrians feel that they are more visible to their neighbors and that negative activities are discouraged. **WALKSacramento appreciates that the apartment layouts that provide a mixture of active living spaces facing both the street and parking lot areas to encourage natural surveillance and "eyes on the street".**

Amenity areas are not centrally located and are generally isolated at the edges of the site, with poor pedestrian access and surveillance from nearby buildings. The tot lot in particular is an area of concern, since it is intended to be used by young children. **WALKSacramento recommends relocating the tot lot to a more central location to improve natural surveillance from nearby buildings and safe, short walking routes that minimize conflict with cars.**

The project proposes above-minimum car parking spaces. Generally higher amounts of parking indicates to residents that driving is encouraged over walking, biking, or transit. Since the project site has both walkable destinations nearby as well as existing bus service and future proposed light rail on Truxel Road, the amount of proposed parking may be higher than what is necessary. **WALKSacramento recommends reconsidering parking needs given the site's proximity to existing and proposed transit, as well as its negative impact on pedestrian circulation within the site.**

The project proposes above-minimum long-term and short-term bike parking with the inclusion of bike cafés which we assume will be located in each of the five apartment buildings. We support and commend these actions because it encourages health and physical activity. However, the location of the bike cafés and short-term bike parking at each building is not clearly identified in the site plan. **WALKSacramento recommends that all bike parking be located near pedestrian gates for convenient access to the street.** We recommend contacting the Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates for more specific details on bike café and bike parking locations.

The entries at three sides of each building improve access for residents. The two entries on the sides of each building have stairways, however as indicated on the building composites the stairways are enclosed from the interior hallways. Blocking the stairs with a wall and door reduce their visibility and discourage residents from using the stairs instead of the elevator. **In order to encourage use of the stairs at the ends of the hallway to improve health and physical activity, WALKSacramento recommends reconsidering whether the interior stair access needs to be enclosed.** If the stairs must remain enclosed, **WALKSacramento recommends adding windows to the interior wall and door to improve visibility of the stairs and so that natural light may attract residents toward the ends of the hallways.** As mentioned previously regarding pedestrian circulation, **paths of travel to and from the side entrances must also provide convenient connections to onsite amenities and off-site access** in order to encourage use of the stairs.

The turning radius for cars entering the vehicle access gate off the proposed private road is very large, which leads to higher turning speeds and conflict with pedestrians at the crossing. Additionally, the placement of just one curb ramp on each corner increases the distance for pedestrians crossing the intersection. **WALKSacramento recommends reducing the curb return radii at the proposed private road entrance and providing dual curb ramps on each corner in order to shorten pedestrian crossing distances, decrease traffic turning speed, and improve overall traffic safety at the crossing.**

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and recommendations. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact me at (916) 446-9255.

Sincerely,

Alicia Brown  
Project Coordinator