



9/4/2020

VIA EMAIL

Daniel Abbes, Assistant Planner
City of Sacramento Community Development Department
300 Richards Boulevard, 3rd Floor
Sacramento, CA 95811

RE: Northlake Senior apartments (DR20-134)

Dear Mr. Abbes:

Thank you for routing the Northlake Senior Apartments project to WALKSacramento. The project proposes to construct a gated 191-unit affordable apartment complex for seniors and community open space facilities including a community building, outdoor swimming pool and community gardens.

Northlake (formerly called the Greenbriar Development Project) is located on the edge of the City of Sacramento and within the North Natomas Community Plan area. The Greenbriar PUD Guidelines identified several transportation design strategies for the community.

Develop a public transportation system that encourages light rail ridership by centrally locating the Transit Station adjacent to higher density residential neighborhoods and providing a high degree of walkability within the PUD.

Utilize a circulation system that connects people with neighborhoods, parks, lakes, light rail and other amenities within the community enhancing the unique character of each neighborhood.

Create a well-connected circulation system that unifies the PUD by providing a variety of links from one neighborhood to another.

Although these strategies were applied to supporting active transportation in the design of the Northlake community, they must also be applied to each parcel so the transportation and circulation systems can be maximally utilized. Northlake Senior Apartments is located in a fairly good location and has fairly good internal connectivity, but the project is poorly connected to the streets and, therefore, less than optimally connected to the Transit Station and mixed-use community commercial development.

The future light rail station is an integral (no pun intended) component of Northlake's sustainability and potential to reduce VMT. While it appears that light rail to the airport with a station in Northlake will not materialize for a long time, we expect that either Sacramento Regional Transit or a Transportation Management Association will initially provide shuttles to downtown for Northlake, and the Transit Station will be utilized as the service hub.

Approximately one-half of the Northlake Senior Apartments site is within a ¼-mile of the Transit Station. The street network provides direct access to the Transit station, but the project's sidewalk network provides access to the street that will be indirect and inconvenient for many of

the residents. The site design of Northlake Senior Apartments must contribute to connectivity and ease of walking to maximize the investment in the PUD strategies.

The project will create a good visual street presence – the street-facing building elevations have windows, balconies and doors, and street trees are at a dense spacing. However, the project's fencing and on-site perimeter sidewalk network will not contribute to street activation nor will it provide convenient access to the street and nearby destinations.

Fencing around buildings creates a fortress image in addition to limiting connectivity. The landscape plan shows the fencing set back from the two local streets (Littlestone Street and Hammock Avenue) and generally between corners of adjacent buildings, as is recommended by the City's Multi-Unit Dwelling Design Guidelines. However, the fence along Meister Way is at the street-side edge of the project sidewalk that's parallel to the street sidewalk. The fence at the edge of the sidewalk will reduce the effective width of the sidewalk and the continuous run of fence will reinforce the fortress effect. **Recommendation #1: Set the Meister Way fence behind the building fronts and between the ends of the buildings.**

There are only three pedestrian gates providing access to the street sidewalks along the project's nearly 1/3-mile long street frontage. The lack of connections is especially problematic at the corner of Littlestone Street and Meister Way. This corner would be on the most convenient route to the Transit Station and the mixed-use community commercial site. The pedestrian gate on Littlestone Street will be convenient for the interior-facing units in the buildings along Hammock Avenue, but for the rest of the interior- or street-facing units there will be in best case some out-of-path travel and in worst case significant out-of-path travel required to get to the corner of Littlestone Street and Meister Way.

Generally, connections to the street from street-facing buildings should be made at every entrance or at each building. However, the Northlake Senior apartments buildings have entrances on both sides so connections to the sidewalks between buildings would be more efficient, as was done with each of the three connections shown on the landscape plan. **Recommendation #2: Add a pedestrian connection to the public sidewalk at the corner of Littlestone Street and Meister Way.**

Pedestrian on-site circulation elements of sidewalks and driveway crosswalks is good for most of the units facing the site interior, but buildings in the southeast corner of the site have inferior access to the common facilities and many of the more distant neighboring buildings. The weak links appear to be between Building 17 and Buildings 8 and 10. **Recommendation #3: Add crosswalks between the northeast corner of Building 8 and the south end of Building 17 and between the west side of Building 10 and the east side of Building 17.**

We were unable to determine the proposed number or locations of long-term and short-term bike parking spaces. In addition to the lack of this necessary information, we'd like to note two other things. First, the parking district maps for North Natomas and the City of Sacramento designate the Northlake Senior Apartments site as Suburban, yet the multifamily residential parcel next to the project site but on the south side of Meister Way is designated Urban. With the environment and context on both sides of Meister Way nearly identical, shouldn't they both be designated Urban? Second, the 11-bike and 13-bike racks specified in the project plans will accommodate only 4 to 5 bikes, respectively, when bicyclists use the preferred two-point parking technique.

We also note the presence of a sidewalk connection to the future freeway buffer bike trail. We expect that residents will highly value being able to walk or bike off street to the future shopping center at Elkhorn Blvd in the northeast corner of Northlake or to the parks and residential uses south of Meister Way without having to walk along or cross Meister Way.

WALKSacramento is working 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 public health and physical fitness, better air quality, a stronger sense of cohesion and safety in neighborhoods, and more sustainable communities and local economies.

Sincerely,

Chris Holm
Project Manager