



SAN MATEO, SANTA CLARA & SAN BENITO COUNTIES

June 7th, 2021

Carmelisa Morales, Associate Planner,
City of Daly City, Planning Division,
333 90th Street,
Daly City, CA 94015
Via email to: cmorales@dalycity.org

Re: Serramonte Del Rey Campus Redevelopment, 699 Serramonte Boulevard APN 091-211-230

Dear Ms. Morales,

The Equity Committee of the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club has reviewed the Serramonte Del Rey Campus Redevelopment and appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Notice of Preparation regarding this 22-acre site slated for redevelopment by the Jefferson Union High School District (JUHSD) by dividing it into six parcels to accommodate 1,235 housing units and 14,000 sq ft of residential retail commercial space including a 1400 sq ft Head Start childcare facility. The equity group looks for local development to be consistent with state priorities to promote equity, health, environmental protection, access to fresh food, and public safety. We are concerned with air and noise pollution, nature deficits disorder, disease, jobs, and urban disorders like congestion within Daly City as the city looks to address climate-related crises such as extreme heat, power shutdowns, and sea level rise.

Our comments are organized into five sections that look for remedies to

- 1 - Keep public uses public.
- 2 - Preserve public uses such as community gardens and parks.
- 3 - Fund public uses, like gardens and parks, fairly across the city.
- 4 - Prevent gentrification and displacement.
- 5 - Preserve access to Indigenous cultural resources.

Public uses including access to public land are better served at the current site and the proposed development should occur within a Planned Development Area to prevent harms that Environmental Impact Statements typically say cannot be mitigated.

Keeping public uses public.

1. No project is the best alternative to preserve public uses and reduce harm since the city cannot meet its Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) goals under SB743 and ozone and PM targets under the Clean Air Act. The public uses of the site include the almost 2-acre community garden and the school. According to California air quality standards, the site slated for redevelopment is in an area that is failing to reduce pollutant levels for ozone, PM 10, and PM 2.5 to protect public health and the climate. Daly City and this project area suffer from elevated diesel particulate and other

traffic emissions relative to other census tracts in California according to CalEnviroScreen. People in impacted neighborhoods endure unhealthy community conditions and face barriers in access to health care that result in poor health outcomes and shorter life spans. Scarce transit service and route eliminations or reductions by SamTrans means low-income people have less access to goods and services, employment, and other opportunities. The lack of adequate public transit that this site will experience can often exacerbate those inequities. Families and individuals living in extended Daly City, especially low-income and environmental justice communities who face disproportionate amounts of pollution from industry and transportation also face the worst health outcomes when compared with the affluent sections of Daly City. This area is also difficult to traverse on foot or by bicycle. As the devastating and unjust health and social impacts of COVID-19 have demonstrated, maintaining the status quo is no longer an option. An outcome of the pandemic was the need for adequate outdoor access overwhelming parks, etc. Keeping public uses public is essential to public health by preventing harms like pollution.

1a. The city should have a Growth Management Policy that would prohibit new development to occur unless adequate public facilities like transit, and improvements to environmental quality of life standards are raised in the rest of the city. Projects like this tend to claim that the significant air quality impacts, VMT increases, and poor transit options cannot be mitigated. However, they could be mitigated if the project occurred in a transit-oriented development location such as Daly City's Planned Development Area.

1b. Use transfer of development rights to move the project to a transit-oriented development site. Transfer Of Development Rights are used to move development to less problematic locations where additional public goals can be realized. Belmont, Pacifica, San Francisco have used transfer of development rights in various contexts. Other jurisdictions have moved development through more conventional means such as the theater in Redwood City, and FEMA projects related to removing developments from harm's way such as flooding and wildfire.

1c. A no-project option would be better all-around given the problems with this location meeting public goals for displacing public uses, air quality, public health, safety, and displacement of lower income groups.

Preserving public uses such as community gardens and parks.

2. The school district currently represents a public use. It includes a well-used almost two acre community garden and orchard that improves air quality, increases access to fresh food, improves food security, improves dietary habits through education, increases fruit and vegetable intake, increases physical activity through garden maintenance activities, reduces the risk of obesity and obesity-related diseases, improves mental health, promotes relaxation, provides needed biodiversity, includes hundreds of plant species including native plants, provides wildlife habitat, includes trees and shrubs of different densities and heights giving birds a places of retreat and safety, includes a number of redwood trees and fruit trees, the garden includes a seasonal wetland, reduces erosion from runoff, provides natural flood control, improves water quality and serves as a vital component of effective adaptation and resilience to climate change. Children's toys within the garden point to widespread community use and the functioning of the garden like a park. For photos of the garden please see the garden's Instagram account @themysticalgarden and additional photos are published here: <https://spaces.hightail.com/space/C09Szrz5BR>

We support keeping public resource uses public because it more equitably addresses nature-deficit disorder which contributes to a diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, conditions of obesity, and higher rates of emotional and physical illnesses. Research also suggests that the nature-deficit weakens ecological literacy and stewardship of the natural world, resulting in apathy in the face of climate change disasters such as wildfires, sea level rise, and extreme heat which Daly City needs to counter. Accordingly, we support increasing community gardening opportunities on public lands in Daly City. Preserving public uses such as community gardens and parks serves public needs, safety, and recreation.

2a. The city should provide the park-to-resident ratio for Daly City and how it compares to surrounding cities and the national averages of the typical park and recreation agency offering one park for every 2,277 residents served, with 9.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Proximity to existing parklands operated by the county or state, including San Bruno Mountain, should not be considered part of the city's own obligation to provide an adequate park-to-resident ratio, particularly since San Mateo County parks underperform with regard to minority access relative to the county's demographic makeup.

2b. Consider an option to restore the site to parkland under N-EO-82-20 to offset the negative effect on the aesthetic, natural, scenic, and historical environmental qualities to the proposed projects vicinity which would be a significant environmental impact under CEQA. There are many options here, for example the site could be a Planned Conservation Area under the One Bay Area Plan.

2c. Preserve the community garden or offer a larger garden to the community proportional to the addition of residents as part of the project. There is a shortage of community gardens in Daly City unlike surrounding cities including Pacifica and San Francisco. Community gardens function as ecological green space, a gathering place for neighbors, as well as a place for solitude, reflection, and study. They also make a positive contribution to the community by reducing food insecurity, providing access to culturally relevant foods, promoting healthier eating through education programs, and providing access to gardening for those who otherwise could not have a garden, such as families with young children, the elderly, recent immigrants, multifamily dwellers, and or the homeless.

2d. Study in the EIR the bird habitats within the garden which community gardeners say include raptors and the role of water at the site during bird migration.

The garden was started decades ago as part of a therapeutic school garden project and it continues today as a source of great public benefit and community pride. The garden provides opportunities for active and passive recreation as well as healthy nutrition. This is critically important given concerns about malnutrition and obesity and a disproportionate lack of community gardens in Daly City. Further, given the low proportion of counselors to students in JUHSD, the garden's benefit to student mental health is significant. A shortage of community gardens in Daly City negatively impacts citizens; this hardship became particularly difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic when team sports, gyms and group exercise classes were prohibited by state and local health orders. The need for increased community garden access is particularly relevant in Daly City, given its high percentage of minority families with backgrounds in active tending of gardens, orchards and farms for reasons related to food security and cultural practice.

Community gardens are examples of green infrastructure that are resilient adaptations to climate change. Community gardens can reduce urban heat islands, provide various ecosystem services, and increase storm water retention. From a socioeconomic perspective, these gardens also build trust, facilitate participation, improve responses to natural disasters and food security – all vital components of effective adaptation and resilience to climate change. Unlike rain gardens, bioswales, and green roofs, community gardens respond to stressors like economic, social, and political instability. Therefore, the EIR should explain if policies that address climate change explicitly incorporate mitigation strategies like community gardens.

2e. Decades of tree removal, often to make way for both front yard and backyard paving, has increased impervious surfaces citywide. Now the highly urbanized population faces a new climate reality dominated by drought, rising temperatures, and limited but more intense storm events. The EIR should discuss Daly City expanding its 2016 Project Green Space by taking a fee from projects like this which threaten public resources.

2f. Gardeners at the project site report foraging for plants of significance to the medicine and diet of the Ramaytush Ohlone. The biological section should include a complete list of all plants and trees and explain if these resources should be preserved.

2g. Gardeners also report a high-water table at the garden site and a seasonal wetland. The hydrologic section should explain the significance of any dewatering expected from the project.

Funding public uses like gardens and parks fairly across the city.

3. New developments require substantial public services such as sewer, water, security, and especially stormwater. The infrastructure is paid for by the development, but the upkeep is a public cost at a time when the cost of operations for existing service is rising across the city despite a decrease in use, due to drought, costs, maintenance, and other factors. Hardscape, increasing the cost of stormwater downstream, is a consequence of development. This affects the city's ability to deliver other public services like parks, recreation, safety, libraries, childcare, reliable public transit, etc especially in low-income areas – all of which affect the equity and quality of services that residents can access. These shortfalls occur at a time when increasing climate issues like extreme heat and Public Safety Power Shutdowns have resulted in blackouts creating safety concerns for medically and financially impacted residents. Funding public uses like gardens and parks fairly across the city requires not increasing the disparity with projects like currently proposed at this site.

3a. The EIR should enumerate the cost of providing services to the project and how the city will make operation and maintenance break even.

3b. Provide affordable housing developers the opportunity to develop on half the lots. Affordable housing would be a real community benefit given the median income of residents surrounding the project. Further, with consideration to the Daly City RHNA 5 (2014-2022) planning period, preference should be given to producing housing affordable to very low & low income Daly City residents. It would have been required for most other surplus properties but AB2135 doesn't cover school districts.

3c. Provide a copy of the decision required under Education Code section 17388 which states that the board needs to appoint a committee to advise on the disposal of surplus lands.

3d. The project should include community benefits such as battery powered ventilators and cooling rooms and shelters for community use during extreme events.

3e. The Jefferson Union High School Faculty and Staff Housing Project provided 122 parking spots, in the form of problem hardscape. The 58 surface level spots cost is \$2.3M, based on the cost of paving land in Daly City which could have more beneficial uses as community gardens, housing, etc. The 64-unit car barn cost was just under \$5M. \$7M can build a lot of affordable housing if the project was located in a transit friendly location and not add to the disease burden in the area. At the rate of in-lieu fees in the area you could build 70 more units as a community benefit. The city should look at alternatives to driving to increase public benefits and reduce harms from the project. Housing people instead of cars is a public benefit realized through reduced VMT and air pollution.

3f. Require shuttles as part of the project design.

3g. Study the impacts of increased traffic from the proposed development on out of attainment air quality and road congestion level of service including an analysis of the bicycle pedestrian access to school, transit, and neighborhood services.

Preventing gentrification and displacement.

4. The project will increase gentrification and displacement. Poverty in the project area is the 52nd percentile of the CA census tracts. Adding high-end housing will not address the chronic need for affordable housing at all income levels while increasing harms such as bad air quality and VMT mentioned above. Further, according to CA HCD, housing is unaffordable when more than 30% of a household's income. Therefore, market rate development rental prices would be considered unaffordable to the majority of Daly City Residents, based on median income data. The addition of 1,235 housing units, the majority being market rate, would increase median rental prices in Daly City. Building housing that is unaffordable to the majority of Daly City will accelerate gentrification that is already a serious issue for Daly City households. Other problems that arise include income-based segregation as low-income projects are developed in standalone buildings. Preventing gentrification and displacement addresses public goals related to VMT, greenhouse gas emissions, affordable housing, and preventing homelessness.

4a. The project should consider anti gentrification measures such as an additional in-lieu fee for additional affordable and workforce housing. See point 3B above that suggests affordable housing developments.

Preserving access to Indigenous cultural resource

5. This project is on Ramaytush Ohlone and Muwekma lands. Assembly Bill 52 requires that a project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an Indigenous cultural resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment. The bill requires Daly City to begin consultation with the two Tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with the

geographic area of the proposed project prior to determining whether an environmental impact report is required. We ask that the City of Daly City prepare a document outlining their compliance with California procedures for proper consultation with indigenous groups. Preserving access to Indigenous cultural resources prevents a historical genocidal indifference to native landscapes.

5a. Religious, cultural, and spiritual significance of the area to Tribes be ascertained prior to the EIR for the purpose of protecting, or mitigating impacts to, cultural places by contacting the relevant groups.

5b. As mentioned earlier Indigenous people within the garden community farm native plants for herbal and spiritual needs, a use that should be preserved.

Public uses including access to public land are better served at the current site and the proposed development should occur within a Planned Development Area to prevent harms that Environmental Impact Statements typically say cannot be mitigated. The analysis should consider these five significant issues presented in this letter within the EIR to inform council how to mitigate impacts before granting entitlement. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sabrina".

Sabrina Brennan,
Chair, Equity Committee, Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gladwyn d'Souza".

Gladwyn d'Souza
Chair, Conservation Committee, Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club

Cc: James Eggers, Director
Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club