

Comment on 11.3.21 Agenda Item II Study Session Topic Article XIX - Equity and Inclusion

Brian Schmidt [REDACTED] >

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To: CharterReview <CharterReview@sanjoseca.gov>

 1 attachments (193 KB)

General Plan - Coyote Valley Oct 2020 - Equity and Inclusion ltr.pdf;

[External Email]

Dear Charter Review Commissioners:

Thank you for your vital work on inclusion issues. Article XIX, the former 2018 Measure C that passed with 61% public approval, took an important step for equity and inclusion on housing issues and open space. This measure was instrumental in defeating Measure B, a deceptive proposal by billionaires that would have developed hillsides outside of San Jose and create an overlay process for weakening affordability requirements for housing citywide, with the undeveloped Coyote Valley becoming a direct target. Article XIX/Measure C stopped that, in effect requiring enhanced affordable housing for undeveloped lands designated as industrial lands that are close to or at the urban edge, places like Coyote Valley, undeveloped hillsides above Evergreen neighborhoods, and a few others.

We urge any consideration of changing Article XIX to consider the ramifications on equity and inclusion from potential risks the changes would create to open space, including but not limited to Coyote Valley. Public open space is an equity issue. Please see the attached letter signed by 27 community leaders regarding the importance of Coyote Valley and open space for the purposes of equity and inclusion.

Finally, we note that Coyote Valley is being proposed for open space protection, but that has not happened yet, and litigation may result in delays of General Plan changes. A 2.3 million square foot, Amazon-style warehouse development was just proposed for farmland in Coyote Valley, so the fate of this area is still undetermined. Please do not do anything to jeopardize the protections in the Charter, and the environmental community will also carefully review anything that comes to the City Council and the public for their decision-making.

Please contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,
Brian Schmidt



Brian Schmidt

Legislative Advocacy Director

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October 27, 2020

2040 General Plan Four-Year Review Task Force
City of San Jose

Re: Equity and Inclusion - Coyote Valley

Dear General Plan Task Force Co-chairs, Task Force Members, and City staff,

We are 27 local community leaders working to confront and address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and liberation in San Jose and throughout the Bay Area region.

The health of people and our communities is inextricably tied to caring for our remaining working lands and wild places. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, low-income communities, and people with disabilities bear the brunt of climate crisis impacts. We have very little time to make big changes and over the next decade we need to build resilience into the physical environment of our communities. Protecting and restoring at-risk open space and shifting to entirely infill development is an important way to do this.

We support staff's recommendation for Coyote Valley. The highest and best use for Coyote Valley is as open space and agriculture. We ask that the San Jose General Plan Review Task Force members consider the following as they weigh recommendations from City staff.

One of the first steps toward race equity is to acknowledge that unless we are descendants of the local Native American tribe, we reside on unceded land. The United States began with the conquest and genocide of Indigenous People. In the San Jose region, we reside on the sacred land of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area. For thousands of years, ancestors of the Muwekma Tribe stewarded the Coyote Valley region. Native American people have an inherent stake in any environmental issue in their traditional territory and are uniquely impacted by environmental degradation. The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area and the Amah Mutsun Tribe are both members of the Protect Coyote Valley coalition and support the permanent protection of Coyote Valley. Their ancestors understood that if we do not take care of the environment, then we face extinction as a people because we have a codependent relationship with land, wildlife, plants, and the Earth itself.

Affordable infill development within the current development footprint of the city is a more efficient use of resources. Prioritizing the health and resilience of our community means making open space investments paired with affordable housing policies and strategies. The City should prioritize resources to develop infill housing. Developing in the Wildland Urban Interface and in rural areas that are prone to fires and floods will only further

deplete public resources that can be better spent in other parts of the city. Sprawl inequitably spreads city resources that could be better used on city services such as libraries, parks, affordable housing, and other community services. Infill is more cost-effective for cities and counties, since the infrastructure is already established.

Building infill is better for the local economy and local workers since this type of construction creates better-paying jobs for construction workers. The wage difference between infill and urban sprawl housing building projects is at least 60% and workers who build in downtown cores bring more money home to their families.

Low-income residents stand to gain the most from climate action. Extreme weather events have outsized and long-term impacts on vulnerable communities because they are much less able to recover from the destruction of property and the costs of relocation. There are residents along the Coyote Creek watershed who still have not recovered from the impacts of the 2017 flood in San Jose. The flood, which occurred on Feb. 21, 2017, following heavy storms, caused an estimated \$100 million in damage and forced the emergency evacuation of 14,000 residents of neighborhoods in and around downtown San Jose.

Since Coyote Valley filters residents' drinking water and air and limits the urban heat island effect, its protection is an act of environmental justice. A protected and restored Coyote Valley serves as San Jose's green infrastructure and helps to protect residents downstream from flooding. A developed Coyote Valley would have the opposite effect, increasing flood risk, reducing air quality, putting our water quality at risk, reducing a local water source, and increasing emissions and temperatures.

Furthermore, according to a recent study, *The Benefits of Saving San Jose's Coyote Valley: A Case Study in Climate Action Planning*, concentrating infill development in downtown San Jose instead of in Coyote Valley would reduce passenger vehicle greenhouse gas emissions by at least 14,000 metric tons per year. It would also double the percentage of residents (from 1.7% to 3.4%) who can access a quarter of San Jose's jobs within 30 minutes via public transit.

Food security is a real issue for San Jose residents and protecting local farmland is a part of the solution. One in four people in Silicon Valley are at risk of hunger. A new Second Harvest study suggests that 26.8% of the population – almost 720,000 people – qualify as “food insecure.” In the face of the climate crisis, access to locally-grown food matters now more than ever. Coyote Valley is prime farmland and can provide San Jose residents with local, fresh produce. The 7,400 acres of agricultural land could eventually generate \$35 million per year and benefit San Jose by providing access to fresh, sustainable produce. Furthermore, Coyote Valley is one of the last remaining locations in San Jose that is large enough to implement a local regenerative agriculture effort which

would include farming and grazing practices that, among other benefits, can help San Jose reach its climate goals by rebuilding soil organic matter – resulting in both carbon drawdown and improving the water cycle. Regenerative agriculture practices have roots in historic Indigenous knowledge of how to work with the land.

Investment in open space is particularly critical for people who are negatively impacted by economic disadvantage, systemic racism, trauma, opportunity gaps, and other challenges. Experiences in nature can help ameliorate high blood pressure, anxiety, sleeplessness and other harmful health conditions associated with environmental racism and the stressors that disproportionately affect communities of color and low income. Preserving ample open space is critical for providing city dwellers with a safe opportunity to exercise while social distancing.

Thank you very much for your consideration and all that you do to confront and address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and liberation in San Jose and throughout the Bay Area region.

Sincerely,

Chairwoman Charlene Nijmeh
Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San
Francisco Bay Area

Blanca Alvarado
Former Santa Clara County
Supervisor

Tamara Alvarado
Shortino Family Foundation Executive
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