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Shasta/Hanchett Park Neighborhood Association
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November 28, 2017

Mayor Liccardo and Members of City Council
City of San Jose
200 East Santa Clara St
San Jose, CA 95113

Re: November 28, 2017 Council Agenda Item 10.1(k): "General Plan Text Amendment: Diridon Station Area Plan"

Dear Honorable Mayor Liccardo and Honored Members of City Council,

On behalf of the Shasta / Hanchett Park Neighborhood Association, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed General Plan Text Amendment for the Diridon Station Area Plan.

The Shasta / Hanchett Park Neighborhood Association represents 1,400 households in neighborhoods immediately West of Diridon Station, an area of the City that is already severely underserved in parks. As additional residents move into the area, as part of The Alameda Urban Village and surrounding developments, the residents-to-parks ratio will continue to worsen. While this widening disconnect is not unique to our neighborhood parks, it has been exacerbated by previous City policies, including, but not limited to, the inclusion of school lands in parkland calculations. As a result, the partial pave-over of the greenspace at the former Hester School campus has made a bad situation far worse, and puts more pressure on our undersized and underfunded parks.

Our neighborhood parks are not alone in these deficiencies; some of the best of San Jose's parks have been determined to merely be in 'acceptable' condition, while more than thirty of them are well below that admittedly low bar. These deficiencies have been exacerbated by continuously deferred maintenance, Parks Maintenance staffing vacancies, and the drought of recent years. Significant capital investment is needed to simply bring the parks up to a minimum standard, with a current estimated maintenance backlog in excess of \$250 million dollars. However, restoring our parks to a "minimum standard" is not enough. Resources should be devoted to meet a long-term sustainable maintenance goal – one that acknowledges the value and return on investment inherent within properly constructed and maintained parks, libraries, community centers, and trails.

The proposed rethinking of the Greenprint heard this evening is an excellent step in the right direction, with the pursuit of smaller parks a complete reversal from the previous Greenprint. In the last few years, S/HPNA has advocated for smaller-scale parks at 292 Stockton Avenue (later sold to a developer), the parking lot at Hanchett Avenue and The Alameda (later sold to a developer), and the corner of Tillman Avenue and Park Avenue (later redeveloped by Public Works). Had the proposed Greenprint's policies been in place at the time, one or more of these parcels might already be designated as a future neighborhood-focused park. Instead, \$6 million dollars in park fees from two developments in our area directly benefited the Del Monte area, with the creation and expansion of the park and soccer field there.

We are therefore very concerned by aspects of the text amendment before you tonight, which is the first step toward reinstating the Downtown Core, and modifying the boundaries of the Midtown Specific Plan and the Downtown Growth Area. Removing the cap on the number of high rises because of a procedural error is a troublesome precedent. From the outside looking in, it would seem that the more appropriate response would have been to use the rules motion by Vice Mayor Herrera. We all know that residential units are a net drain on City services. Drastically increasing the number of potential units, while asking for reduced park fees, is a recipe for disaster.

The extension of the Downtown Core will have little, if any, positive impact on the area within the current flight path. The current OEI restrictions all but guarantee that the only viable area in the newly expanded core are the lots along the East side of Stockton Avenue. These sites are within District 3, on the border with District 6. The already-reduced park funds will be spent within District 3, but one look at an aerial photograph of the area makes it clear that the streets and parks of S/HPNA and District 6 will bear the brunt of the change; an area that

will not receive a single dime of the reduced park fees. They will be close to the underfunded Theodore Lenzen Park, and the already-hobbled Hester Campus artificial turf. Developers will be given the opportunity to increase their profit margins, in the name of additional housing units, while District 6 feels the strain of the new units, and received little to none of the financial benefit. This perpetuates a disturbing trend, and very clearly prioritizes the number of high rise units allowed over the quality of life for the new and existing residents of the Shasta / Hanchett Park Neighborhood Association.

In lowering the fees for the Diridon Station Area Plan, the plan puts at risk the 'green fingers' concept within the plan, the likelihood of a park at the Fire Training Station, and the Los Gatos Creek Trail. When fees are cut, amenities must follow.

Last year, Council directed the Parks Department to look at the whole of the Park Fee program. Now, instead of moving forward hand in hand with the Greenprint update and city-wide results, the proposal is to accelerate this single piece of the study. Parks is tasked with the acquisition and maintenance of parks and trails. For Planning and the City Council to undercut this mission will have an adverse effect on both the new developments and those residents who currently call the City of San Jose home. The Parks Commission correctly took issue with the "2017/2018 Annual Adjustment to Park Impact Fees" on November 1st.

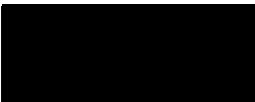
Most of the current park fee discount programs do not sunset for another couple of years. What is the purpose of pushing the expansion before that time? The optics of asking for an expansion of discounted high-rise park fees, while preparing for a potential bond measure to repair and maintain our *current* parks are troubling, to say the least.

We are similarly concerned about the expanded Downtown Core's impact upon nearby Urban Villages. The entirety of The Alameda Urban Village is within the borders of S/HPNA. When high-rise discounts were first proposed in 2006, advocates claimed they were only being proposed for Downtown (East of 87), as a very special case, and then solely as a means of temporarily jumpstarting the construction of Downtown housing. I believe the exact term was "a proven market". Downtown is clearly a proven market today, yet the discounts have been extended and broadened. Now you have before you the text to expand the park fee reduction to the Diridon Station Area. Putting the high-density housing and reduced park fees in close proximity to the surrounding Urban Villages will hamstring them at the earliest, most fragile stages of development. The City would therefore be throwing out years of community engagement and planning, for the sake of a finite number of developers and developments. Any gains Downtown will come at the cost of surrounding neighborhoods and Urban Villages.

Rather than potentially reducing the financial allocations for parks and neighborhood services, please take this opportunity to make a strong statement in favor of the social, economic, and health benefits of a properly maintained Parks system. In the face of recent difficult budget cuts, PRNS staff has struggled valiantly to maintain our parks at a level well-beyond the staffing and resources allotted to them. Now is the time to correct those deficiencies, and make clear that the Mayor and Council's vision for a vibrant, growing San Jose include parks and recreation facilities worthy of the Capital of Silicon Valley.

We take pride in our neighborhood; S/HPNA Board members and volunteers have been diligent advocates and volunteers in our parks for many years, and will continue to do so. Therefore, we ask you to match this dedication. Our community can only benefit from your support today. We look forward to being a part of the process to address quality urban planning, public safety, and truly livable amenities for our diverse community.

Respectfully submitted,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Edward Saum.

Edward Saum

President, Shasta/Hanchett Park Neighborhood Association