



Bob Strain, Planning/Zoning Chair
7160 Echo Ridge Drive
San Jose, CA 95120

July 26, 2011

Mr. Joseph Horwedel, Director
Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement
200 East Santa Clara Street, 1st Floor
San José, CA 95113

Re: Envision San José 2040 and PEIR

Dear Mr. Horwedel:

In reviewing the current draft of Envision San José 2040 and the draft Program Environmental Impact Report, the board of the Almaden Valley Community Association finds a great deal to recommend the new plan. Some of the particularly strong points are:

- Clearly defining the urban boundaries of San Jose
- Protecting the Mid Coyote Valley and South Almaden Valley Urban Reserves
- Addressing the expansion of jobs within the city of San Jose
- Providing for periodic, serious reviews of San Jose's evolution in comparison with the goals of the General Plan.
- Focusing growth into areas where it can be best supported.
- Using one or more "Urban Villages" as a pilot, because they may not work as envisioned.

The PEIR makes it clear that growing the population of San Jose will have an adverse effect on the quality of life in the city. In fact, the quality of life in San Jose has been deteriorating already, largely because of ten consecutive years of budget deficits. This has created the obvious effects of deferred maintenance on the streets, medians, and parks in the city. It has created libraries that are closed as much as they are open, averaging in the newly constructed, vacant sites. More recently, these deficits have created a probable decrease in public safety because of police and fire lay-offs

Consequently, the focus of Envision San José 2040 on expanding the city's employment base is extremely important. A fiscal analysis of San Jose's existing land usage (prepared by ADR, Inc.) shows that every new job in the city is a net financial benefit to the city, and every new residence is a net financial loss. Keeping job creation as a primary focus is a long term strategy that will enhance the sustainability of San Jose and its quality of life. This general plan correctly reflects that.

Based on Table 8.5-1 in the PEIR, the baseline plan proposes adding 470,000 new jobs over the 30-year horizon of the plan, and it proposes adding 120,000 dwelling units. We find Scenario 1 (It is titled "Low Growth.") very interesting because it adds 88,650 dwelling units over the same time frame. This rate matches the 3,000 DU/year growth that the city has experienced over the last decade. There is no apparent need to expand the housing base faster than the recent pace, and acceleration is bound to be difficult because the amount of buildable land is severely constrained. Housing is going to expand vertically, and the market has not totally embraced that concept, so far. As noted above, each added residence is a net expense in the San Jose budget.

Scenario 1 is probably more realistic, and for that reason it is a better choice than the baseline plan. Scenario 1 calls for adding 346,550 jobs in thirty years, approximately doubling the employment base. The so-called "Low Growth" plan targets a ratio of 1.2 jobs for each employable resident. That is clearly a worthy objective, even though it is slightly less than the goal of 1.3 in the General Plan.

This is where the periodic reviews are extremely important. If the city's employment growth falls significantly behind a rate of 4 jobs per new dwelling unit, the review process should trigger a moratorium on residential construction. (That ratio, 4 jobs/DU, is roughly common to both the proposed General Plan and Scenario 1.)

AVCA has noted that the Association of Bay Area Governments proposes a very different scenario, one in which San Jose continues to act as a dormitory for the balance of the Bay Area. That is clearly not acceptable. Being a bedroom community contributes to the city's structural deficits, and it adds to the average vehicle miles traveled. Bad for the roads. Bad for the air. Bad for the quality of life. Bad for San Jose's sustainability.

There are assumptions in the General Plan concerning the success of mass transit. Like the popularity of high rise living, that cannot be taken for granted. This area developed as car-connected region. A major part of Silicon Valley's appeal to highly educated workers is the fact that if something goes wrong at Company A in Santa Clara, Company B in San Jose has job openings; one's career can progress without selling a house, changing schools, or abandoning friends and neighbors. Since that flexibility is important to the key workers, it must be retained, because companies come here for the highly trained, highly innovative labor force. The flexible connection between Silicon Valley companies and their workers is the local infrastructure, and today that infrastructure is roads.

Consequently, the efficacy of mass transit must also be included in the periodic reviews. At this time, mass transit, bicycles and even car pools represent a small fraction of the overall employment-related traffic.

One of the opportunities for relieving congestion lies in telecommunications, which is almost an afterthought in the General Plan. It is addressed in general terms at the end of Chapter 3 in the General Plan. Most of the dark optical fiber has vanished, and IN 6 on page 3-58 stresses localized communication capabilities. To be attractive, San Jose also needs to have data communication freeways, high capacity fiber trunks, switching nodes and server farms. As long as we are human, face-to-face communication will be best, but high bandwidth video conferences are becoming more common and better tolerated because of savings in time and travel. Bandwidth availability across the city will

facilitate more work from home, as well. In fact, work-from-home is a potential bonanza for reducing vehicle miles in San Jose and Silicon Valley.

The Program Environmental Impact Report makes it clear that increasing the population density of San Jose will create unavoidable adverse effects. Key to mitigating those effects is having an economically and fiscally sustainable city. Envision San José 2040 charts a path toward that goal, and for that reason it deserves strong support. The plan needs further buttressing to make sure that its aims are followed. Since expanding housing has been San Jose's easiest growth path in the past, the reviews should be capable of establishing housing moratoria when the dwelling units are out-running job creation, or when they are out-running infrastructure capacity.

Attracting jobs to San Jose at the rates suggested in either the General Plan or in the Low Growth Scenario is a serious challenge. The City Council must examine both the encouragements and impediments posed by the City of San Jose. Wise strategies and skilled execution will be required to bring 12,000 to 16,000 new jobs here every year.

Cordially yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat McMahon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pat McMahon
President
Almaden Valley Community Association

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob Strain". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bob Strain
Planning/Zoning Chair
Almaden Valley Community Association

Cc. District 10 Council Member Nancy Pyle