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Transmitted via email

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Members of the Citizen Advisory Committee
Comprehensive Plan Update
City of Palo Alto
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Dear Members of the Citizens Advisory Committee

RE: Discussion of the Land Use & Community Design Element

SV@Home is the voice of affordable housing in Silicon Valley, representing a broad range of interests, from leading employers who are driving the Bay Area economy to labor and service organizations, to nonprofit and for-profit developers who provide housing and services to those most in need. Our mission is to drive the creation of affordable housing for a more vibrant and equitable Silicon Valley.

We are appreciative of the work that the City and the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) are doing to focus on housing and to reconsider policies in an effort to increase development. With the City's and region's current imbalance of jobs and housing units, this is a really important task.

On behalf of our members we offer a few comments for your consideration:

Heights – We encourage the conversation around height limits, and agree that relaxing the current 50-foot high limits will help to decrease the cost of new development. We support the idea of allowing increased heights, in areas where it makes sense, such as along transportation corridors and in high use areas, in exchange for the provision of affordable housing. Strict City-wide height limits restrict opportunities to ensure limited land is developed at its full potential.

Surplus Land— Land is a finite commodity in Santa Clara County and the sale or lease of surplus lands is a simple way to facilitate affordable housing development in the post-redevelopment environment. The State Surplus Land Act requires public agencies to prioritize affordable housing on publicly-owned land that is sold or leased. We urge you to add to Palo Alto's toolbox of solutions by including a policy that ensures compliance with the State Surplus Land Act..

Transitional uses – We recommend that the CAC consider prioritizing “Missing Middle Zoning”—townhouses, duplexes, four-plexes, etc.—as a way to transition between lower intensity and higher intensity uses and to expand the diversity of housing stock within the City.

Housing for all—While the policies in the land use element call for increased density and housing diversity, they should reflect the need for housing that is affordable across all income segments. Increased density alone does not equate to housing that is affordable to lower-wage retail and service sector workers. Since the Land Use element calls for increased retail opportunities to serve the needs of the community, it is important to consider that these retail uses pay low-wages. Creating opportunities for these workers to live in Palo Alto will contribute greatly to reducing congestion and traffic for the entire Palo Alto community.

Transit Oriented Residential Housing – Zoning standards for transit oriented residential housing zones should be crafted to include a minimum density, affordability requirements, and mix of unit types without being overly prescriptive. Doing so ensures that multi-family developers can adequately respond to future RFPs with a project that responds to the needs of the community for a range of housing options, including affordable housing, while responding to market conditions.

Please accept my apologies for being unable to deliver these recommendations in person during this evening’s CAC subcommittee meeting. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback and look forward to continued opportunities to engage in Palo Alto’s Comprehensive Plan update process.

Sincerely,

Pilar Lorenzana-Campo
Policy Director, SV@Home

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