

September 15, 2017

Mariya Hodge, AICP  
Senior Planner  
Community Development Department  
City of Mountain View  
500 Castro Street  
Mountain View, CA 94039

Re: SummerHill Homes – Walker Drive Rowhouse Proposal

Dear Mariya:

In preparation for the upcoming City Council study session regarding SummerHill's proposed project at Walker Drive, we are pleased to submit this letter explaining why we believe that this project presents an opportunity for a creative housing solution that would bring 60 new, smaller and lower-priced ownership housing units to Mountain View.

With the tremendous job growth in Mountain View and the surrounding region over the past decades, the region is faced with a dramatic housing shortage. Housing prices have skyrocketed, leaving many gainfully employed and well earning individuals and families with very limited housing choices. Many regional leaders, including Mountain View City Councilmembers, continue to ask the development community to deliver more entry level ownership housing to serve the "missing middle."

### **Proposed Approach**

SummerHill identified the 2.15-acre site on Walker Drive earlier this year as a location for new homes, and we have been diligently evaluating ways in which we could maximize new ownership housing on the site while adhering to the City's General Plan and zoning requirements, applicable design guidelines and Council policies.

The proposed project would provide homes that are significantly smaller and more compact than new ownership offerings typically on the market. Fifty-two of the sixty homes have either one or two bedrooms and range in size from approximately 710 to 1,070 square feet. All but two of the homes have an enclosed two-car garage with private access.

The most unique and compelling part of the design is that each home has its own private roof deck for expanded outdoor living, reducing the demand for common open space on site. Based on market research, we believe that the rooftops will be a great feature for buyers. The property is well located relative to jobs, has excellent access to bike corridors and freeways, and is also close to downtown, making it a very desirable place for a home.

By combining a great location for young professionals with smaller homes and a more compact site plan, we see this project as an opportunity for entry-level buyers to buy a new home at a more reasonable price. Based on the current market, we expect the homes to be priced as follows:

	Living Area	Qty.	Projected Price
Plan 1 (1 Bd. + 1.5 Ba.)	712 SF	2	\$680,000 – \$720,000
Plan 2 (1 Bd. + 1 Ba.)	926 SF	8	\$830,000 – \$870,000
Plan 3 (2 Bd. + 2.5 Ba.)	1,063 SF – 1,069 SF	42	\$950,000 – \$980,000
Plan 4 (3 Bd. + 2.5 Ba.)	1,273 SF	8	\$1,090,000 – \$1,120,000

Our application is fully consistent with the General Plan and the R3-1 zoning designation. It also meets nearly all of the major design preferences in the Rowhouse Guidelines. That said, there are a few aspects of the project which take an alternative approach to meeting the intent of the Guidelines due to the uniqueness of this housing type as well as the challenging, triangular shape of the property; specifically:

### **Open Space Configuration**

**Rowhouse Guidelines** call for a central courtyard or a sizable, contiguous common area in each project, as follows:

- “[I]t is essential that rowhouse developments provide an adequate, central, well-designed public open space to act as a community focal point and gathering space.” § 7.3
- “Common open spaces should have a minimum of 20 feet in each dimension.” § 7.3

**SummerHill suggested approach:** At Walker Drive the size and irregular shape of the site are not compatible with the preference for a central open space without substantially reducing the number of housing units. Our suggestion is to permit flexibility in the layout on the site because of its irregular shape. Special consideration is also requested due to the fact that the site is within walking distance to parks, schools and other existing public open space. The project will also be required to pay its fair share in Park Fees.

### **Building Orientation**

**Rowhouse Guidelines** state that units should face a public street or a central common area as follows:

- “Buildings should define the edges of and face onto the central public open space.”  
§ 7.2.3

**SummerHill suggested approach:** At Walker Drive the preference for “inward-facing” units would eliminate at least five units from the project, at which point the project would no longer meet the Council’s policy objective of providing at least 80% of the maximum density. We suggest that rowhome units be allowed to face outward, provided that the units face either a public parcel or an on-site open area of sufficient width (e.g., 20 feet minimum). This would achieve the City’s goal of ensuring that units face onto a usable common open area without sacrificing units.

### **Street Layout**

**Rowhouse Guidelines** state that streets should be looped as follows:

- “Internal streets should provide loop circulation wherever possible rather than dead end cul-de-sacs.” § 7.2.3

**SummerHill suggested approach:** At Walker Drive the irregular lot shape does not lend itself to the more traditional looped street layout preferred in the Rowhouse Guidelines. Requiring a looped road would substantially reduce the number of units.

In our view, the proposed site plan does not diminish the livability and desirability of the community. While the site plan does not include an on-site street loop, two of the three on-site streets are essentially “looped,” because they connect to public streets at both ends, consistent with the City’s general street pattern. The irregular shape of the site makes it infeasible to provide looped access to the units in the narrow southern section of the site, but those units are served by short alleys which open onto common open areas.

### **Creative Floor Plans**

**Rowhouse Guidelines** define a rowhouse as a residence which has a front entry on one side of the building and a garage at the rear, versus a townhouse which has the front entry and the garage on the same side of the building.

**SummerHill suggested approach:** At Walker Drive there are several buildings that would benefit from being able to place the front door on the same side of the building as the garage. Under the current Rowhouse Guidelines, however, if a unit has an entry door and a garage on same side, such units would be viewed under another set of guidelines, the Townhome Guidelines, which are intended for a more traditional, larger and less dense product type (less than 12 – 14 units per acre and typically two-story).

We believe that having the flexibility to have garage doors and front doors on same side of the building on a few of the buildings in the most constrained, pinched part of the site would lend itself to a more efficient and attractive land plan.

### **Conclusion**

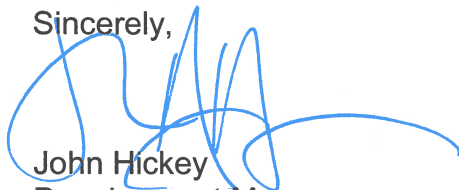
We see a tremendous opportunity at the Walker Drive site to achieve a creative housing solution that fully complies with the General Plan and zoning, yet utilizes a more flexible interpretation of the City's Rowhouse Guidelines. Given that the Rowhouse Guidelines are more than a decade old and that the high cost of land and housing in Mountain View has generated the need for new types of housing, we believe that a fresh approach to interpreting and implementing the Rowhouse Guidelines is an essential step to help the City provide opportunities for reasonably priced homes for first-time buyers.

To summarize, our proposal offers:

- Compliance with City Council's 80% Policy of delivering 80% of the maximum number of units allowed under the existing zoning
- Preservation of the City's total housing stock; i.e., no reduction in overall housing count — would provide four more units than currently exist on site
- A chance for entry-level buyers to purchase a new home at a more reasonable price, estimated to start at about \$700,000, with 52 of the units expected to be priced below a million dollars
- Double-loaded street design that maximizes housing production
- Roof decks for every unit that provide attractive and usable outdoor space, reducing reliance on common open space, rather than trying to duplicate the common public open space available immediately next door
- Ample parking to prevent spillover into the nearby neighborhood

Based on the design features and benefits outlined above, we request Staff support for our proposal for the Walker Drive site. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,



John Hickey  
Development Manager

Cc: Randy Tsuda  
Stephanie Williams  
Rebecca Shapiro  
Katia Kamangar  
Kevin Ebrahimi