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Re: The Retreat
Walnut Creek, CA

12/15/2010

Gary:

Over the course of the last several weeks my office has made two visits to The Retreat Apartments, formerly known as Whispering Oaks. Based on those visits and our discussions, we would like to share some of our observations and opinions with you regarding key areas of the project site:

The Rental Office/Parking Lot Entry:

- The entry from the street into the parking lot needs to be enhanced and emphasized (see photo 1.)
Design solutions might include:
 - A more architectural gate.
 - Flanking masonry pilasters.
 - Well-placed signage.
 - Replacement of the hedges and lawn adjacent to the entry with flanking specimen planting.
 - Water feature.
- The backflow prevention device should be screened from view (see photo 2.)
- Carports are flimsy in appearance and in poor repair (see photo 3.)
- Several trees are failing trees and should be replaced. Lawn and plant treatments requiring regular irrigation should be pulled away from oaks.
- Additional tree plantings should be provided to filter views of the buildings (see photo 4.).
- Failing timbers in the dog lawn area should be replaced, perhaps with boulders and planted slopes (see photo 5.)
- The walkway from the guest parking to the Rental Office is narrow and meandering, and should be replaced with a wider and more direct approach (see photo 6.)
- The utility boxes should be screened from the Rental Office walkway.
- The spa area is uncomfortably proximate to the walkway, and screening should be provided or the spa moved to a more appropriate location (see photo 7.)
- The stairs down to the Rental Office landing are narrow and uninviting. Lower stepped planters alongside widened stairs, broken into two flights, would open up the approach (see photo 8.)
- The utility building to the left of the walkway is unattractive and should be screened (see photo 9.)
Rerouting the side walkway would provide more space for screening plant materials.
- The cameo view through the walkway to the pool area is significant, and could be improved by providing a curving walkway and specimen plantings with low retaining at the toe of slope. The hanging light fixture is distracting and should be replaced (see photo 10.)
- The narrow gap between buildings creates an uncomfortable 'canyon' of space, which could be mitigated by use of light metal trellage overhead (see photo 11.)
- The doors into the apartments have a utilitarian appearance, and could be enhanced by trim, expanded walkways and landings and/or use of porch roofs (see photo 12.)

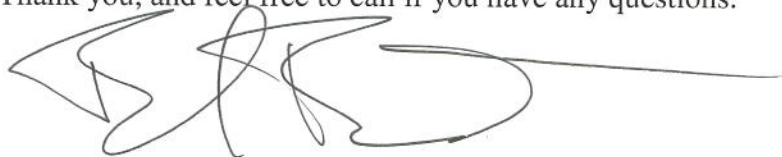
The Pool Area:

- The fountain feature is oppressive in its sound and volume. A spray head with less volume and a more attractive arc could enhance the space (see photo 13.)
- The recirculating water course is similarly oppressive in its unbroken, high-volume flow. The feature could be enhanced by slowing the flow and breaking it into a series of still pools and ripples (see photo 14.)
- The appearance of the concrete channel sidewalls could be improved with additional river stone and pebbles, mortared in place. Allowing adjacent plantings to extend over the edge of the sidewall rather than trimming them back would provide a more natural appearance.
- The connection between the gym and the outdoor area could be strengthened by expanding the 'bridge' to the deck.
- Wood-toned decking might provide a more appropriate and attractive surface adjacent to the pool.
- The benches on the deck should be realigned to better relate to the lines of the decking and buildings. Planters could further enhance the deck space (see photo 15.)
- The pool perimeter fencing follows some erratic and distracting lines and could be realigned to provide space for additional features.
- The connection between the pool area and the lower deck area could be strengthened with wider and more direct stairs. (see photo 16.)
- The vertical landscape timbers used as retaining are failing and should be replaced (see photo 17.)
- Portions of the sidewalks are uncomfortably steep and potentially hazardous, and should be reconfigured to provide gentler grades or replaced with steps.
- Standing irrigation risers adjacent to walkways provide tripping hazards.
- Algerian (big-leafed) Ivy can shelter rodents and is hard to maintain, and should be replaced with other ground covers. The smaller leafed English Ivy is less problematic.
- The lawn area above the pool could provide the opportunity for a barbecue patio and outdoor entertainment space outside of the confines of the pool area (see photo 18.)
- The coarse chipped bark is unattractive and difficult to keep in place.
- The electrical conduit is unattractive and cable is exposed in places, creating a hazardous condition (see photo 19.)

The Pedestrian Entry:

- The fountain feature would benefit from less volume and more attractive arcs.
- Two fountains seems an excessive treatment for a minor entry (see photo 20.)
- The sand treatment on the sidewalls of the water course does not work.
- The exposed rims of the pools are unattractive, and should be concealed with soil, boulders and planting (see photo 21.)
- The use of annual flowering plantings along the street requires considerable maintenance and provides little visual impact (see photo 22.)
- Much of the lawn area along the street could be replaced with more attractive groundcovers which would reduce maintenance and irrigation costs.

Thank you, and feel free to call if you have any questions.



Brian Bisnett



Photo 1 - View at main entry.



Photo 2 - Backflow device at entry.



Photo 3 - Carports in poor repair.



Photo 4 - Exposed building wall.



Photo 5 - Failing timbers at dog walk.



Photo 6 - Narrow, meandering entry walk.



Photo 7 - Spa feature adjacent to rental office walkway.



Photo 8 - Narrow, uninviting entry stairs.



Photo 9 - Unattractive utility building at rental office walkway.



Photo 10 - Cameo view/walkway to pool area with light fixture.



Photo 11 - Narrow 'canyons' of space.



Photo 12 - Apartment entries.



Photo 13 - Fountain outside gym entrance.



Photo 14 - Watercourse with unvaried flow.



Photo 15 - Poorly placed benches, brightly toned decking.



Photo 16 - Entry to pool could be enhanced.



Photo 17 - Failing retaining and planters at pool.



Photo 18 - Lawn area above pool could be better utilized.



Photo 19 - Conduit with exposed wiring.



Photo 20 - High volume fountains at pedestrian entry.



Photo 21 - Exposed rim of fountain pool.



Photo 22 - Annuals at entry with poor header.