



April 21, 2009

Mayor Chuck Reed and City Council
City of San Jose
200 East Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113

RE: Envision San Jose 2040 alternatives for environmental review

Mayor Reed and Council Members:

Greenbelt Alliance recognizes that the City of San Jose is a regional leader when it comes to providing homes for Silicon Valley's workers. San Jose has also demonstrated a commitment to infill development near transit stations. With the region expected to grow by nearly 2 million new residents in the next 30 years, all cities and towns will be expected and encouraged to add new homes. Greenbelt Alliance also recognizes that San Jose has a jobs/ housing imbalance and supports the City in its efforts to attract a significant portion of the new jobs headed to Santa Clara County.

As San Jose updates its General Plan, Greenbelt Alliance will continue to advocate that homes and jobs be located near existing and planned transit stations, on underutilized sites. We also expect to see an emphasis on planning and designing around people as opposed to cars, and a commitment to open spaces, whether they are urban parks, trails and creeks, working farms or wildlife corridors. As you receive an update on the Envision San Jose 2040 alternatives for the Environmental Impact Report, I hope you give consideration to the open space value of the Coyote and Almaden Valley Urban Reserves. It is understandable that North Coyote has been set aside to attract new jobs. However, mid-Coyote Valley, and especially Almaden Valley, are not needed for development anytime soon. Greenbelt Alliance encourages the City Council to consider a change in designation of these urban reserves to more clearly reflect their open space value. The reasons identified below provide the basis for why this consideration is timely.

Climate Change Legislation

Last year, SB 375 was signed by Governor Schwarzenegger and is the nation's first law to control greenhouse gas emissions by curbing sprawl. SB 375 will provide emissions-reducing goals for which regions can plan and provides incentives for local governments and developers to follow new conscientiously-planned growth patterns. SB 375 enhances the Air Resources Board's (ARB) ability to reach AB 32 goals. SB 375 builds the case for smart infill near transit and neither Coyote Valley nor Almaden Valley qualify as opportunities for infill or transit-oriented development. Development in these valleys would pave natural areas and detract from the multitude of infill opportunities within San Jose's urbanized area. One way to truly embrace the essence of San Jose's Green Vision is to pursue sustainable development near transit and designate high value lands as open space. This also helps the City reach its open space and parks goals.

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Costly Infrastructure

California's infrastructure is aging and sprawl development has proven to be unsustainable, costly and inefficient. As cities grow, making better use of existing infrastructure and directing valuable dollars to enhancing the roads, sidewalks, pipes and services already in place is both the environmentally and economically right thing to do. San Jose is dealing with the costs of managing a city that has spread out too far. Adding development in either of the urban reserves would be more than the City can handle for decades. San Jose should build more homes and attract more jobs, but this growth must make better use of existing infrastructure and breathe new life into existing neighborhoods.

Santa Clara County, and especially San Jose, has also made a commitment to bring BART to the South Bay. Planning around future BART stations makes sense for San Jose. Coyote and Almaden valleys would not benefit from BART. Setting them aside for their eventual development represents a direction for San Jose that is neither good for the City's fiscal health nor for achieving the City's Green Vision.

Plenty of Room to Grow

As part of the San Jose General Plan Steering Committee, Greenbelt Alliance participated in a bus tour last June. The amount of land dedicated to large roads, surface parking and languishing strip malls is significant. While it may be challenging, the rewards from redesigning these areas would be considerable. Auto-dependent neighborhoods can benefit from an infusion of new homes, jobs, shops, parks, bike lanes and more. The empty lots and under-utilized areas located throughout the City are many and can accommodate much of San Jose's projected growth.

Value of Coyote Valley as Open Space

The Santa Clara County Habitat Conservation Plan, of which San Jose is an integral part, identifies Coyote Valley as an important wildlife corridor. Coyote Valley also performs an important function as both flood control and groundwater recharge. San Jose gets most of its drinking water from underground aquifers. Therefore, being prudent about which lands get paved is of great consequence. Lastly, as the importance of locally grown fresh produce grows, San Jose must not underestimate the value of nearby farmland.

Greenbelt Alliance looks forward to working with San Jose on Envision 2040. Staff has already done an excellent job of providing knowledgeable speakers and excellent reading materials. We would like to see the City adopt a model climate-friendly General Plan. Studying alternatives that offer a mix of homes and jobs would not be complete without looking at the benefit of directing that growth into appropriate locations and away from sensitive open space lands.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Michele Beasley
Senior Field Representative