



November 4, 2019

To: Mayor Scharf and Cupertino City Council

Re: Item 10 on 11/5/1019 agenda: Consideration of Municipal Code Amendments

On behalf of our members in Cupertino and surrounding communities, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, the Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter, the California Native Plant Society Santa Clara Valley Chapter, and the Committee for Green Foothills ask the Cupertino City Council to deny consideration of a General Plan Amendment that would set in motion a formal submission and processing of the Canyon View development.

Over the years, development proposals for these and nearby properties have been proposed, but they have always failed because residents and the City Council understood how fragile the landscape is, how critical it is to the welfare of wildlife species in the area, and how development there would burden the City of Cupertino with geological hazards and fire risks. Indeed, most of the wildfires that have devastated communities in recent years were caused by a spark from vehicles, electric infrastructure, or maintenance equipment or tools.

Other jurisdictions are currently looking to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits that the natural landscapes around them offer. San Jose voters have dedicated 50 million dollars to purchase land in Coyote Valley and this week, the City will announce the permanent protection of 937 acres in Coyote Valley (please see memo attached) to provide habitat for wildlife, and green infrastructure protection to the City.

Environmental review is not needed to understand the scope of risks that development at the proposed location would impose upon the City and its residents, and the degradation in quality of life it would bring. In this time of climate change and global threats to biodiversity, sprawls development into natural open space areas would repeat the mistakes of the past – the same mistakes that have resulted in tremendous losses to local and migratory bird species [recently published studies show that birds are vanishing from North America¹ and that most bird species may become extinct due to the cumulative pressures of development and climate change²),

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/science/bird-populations-america-canada.html>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/10/bird-species-extinction-north-america-climate-crisis>

devastating wildfires, and the permanent loss of carbon-absorbing forests and habitat. To plan for resilience in the face of climate change, development in the urban–rural interface should simply stop. Let’s focus housing growth in the City’s core, not its natural surroundings.

The staff report shows that the proposed General Plan amendment is inconsistent with the existing General Plan protections of hillsides and nature, including General Plan Goal LU-19 that seeks to preserve and protect the City’s hillside natural habitat and aesthetic values, including Strategy (LU-12.1.1) to limit development on ridgelines, hazardous geological areas and steep slopes. Hundreds, if not thousands of California native trees will have to be removed to allow construction as well as wildfire “defensible space” buffer from homes, roads and infrastructure, and the Stevens Creek Corridor – a critical wildlife movement corridor – will be negatively impacted. General Plan Policy ES7.8 (Natural Water Courses) requires retention and restoration of creek beds, riparian corridors, watercourses and associated vegetation in their natural state.

The degrading of the General Plan land use designations that apply to the hillside area will create a precedent for more similar projects to be proposed, and will thereby exacerbate the harm and hazards the Canyon View subdivision would cause.

Lastly, we believe the time has come to create safe trails on existing infrastructure rather than impact our remaining riparian corridors. We can provide point access to our natural treasures, rather than continuous trails that damage them. The proposed trails would unnecessarily harm the precious natural habitat in this area.

Please deny consideration of this General Plan Amendment.

Respectfully,

Katja Irvin,
Consecration Committee co-chair,
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

Shani Kleinhaus
Environmental Advocate,
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Alice Kaufman
Legislative Advocacy Director,
Committee for Green Foothills

Linda Ruthruff,
Conservation Chair
California Native Plant Society, Santa Clara Valley Chapter
