



VEP Community Association

Representing More Than 2000 Families in the Blossom Valley Area of South San Jose Since 1969

Emailed to: john.davidson@sanjoseca.gov

July 29, 2011

John Davidson, Senior Planner
Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement
200 East Santa Clara Street, Tower 3
San Jose, CA 95113-1905

Re: Draft PEIR for Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan, File #PP09-011

Dear Mr. Davidson and Planning Staff:

On behalf of our membership, the Board of Directors of the VEP Community Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft GP2040 Program Environmental Impact Report. VEP recently sponsored two formal presentations on Envision San Jose 2040, which elicited significant interest in this revision of our general plan.

The VEP Board would like to commend the members and staff of Envision San Jose 2040 for the work and commitment that went into developing it. Some of its particularly strong points are:

- Continuing to increase the number of jobs within the city of San Jose as a priority in achieving fiscal sustainability;
- Providing for periodic, serious reviews of San Jose's evolution in comparison with the goals of this general plan;
- Continuing support of environmental goals including protection of areas surrounding San Jose, such as the Mid-Coyote Valley and South Almaden Valley Urban Reserves;
- Clearly defining the urban boundaries of San Jose;
- Providing protection and support for established residential neighborhoods while advancing new models for the future;
- Focusing growth into areas where it can be best supported; and
- Utilizing the concept of one or more pilot projects in developing "urban villages", to ensure successful implementation of this new concept in our city.

The new general plan also raises concerns for the city's future. The PEIR indicates that increasing San Jose's population will definitely have a negative impact on the quality of life that we have all come to expect. Unfortunately, the quality of life in San Jose has been slowly deteriorating over recent years, largely due to the economic downturn and ten years of consecutive budget deficits. This has resulted in decreased services and deferred maintenance on our infrastructure, particularly streets and parks. Libraries and community centers have also been seriously impacted, and most recently concern has increased over the budgetary requirements to decrease public safety services.



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Page 2 of 3

Therefore, the focus of Envision San Jose 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; every new residence is a net financial loss. Understanding this, we applaud your focus on job creation as a long term strategy that will enhance the fiscal sustainability of San Jose and its quality of life.

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, as well as proposing adding 120,000 dwelling units. We find Scenario 1 (titled "Low Growth") to be a preferable scenario, as it adds 88,650 dwelling units (DU) over the same timeframe. This matches the average 3,000 DU/year growth rate 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 with the amount of buildable land being severely constrained. Moreover, each new residential unit adds to our city's costs.

Scenario 1 also calls for adding 346,550 jobs in thirty years, approximately doubling the employment base. The "Low Growth" plan targets a ratio of 1.2 jobs for each employable resident. This is clearly a worthy objective, even though it is slightly less than the goal of 1.3 in the General Plan's baseline scenario. Periodic reviews will be key to assisting the city in determining how to proceed. Should job growth fall behind, the review process should trigger a corrective moratorium on residential construction.

However, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) proposes a very different scenario, one in which San Jose will continue to function as the "bedroom community" for our area. This has not been acceptable in the past, and will clearly be problematic should it continue into the future. Being the "bedroom community" contributes to the city's structural deficits, while also adding to the "average vehicle miles" traveled (adding to the challenge of the goal to reduce this number significantly in the future). Clearly this would not be good for San Jose; bad for our roads, bad for our air, bad for our quality of life, and bad for San Jose's fiscal, economic, and environmental sustainability.

One of the opportunities for relieving congestion lies in telecommunications, which the General Plan briefly addresses in Chapter 3. Many businesses, both large and small, use teleconferencing and webinars to educate and bring their employees and stakeholders together, whether they are in the next building, are three miles away, or are 3,000 miles away. To be attractive, San Jose needs to have communication freeways, high capacity fiber trunks, switching nodes, and server farms. Work-from-home is a potential bonanza for reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in San Jose and Silicon Valley.

There are ambitious assumptions in the General Plan concerning the success of mass transit. While the goal to significantly increase usage of mass transit is an admirable one, currently the region is strongly interconnected by roads and use of private vehicles. This is borne out by the fact that mass transit, bicycles, and carpools make up a small percentage of the employment-related traffic. Continued public education, increasing bicycle lanes, and financial incentives by employers will continue to encourage the growth in usage of mass transit. However, as this is a significant cultural shift for the majority of the residents of our city, efficacy of mass transit should be included as part of the periodic reviews in the general plan.



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Page 3 of 3

Envision San Jose 2040 proposes the development of several “urban villages”. Of the seven identified proposed locations, the one on the VTA Park ‘n Ride lots at Capitol Expressway/Narvaez/Hwy 87 is of particular interest and concern to the VEP Community. For more than five years, VEP has had a formally-adopted goal to work toward the improvement of the intersection at Capitol Expressway/Narvaez and the onramp/offramp to Hwy 87. This intersection has had significant traffic volume and traffic flow issues for several years. It became problematic following the development of Communications Hill.

In 2007, VTA proposed selling/leasing the same property that is currently included in the proposed general plan. The surrounding communities became very concerned about the potential to worsen ongoing traffic gridlock that occurs daily at this intersection, and voiced their concerns to VTA, to members of the City Council, and to members of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. VTA enlisted Fehr & Peers Consulting firm to develop possible scenarios for resolution. Each of their four alternatives indicated that a portion of the land (now part of the Park ‘n Ride lots) would be needed to mitigate existing congestion on the northbound onramp to Hwy 87. Currently, although it’s listed on VTA’s Highway Program, there is no plan or funding in place to improve this intersection or highway onramp. Without a plan to improve the intersection and onramp, the development of the VTA property into an “urban village” would certainly worsen congestion there, negatively impacting the established surrounding residential communities. Worse, using any of the available land could foreclose the possibility of future traffic mitigation. This is a major concern to VEP and its neighboring communities.

Since 1969, the VEP Community Association has an established history of commitment and willingness to work in collaboration with elected officials, staff, and developers on projects that directly affect our community. We would welcome the opportunity to do so again should the proposal go forward to develop the VTA Park ‘n Ride lots as an “urban village”.

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 Jose 2040 charts a path toward that goal, and for that reason, it certainly deserves support.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Rodgers, President
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Cc: District 10 City Councilmember Nancy Pyle