

From: [redacted]
 To: [redacted]
 Subject: Comments Regarding IS/MND Economic Overlay Zoning District and Hotel
 Date: Monday, November 6, 2023 2:24:34 PM

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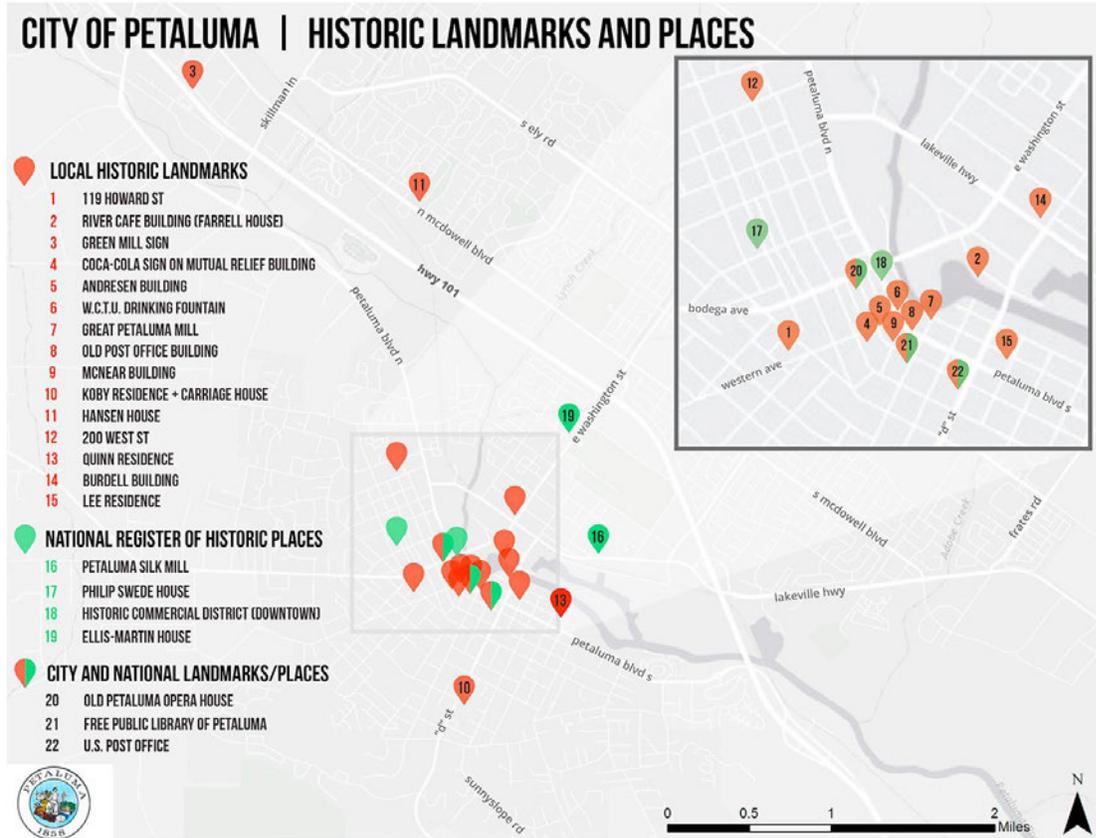
I am a 20 year resident of Petaluma and founded and operated an art gallery in Petaluma's Downtown Historic district for 15 years. I have a deep familiarity with Petaluma's history, its downtown core, and the needs of businesses that operate in Petaluma's downtown historic district.

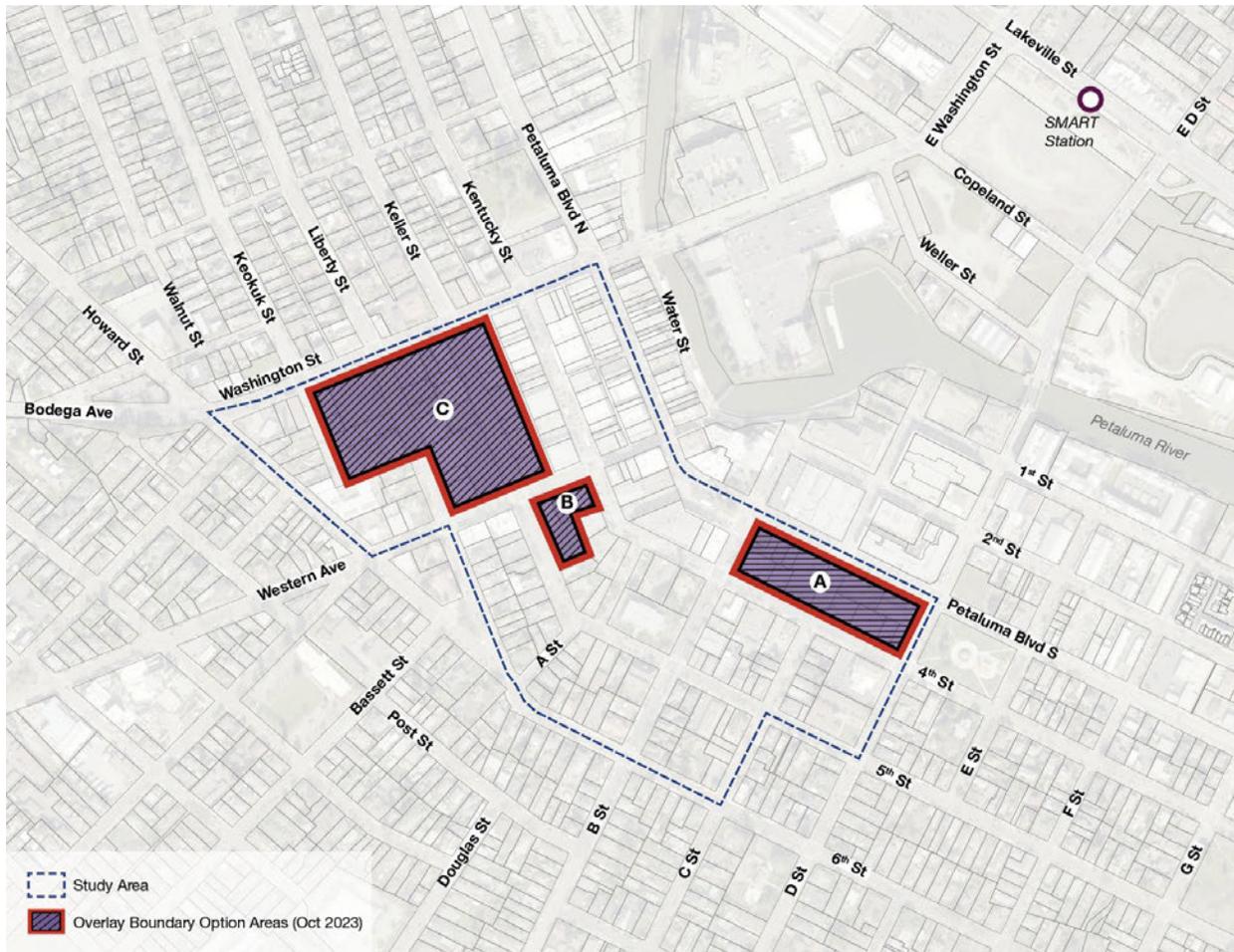
First off, calling this a "Housing & Economic Opportunity" overlay is just a bad attempt at marketing. There is no evidence that creating this overlay will improve economic opportunities in any way. The historic downtown of Petaluma is the city's main attraction, anything that would detract from its historic nature will probably make things worse.

If somehow, the central core of Petaluma's historic district were to disappear overnight, there would be no more reason for anyone to visit Petaluma, than there would be to visit downtown Rohnert Park (wherever that is). The historic downtown is our crown jewel. We have to tread carefully when considering major changes to this area. Apparently we have considered historic preservation important in the past, since we actually have a Historical and Cultural Preservation Committee. If this overlay is adopted unchanged, then we should probably just disband that committee as no longer relevant.

This whole proposal looks like a developer's wishlist to maximize profit on a parcel, without any regard to its impact on the surrounding area. There is nothing in this proposal that serves the citizens of Petaluma. It raises building heights to 75 feet from 45 feet, blocking views and casting long shadows. I am a fine art landscape photographer, if this is built it will forever ruin the city's skyline in terms of photographing wide angle views of the city. I could also see Hollywood no longer making films in this town, due to the inability to hide modernist out-of-scale buildings from a shot.

This proposal changes lot coverage from 80% to 100% (taking away any potential public space or amenities). In addition, this overlay impacts the majority of our historic landmarks. Below is a city map of our major landmarks, followed by a map of the overlay. The majority of "Local Historic Landmarks", "National Register of Historic Places", and "City and National Landmarks/Places" fall within the overlay's sphere of influence. If I were trying to sabotage the historic character of Petaluma's main attraction, this would be the plan.





I am in favor of building up and not out. I think we should do infill whenever possible, especially since there are many empty lots downtown. Four story buildings would work well in several parts of the outer areas of downtown, especially west of Keller Street and near the train station, and I doubt that few people would mourn any of the 1960s - 1970s bank buildings being replaced with more dense and well thought out buildings, but raising the height limit to 75 feet is a non-starter with most Petalumans. Many, if not most of the people who moved here in the past few decades came here because of the charm of the downtown. If you destroy that, this will make the Dutra asphalt plant and the bathtub on stilts look like minor issues.

Another part of the overlay allows for 100% multi-family uses without any retail or offices. That is also a mistake that you only find in America, Europeans aren't this ignorant. People should be able to walk to local retail and service businesses, one of the reasons for infill is to get people out of their cars and not make them have to drive to the east side of Petaluma to buy things or get a service done.

One thing I notice as a person who ran a retail business downtown for 15 years, is that there is a lack of small retail spaces to rent. For example, the Old Shanghai store on the corner of Petaluma Blvd and Washington is 4600 square feet and rents for \$9000 per month. You are not going to get small local entrepreneurs to open up a business in a place like that. Create mixed use buildings with housing on top and small retail/commercial spaces at the bottom, and you will truly have an "Economic Opportunity Overlay". Proposing to eliminate the possibility of small retail and services is the EXACT OPPOSITE of the economic opportunity this overlay purports to provide.

I have heard that building this out-of-scale hotel will be an "investment" in the downtown. That shows a clear lack of knowledge of how this whole retail thing works. Prior to establishing my own gallery, I worked for Apple in one of their stores. I was part of the opening crew of the store in Corte Madera and Apple spent a lot of time training us before we ever stepped foot in the store. You learn things like "conversion rates" (how many people walk in versus how many people buy), "shrinkage" (shoplifting and how to deter it), "qualification" (is this person ready and willing to buy the thing you're selling them). Apple sells more products per square foot than any other store on the planet (including jewelry stores like Tiffany). They know what they are doing and part of that is training their employees well. Just getting more people to wander the streets of downtown because they happen to be staying at a hotel nearby is not a business plan. The only businesses it might help are the restaurants, but there is a lot more to downtown Petaluma than restaurants. If you want to talk about foot traffic, talk to the downtown merchants about the "Butter and Eggs Day Parade", tens of thousands of people come downtown for that. If you want to get an earful of complaints, talk to the downtown merchants about that foot traffic.

The hotel developer says this doesn't "pencil out" at 4 stories. If their business plan is so weak that they can't make it work with 4 stories, how are we to believe that such a weak business plan will make it with 6 stories? What if we had a 6 story vacant building downtown a few years after this opens? The Carthers building was empty for several years before Amy's came along, so this is not out of the question.

In conclusion, I think this overlay is the exact opposite of what we should be doing. Apparently a lot of people are upset that this is even being considered. It is like watching a toddler playing with a loaded gun. Some people in the city government, and the non-existent planning department that consists of one employee, as well as their friends in the development community are saying that people are being mean or unruly in their opposition to this overlay. It is probably because this is an idiotic idea on its face, and people don't like to see their beloved city ruined.

Speaking of past blunders, when I first saw a mockup of the Dutra Asphalt plant in February of 2008, I knew on sight that it would not be acceptable to most Petalumans. Since that was a time before widespread social media, I sent the information to John Crowley at Aqus since he had a newsletter that had a substantial circulation, and a lot more people found out about it. If you know anything about Petaluma's recent history, you can see that there is still no asphalt plant due to massive public opposition.

Then there was the tubs on stilts issue, I knew upon sight in 2018 that this would not be acceptable to most Petalumans, and I wrote the city council in July of 2018 about it. Mayor Glass said something about letting the process work, etc. I wrote to the city council again in September, 2019 that this needed to be stopped, and I at least got a response from Kevin McDonnell, acknowledging my complaint, but not committing to any action. After spending hundreds of thousands of dollars (including tens of thousands to the M Group), money that could have gone to local art and artists, we end up with a mediocre project stuck at the end of F Street (out of sight of most people). I knew it would never be on Water Street from day one, how could the council be that clueless and waste that much time and money?

One last thing, this overlay that will fundamentally change the character of our historic district is being rushed through via a secretive process that is bypassing our normal planning channels. That alone is enough to deny this overlay request by the hotel developer (and don't pretend this issue is separate from the hotel).

Here is my prediction for this overlay, it is unacceptable to most Petalumans who know about it. If it is adopted, it will be overturned by a future city council (if any legal challenges aren't successful). It is just a matter of how much damage is done in the meantime if it is adopted. I will do everything in my power to unseat any council member who supports this in November of 2024 and November of 2026, and I know I am not alone in this respect. Implementing this overlay just shows very bad judgment.

Tell EKN to submit a development plan that conforms to our general plan, like the city does all the time with small local businesses.

Thank you for your attention,

Lance

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