



August 13, 2021

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
70 W. Hedding St.
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Agenda Item 36: Airborne Lead Study of Reid-Hillview Airport

Dear President Wasserman and Supervisors,

The undersigned organizations are in support of exploring alternative land uses for the site of the Reid-Hillview Airport (RHA) in East San Jose. Our organizations collectively represent thousands of residents in Santa Clara County who care about the environment, open space, and parks. We strongly urge the County to pursue a community-led vision for the RHA site that includes a significant percentage of land to be dedicated for open space, nature and parkland.

The Airborne Lead Study Indicates Serious Lead Pollution at RHA

The RHA Airborne Lead Study found that children in the area surrounding the airport have been greatly impacted by airborne lead pollution for decades. According to the study, children living downwind from the airport had higher blood lead levels than those living upwind of the airport. The disparity in blood lead levels was on a par with what was measured during the peak of the lead-in-water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

We support the East San Jose community's demand for immediate action and for other steps the community has requested to address the harm that airport operations have posed for them.

Environmental Justice Requires Access to Nature as Well as Clean Air

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it abundantly clear that people need access to open space. During the past year and more, as residents have taken to the outdoors for exercise, work, relaxation and socializing, the inequity between those who have access to nature close to home

and those who do not has been stark. Particularly for residents who do not have private backyard areas, urban green space is a necessity, not a luxury.

Urban green spaces provide more than just recreational benefits. Trees and other vegetation absorb carbon, filter air pollution and stormwater runoff, and reduce temperatures on the hottest summer days. Native plants provide habitat that supports other aspects of nature such as birds, butterflies, bees and other insects. In a recent Mercury News article on the importance of trees and greenery in alleviating the urban heat-island effect, the disparity in the amount of green space in San Jose's West side versus East side was noted:

Today, in the wealthier parts of the Rose Garden with a median income of around \$130,000 and 10% tree coverage, the temperature can be 5-degrees cooler than the lower-income areas of Alum Rock, which are six miles away and have only 3% tree coverage, according to the Silicon Valley Pain Index and data collected by NPR. ([These Bay Area neighborhoods are hit hardest by heat: why poor neighborhoods are far hotter than rich ones](#), Mercury News, July 30, 2021 at 6:00 a.m. | UPDATED: August 2, 2021 at 1:24 p.m.)

In addition, both physical and mental health outcomes are improved when people have access to nature. One study found that walking through a forest for 40 minutes produced a noticeable decrease in the stress hormone cortisol.¹ Another study found that simply having a view of trees rather than a brick wall through a hospital window resulted in better health outcomes for patients.² And yet another study found that children with ADD can concentrate on schoolwork and tasks better after walking through or playing in a park -- and the greener the park, the greater the reduction in ADD symptoms.³ (For even more scientific evidence on this issue, see [The Health Benefits of Parks](#) from the Trust for Public Land.)

When taking action to address the harm to our children resulting from the high airborne lead levels at RHA, we must also address the harm that results from lack of access to nature and open space.

This Is a Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity to Create Urban Green Space

The RHA site provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a significant amount of urban green space and nature in a part of San Jose that is severely park-deficient. San Jose, like many other cities, has struggled to provide adequate park space for its residents in the midst of continued growth and development. As the cost of land rises in urban areas, it

¹ [The Healing Power of Nature](#), Time Magazine, July 14, 2016 6:14 AM EDT (<https://time.com/4405827/the-healing-power-of-nature/>)

² R. S. Ulrich, "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery," *Science* 224 (1984): 420–21, cited in Howard Frumkin, "Beyond Toxicity: Human Health and the Natural Environment," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 20, no. 3 (2001): 237.

³ Andrea Faber Taylor et al., "Coping with ADD: The Surprising Connection to Green Play Settings," *Environment and Behavior* 33, no. 1 (January 2001): 54–77.

becomes less and less feasible for cash-strapped parks departments to acquire enough land to create new parks. Land that is already publicly owned is in extremely short supply.

The [Reid-Hillview Vision Plan](#) process, developed in collaboration with residents in the surrounding community over 2019-2020, consistently emphasized that open space and parks are among the community's top priorities. The strategies recommended by the community in the Vision Plan include recommendations to create open spaces of at least 1 acre in area within 1/4-mile of all residences, and to create open spaces of at least 5 acres in area within 1/2-mile of all residences. In addition, the Vision Plan calls for "at least one park that is densely planted for people to enjoy nature," as well as for tree-lined streets, community gardens, and green infrastructure as part of the site design.

The 180 acres of the Reid-Hillview site provide enough space for this community vision of open space while also providing for other community needs and desires. When an opportunity arises to create new urban green space, it is vital that we act upon it.

We urge the County to pursue a community-led vision for the RHA site that includes a significant percentage of land to be dedicated for open space, nature and parkland.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,

Juan Estrada, Advocacy Associate and Organizer
Green Foothills

Zoe Siegel, Director of Climate Resilience
Greenbelt Alliance

Susan Butler-Graham
Mothers Out Front Silicon Valley

Shani Kleinhaus, Environmental Advocate
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Richard Tejada, Founder & Executive Director
Sean Reedy, Assistant Director Environmental Education & Interim President
Saved by Nature

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

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

Aurora Perez, San Francisco Bay Area Regional Coordinator
Latino Outdoors