



March 21, 2016

Mayor Gillmor and Santa Clara City Council members  
City of Santa Clara  
1500 Warburton Avenue  
Santa Clara, CA 95050

**Re: Santa Clara City Place - Comments for Study Sessions**

Honorable Mayor Gillmor and Santa Clara City Council members

Thank you for organizing the open study sessions and providing the opportunity to comment on the City Plan Project. **The Sierra Club, Committee for Green Foothills, Friends of Caltrain and Santa Clara Valley Audubon** submit the following comments that we hope you will find helpful as you consider the details of the City Place proposal:

**1. Allow time for appropriate review** by the public, concerned agencies, city departments, planning commission and city council

The appropriate design of large-scale developments is key to their success. This is the largest development proposal in the south peninsula. Full build-out of the Project would result in approximately 25,000 to 28,000 new jobs without a balance of housing on site or on nearby sites or the City at large.

The potential impacts on regional traffic are of a magnitude that it is clear that regional solutions are required in order for the impacts to be absorbed. The City Place project is in conflict with many of the goals of the General Plan and impacts on the City and the region are guaranteed to be enormous.

The large multi-volume final EIR (FEIR) has not yet been issued. We are informed that it might be issued by the middle of April. Nor has the public had an opportunity to view the large Master Community Plan (MCP) that will lay out the development guidelines within the site. There is currently no set date when this will be ready to issue.

We, therefore, respectfully request a minimum of 3 weeks once the MCP and FEIR are available for public review in order to provide informed feedback to the Planning Commission and City Council.

Given the complexities of uses in the proposed multi-phased development, the transportation issues, the regional nature of the traffic impacts, the need for transportation investments by transit agencies as well as the complexities of constructing on closed landfills, it is necessary to have sufficient time to review the information in order to be able to provide educated feedback.

**2. Reduce project size in order to use Open Space to create much-needed recreational facilities:**

With one of the area's worst jobs-housing imbalance, what Santa Clara does not need is to approve over 9 million square feet of mixed-use office space which, in addition to exacerbating the jobs-housing imbalance, will also severely exacerbate traffic congestion problems for the area's already overwhelmed infrastructure.

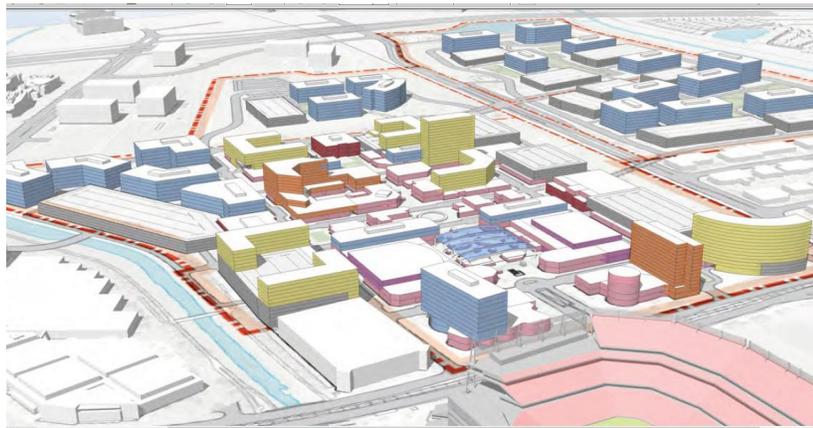
At the same time, the city is far short of accomplishing its parks and open space goal of 3 acres of park space per 1000 residents. Therefore, it is not advisable to give away ALL the 240 acres of the city's open space when the city is actively looking for opportunities to

find space for active and passive recreation facilities<sup>1</sup>. These 240 acres are Santa Clara's only available Open Space. The General Plan states:

*"As residential and employment populations increase and available land in the City becomes more limited, it will be essential for the City to actively seek additional park and open space. . Opportunities for additional regional open space within the city are limited as most of the City is built-out..."<sup>2</sup>*

We believe it would be advisable to reduce the proposed City Place development in size and scope, to a smaller footprint, taking far less of the open space and using the public open space to create much needed active recreation facilities and passive open space along with improved riparian habitat.

*City Place Center surrounded by huge office parks and parking structures filling all the open space*



**3. Phase the development entitlements, making future phase approvals contingent on achieving clear traffic mitigation targets** that ensure no increase in already serious traffic congestion in the area

**A. Approvals for each phase of City Place need to be contingent on achieving traffic mitigation targets:** Traffic generated by this project is not sustainable. The EIR notes that the project anticipates an 81% drive alone rate.

*The EIR projects that mitigation proposed by the development will reduce daily trips from office use by 4% and peak-hour traffic by 10%, for residential use the EIR projects daily trips reduced by 2% and peak traffic by 4%.*

These EIR projections are woefully inadequate given the conditions currently prevalent for traffic on the regions freeways and streets.

Each phase needs to be tied to a mandatory, clear and transparent traffic mitigation plan and mode share goals, with active monitoring and penalties, using Transportation Demand Management (TDM) as well as transit, rail and roadway infrastructure upgrades. As an example, Mountain View has established a goal of 45% drive alone for its North Bayshore Specific Plan area with no net new traffic.

<sup>1</sup> General Plan 5.1.1-P24 "... complete a Parks and Open Space Needs Assessment (Parks Master Plan), or similar planning effort, to implement General Plan park and recreation policies, including potential adjustments to the parks per population ratio from 2.4 to 3.0 as well as identification of potential funding opportunities for new parkland and/or recreational facilities and an assessment of potential parkland dedication fees under the Quimby Act. "

<sup>2</sup> General Plan 5.9.1 Parks, Open Space and Recreation Goals and Policies

Approvals for each phase of City Place need to be contingent on achieving traffic mitigation and mode share goals, monitored to assure no net new traffic on surrounding streets highways and freeways.

This is a proven and effective tool in achieving traffic mitigation goals, notably for regulating traffic from Stanford University and Hospital's growth.

A trip cap with active monitoring and reporting is currently also being used by the Mountain View for its North Bayshore area and by Menlo Park to regulate traffic around Facebook's proposed expansion.

**B. Reduce auto dependence with project design:**

a. Parking ratio: The proposed parking ratios are too high and encourage drive alone auto use. Parking ratios should be reduced- instead of a *minimum* of 3 spaces per 1000 sf office and 1.5 spaces per unit, the ratios should be a *maximum* of 1.5 spaces per 1,000 sf for office and 1 space per housing unit.

This will encourage alternate modes of travel and, simultaneously, reduce the size and the cost of the project. Including car-share provides wheels when needed.

b. Pay to park: Unbundle all parking so there is no free parking for office, retail or housing. This also reduces the size and cost of the project as fewer parking spaces are needed.

c. Shared Parking: Require all office parking be available for retail parking as well. This works well as retail parking is used mostly on evenings and weekends.

d. Congestion pricing: Congestion based pricing should be utilized to encourage use of transit or other means at peak travel times and discourage auto usage. This helps encourage behavior change and mode shift to other modes of travel.

e. Transit passes: With the discounted availability of bulk transit passes, the developer should provide free transit passes to all residential development and all employers should be required to provide the same to employees. Ease and convenience of transit encourages transit use and decreases parking requirements. The savings from reduction of expensive parking structures more than covers the cost of transit passes.

f. Transit: The use of transit could be greatly increased by requiring the developer and/or VTA to provide bus and shuttle service connecting the site to the Santa Clara Caltrain station, as well as to the Diridon multimodal transit hub.

**C. Nitrogen deposition:** One of the major impacts of increased traffic is the harm to native serpentine-dependent species such as the endangered Checkerspot Butterfly due to nitrogen deposition from vehicle exhaust. Santa Clara should compensate for the impacts of nitrogen deposition on endangered Checkerspot Butterfly habitat by paying similar fees to fees that the Habitat Plan imposes on developments in the City of San Jose on the other side of the Guadalupe River.<sup>3</sup>

**4. Phase development approvals contingent on achieving housing goals to balance jobs and housing**

**A. The approvals for each phase of City Place should be made contingent on housing starts** to catch up with the jobs being created - at all income levels. This may have to be done at a city wide level. Given the proposed City Place unbalanced ratio of just 1,700 housing units to 25,000 jobs, it is clear that additional housing is needed to catch up with the new commercial space.

Providing housing associated with proposed commercial/retail development is a key element in mitigating traffic congestion by allowing people to walk or bike to work as well as for addressing the regional housing shortage.

**B. Require affordable housing as part of development agreements.** The city's regional

<sup>3</sup> The EIR notes a reduced fee in the following mitigation measure- BIO-C.1: Make a Fair-Share Nitrogen Deposition Fee Contribution to the Santa Clara Habitat Agency's Voluntary Fee Payment Program.

**5. Create a riverside park along the Guadalupe River for active recreation and passive open space .**

Plan to accommodate flood control along with habitat enhancement. Fulfill the city current deficit in habitat commitments

housing needs assessment (RHNA 2015-2022) requires the city to produce 4,093 affordable housing units. Of this, 525 are for very low and low income.

The Housing Element<sup>4</sup> meets the letter of the RHNA but city policies do not actually create conditions that facilitate creation of affordable housing now that the Redevelopment Agencies have been dismantled.

Require that the affordable housing goals are met in each phase. Both new commercial, retail as well as market rate housing generate low and very low income jobs that need to be accommodated to avoid traffic impacts. An appropriate mix of housing needs to be created in the area in each phase.

**A. A park along the river:** The Guadalupe River corridor, with the Ulistac Natural area adjacent to the site, presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create an iconic 60-100 acre riverside park with active recreation facilities and open space for residents of Santa Clara who lack a regional size park and desired recreational facilities.

Currently, the General Plan has a stated goal of "*Maximizing opportunities throughout the City.*" to provide park space, open space and habitat. As a comparison, some other well-known parks include:

- Mountain View Shoreline Park - 150 acres
- Sunnyvale Bayfront Park- 70 acres
- Alviso Marina County Park - 18.9 acres
- Menlo Park Bidwell Bayfront Park - 160 acres
- Redwood City Red Morton Park - 32 acres

The Riverside park would have enough space to allow a substantial setback to protect and enhance the river's ecosystem and to allow both adults and children to enjoy nature. In addition, space should be allocated for active sports and recreation. The riverside park would provide ample space for a new recreation and sports center, swim center, BMX track, trails, play fields and courts, as well as open space for families to picnic and for children to run and play.

**B. Riparian corridor setback areas** should be improved to provide enhanced habitat potential for many species of wildlife, a goal in the General Plan<sup>5</sup>. While burrowing owl habitat may be difficult at this site, several of the other special-status species, listed in the EIR, have real potential to rebound at the site and would help Santa Clara towards meeting habitat goals. These species include:

- Western pond turtle in the retention basin/pond and river
- Cooper's hawk, northern harrier and white-tailed kite in wooded open space
- Central California coast steelhead, Central Valley fall-run Chinook salmon, longfin smelt and green sturgeon in improved river and creek habitat

Most other bird species in the Santa Clara Valley use riparian ecosystems during part of their life cycle. Amphibians, butterflies and many beneficial insects find riparian habitat life-sustaining. Preserving and enhancing the natural aspects of the riparian corridor is thus extremely important.

<sup>4</sup> [Housing Element](#): See page 166 thru 170 for a summary critique of Santa Clara's current housing element by Silicon Valley Law Foundation.

<sup>5</sup> General Plan Conservation Goals:

5.10.1-G1 The protection of fish, wildlife and their habitats, including rare and endangered species.

5.10.1-G2 Conservation and restoration of riparian vegetation and habitat

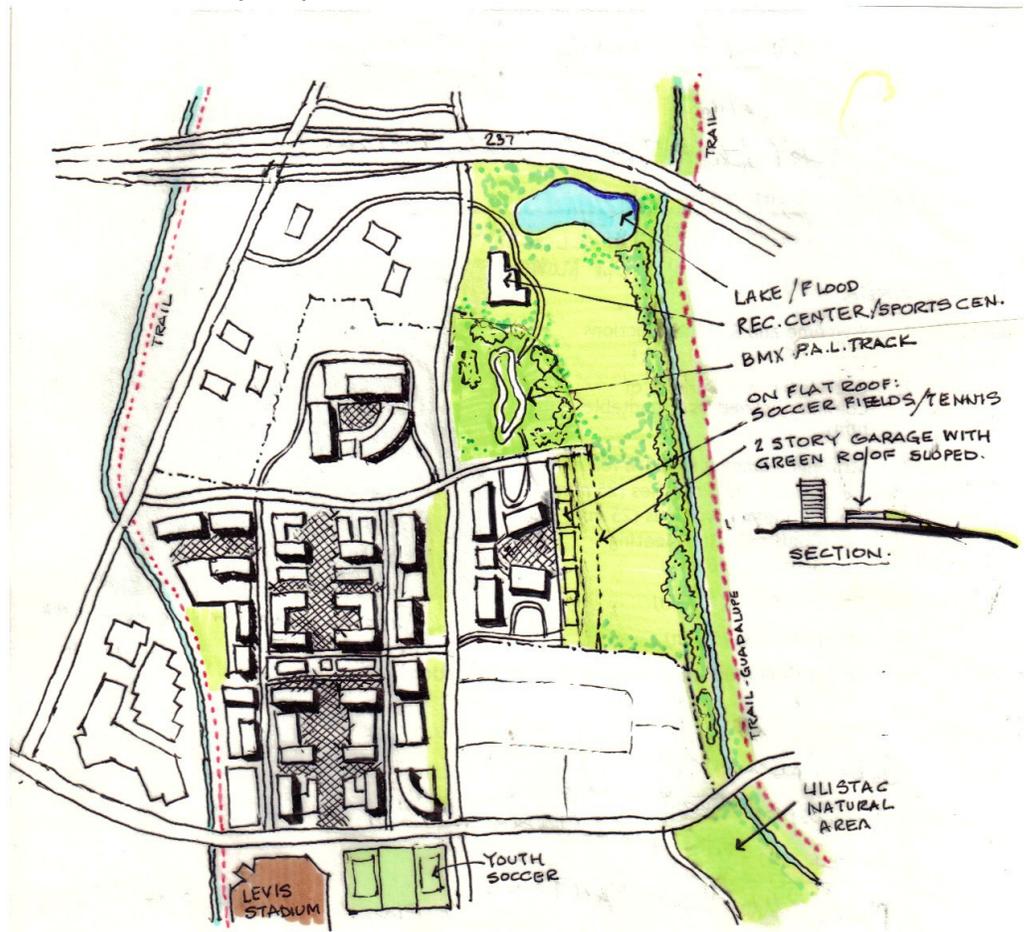
5.10.1-P5 Encourage enhancement of land adjacent to creeks in order to foster the reinstatement of natural riparian corridors where possible.

**C. Flood protection** for the area could be addressed in the park design and might include converting the existing Eastside storm retention basin into a lake in the public park. This resilient flood control strategy is being used in several peninsula city parks.

**D. Add 40 acres to successful burrowing owl conservation area:** If 40 acres of the park are dedicated to a sports complex, it would allow the city to develop the proposed sports complex, planned at the San Jose-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility site, closer to population centers and dedicate those 40 acres to the adjacent burrowing owl conservation area which has been successfully established in that location.

**E. Improved Trails and Clean Water: New auto roadways should not be planned along the creek or river,** as proposed in the project. As noted in the EIR, new roads and bridges will pollute habitat and water with construction, roadway runoff, and constant toxic brake lining and tire dust. Auto traffic will also destroy the peaceful nature of creekside trails as an important alternate route for transportation as well as for recreation.

*Below: Alternate vision for City Place Center with a Riverside Park on Parcels 1 and 2*



**6. Create an updated North Santa Clara Area plan** to identify what services are needed to make this area a complete vibrant neighborhood

The proposed City Place development is in direct conflict with many of the policies in the General Plan. Given the magnitude of the impacts on jobs, housing, land use, open space, air quality and other environmental factors, it is clear that the General Plan needs to be revised and updated, in order for a project of this size to be considered and move forward.

**The North Santa Clara Area needs to be studied to establish what the area needs in services, infrastructure and amenities to become a real neighborhood,** and how the City Place project can become catalyst for creating a vital neighborhood center

While the area needs to be studied as a whole, the City Center project should, possibly, include civic amenities such as a branch public library close to the transit stop, a police sub-station and some space for non-profit community activities like community theater, health clinic, health library, and outdoor space for community events.

In summary, the City Place proposal, as it currently stands, will not serve Santa Clara well as an appropriate use for the city's 240 acre public open space. However, it has the potential to be transformed so that it does become the catalyst for positive change in the area and a vital city and regional entertainment and recreation center, as well as a the focus for a new neighborhood in North Santa Clara.

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