



August 30, 2009

Mr. Albert Balagso, Director
Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services
City of San Jose
200 East Santa Clara Street
San Jose, CA 95113

RE: Greenprint 2009 Update

Dear Mr. Balagso,

Thank you for allowing Greenbelt Alliance the opportunity to comment on the Greenprint 2009 Update. Since 1958, Greenbelt Alliance has been the Bay Area's advocate for open spaces and vibrant places.

At Greenbelt Alliance, we believe in taking a regional perspective on how best to accommodate growth in the nine county San Francisco Bay Area. The region is expected to add 1.7 million people in the next 25 years. Growth that is poorly planned will lead to more traffic congestion, air pollution and lost farmland. Sustainable development in the right places, such as in downtowns and transit corridors, absorbs that growth while easing the pressure to develop valuable habitat and watershed lands.

Simply placing more homes and jobs near transit, however, does not create a great neighborhood. It is the details, such as quality park space and trails, that make cities great places to live and visit. Investing in these details is a critical component of thoughtful urban development. The City of San Jose must recognize the role that quality public spaces play in transforming buildings and streets into a thriving and attractive community.

MAIN OFFICE • 631 Howard Street, Suite 510, San Francisco, CA 94105 • (415) 543-6771 • Fax (415) 543-6781
SOUTH BAY OFFICE • 1922 The Alameda, Suite 213, San Jose, CA 95126 • (408) 983-0856 • Fax (408) 983-1001
EAST BAY OFFICE • 1601 North Main Street, Suite 105, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 • (925) 932-7776 • Fax (925) 932-1970
SONOMA OFFICE • 555 5th Street, Suite 300B, Santa Rosa, CA 95401 • (707) 575-3661 • Fax (707) 575-4275
MARIN OFFICE • 30 North San Pedro Road, Suite 285, San Rafael, CA 94903 • (415) 491-4993 • Fax (415) 491-4734

INFO@GREENBELT.ORG • WWW.GREENBELT.ORG

A Larger Vision for San Jose's Parks

Greenbelt Alliance supports the vision put forth by Envision San Jose 2040 Task Force Co-chairs Shirley Lewis and Sam Liccardo that describes the Guadalupe River Park and Gardens as the backbone to a network of trails and parks. This model of an interconnected system that reaches out to all corners of San Jose would set the City apart from other large cities. Critical pieces of this network, especially east-west trail linkages, must be prioritized. Additionally, neighborhoods that are currently park deficient should have nearby points of entry into this park and trail system.

Residents and visitors alike can take advantage of San Jose's flat terrain and endless sunny days. As gaps in the system are filled, commuters will view cycling to work as a healthier and more sustainable alternative to the car. The trail system should also link villages, libraries and retail districts. Investing in this vision can have a ripple effect by reducing vehicle miles traveled and thereby greenhouse gas emissions.

San Jose has been designed and built for the automobile. The Update of the Greenprint as well as the General Plan should signal a sea change away from this unsustainable land use pattern. Instead, San Jose should be a city where people walk past storefronts, ride their bikes to school, lounge on street benches, get to know their neighbors, plant herbs and vegetables and soak in the sun.

Dena Belzer of Strategic Economics gave a presentation on how to achieve Greenbelt Alliance's vision of accommodating all the region's housing and jobs growth in existing cities and towns without paving farmland and natural areas. She ended her talk with the following advice:

Cities must invest proactively in infrastructure and placemaking; they can't rely on development to drive implementation. Trees and plants are critical in reinventing cities and the 21st century will be of the landscape architect, not the architect. Build places, not projects; build places of privilege for All. Great public spaces add value to everyone's property.

Three Creeks Trail

The 2000 Greenprint identified the Willow Glen Spur as an important East-West connector. The Update of the Greenprint has down-graded this linear park and off-road trail to an on-road bike lane. Greenbelt Alliance believes strongly that the trail alignment on the east side must honor the original Greenprint vision. Plans are only great if they are implemented according to the community's input and vision. By falling down on this important detail of trail connectivity, the City is not only missing out on the larger vision of parks and trails, but also in honoring the Mayor's Green Vision.

MAIN OFFICE • 631 Howard Street, Suite 510, San Francisco, CA 94105 • (415) 543-6771 • Fax (415) 543-6781
SOUTH BAY OFFICE • 1922 The Alameda, Suite 213, San Jose, CA 95126 • (408) 983-0856 • Fax (408) 983-1001
EAST BAY OFFICE • 1601 North Main Street, Suite 105, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 • (925) 932-7776 • Fax (925) 932-1970
SONOMA OFFICE • 555 5th Street, Suite 300B, Santa Rosa, CA 95401 • (707) 575-3661 • Fax (707) 575-4275
MARIN OFFICE • 30 North San Pedro Road, Suite 285, San Rafael, CA 94903 • (415) 491-4993 • Fax (415) 491-4734

INFO@GREENBELT.ORG • WWW.GREENBELT.ORG

If 40-50 years ago City leaders thought as equally about parks as they did about residential subdivisions, San Jose would not be as seriously park deficient as it is today. However, since we cannot go back, leaders today can at least seize opportunities to enhance existing parks and fill gaps in the trail system. San Jose wants to attract quality businesses. In order to do that, San Jose must attract a talented and diverse workforce. And in order to do that, San Jose must design itself as one of the great, green cities of the 21st century. That takes a bold vision and a mix of large and small tasks- one of which is honoring a critical piece to an extended park and trail system, the Three Creeks Trail.

Equity in Parks

Proposed General Plan Parks Policy PR-3.3 states the following: *Apply resources to meet parks, recreation and open space needs in underserved areas of the City.* 51 residential areas throughout the City have been indentified as not having access to a park, school or open space within 1/3 of a mile. The Greenprint, and thereby Envision 2040, should prioritize these 51 areas further by ensuring that lower income and higher density neighborhoods benefit first from new parks and better connectivity to the trail network.

Additionally, community gardens should be prioritized for lower income and high density neighborhoods. City Slicker Farms grows affordable fresh produce for West Oakland. The following is from their website:

Environmental racism is a daily reality in West Oakland. Not only are kids exposed to lead paint, they also don't get the proper nutrition to create strong bones and minds in the first place. Not only are they suffering from asthma and childhood obesity in increasing numbers, they also don't have safe places to play outdoors. Our gardens are havens where children can experience nature and begin to create healthy eating habits.

Greenbelt Alliance supports comments made by Brian Darrow of Working Partnerships, USA, that Parks Policy Action PR-2.10 should also incorporate information on how to grow one's own food. Community garden programs should also be tied to schools, as in the model of Full Circle Farm in Sunnyvale.

Creativity in Park Space

One of the questions posed to the Envision San Jose 2040 Task Force for the August 24th meeting was: *Given the scarcity of vacant land and large development sites, how should we meet the parks, recreation and open space needs of residents living in and adjacent to the Villages?* Here is an opportunity for both some creative thinking and copying of ideas from other cities. San Jose has a plethora of surface parking. City leaders must ask

MAIN OFFICE • 631 Howard Street, Suite 510, San Francisco, CA 94105 • (415) 543-6771 • Fax (415) 543-6781
SOUTH BAY OFFICE • 1922 The Alameda, Suite 213, San Jose, CA 95126 • (408) 983-0856 • Fax (408) 983-1001
EAST BAY OFFICE • 1601 North Main Street, Suite 105, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 • (925) 932-7776 • Fax (925) 932-1970
SONOMA OFFICE • 555 5th Street, Suite 300B, Santa Rosa, CA 95401 • (707) 575-3661 • Fax (707) 575-4275
MARIN OFFICE • 30 North San Pedro Road, Suite 285, San Rafael, CA 94903 • (415) 491-4993 • Fax (415) 491-4734

INFO@GREENBELT.ORG • WWW.GREENBELT.ORG

themselves and residents what is more important: plenty of parking options or quality park space.

Here are some of the creative ideas being employed around the country to address the critical need for more park space.

- In **Seattle, Washington**, volunteers and cycling clubs re-envisioned the land under I-5 from a homeless encampment into a mountain biking park.
- In **New York City**, an old elevated rail line adjacent to the meatpacking district was transformed into a linear park with four design principles: “*Keep it simple; keep it wild; keep it quiet; keep it slow.*”
- **PARK(ing) Day** is an annual, one day, global event where artists, activists, and citizens collaborate to temporarily transform metered parking spots into temporary public parks.
- **Trust for Public Land**’s work includes preserving parks for people, especially those in park deficient areas. They have promoted Fitness Zones, easy to use outdoor gyms, in places like Los Angeles.
- **KaBOOM!** is a national non-profit that facilitates building innovative, kid-inspired play-spaces, using a community-build model.
- Inspired by New York, San Francisco has instituted a **Pavement to Parks program** in which unused swaths of public rights of way will be temporarily reclaimed as public plazas and parks. The success of this program will determine if the transformation will be permanent.

By adopting creative approaches such as these, San Jose can begin to meet its park needs. Enrique Penalosa, former Mayor of Bogota, Colombia, gave an inspiring speech about taking back streets for the people:

Happiness is to be with people, to walk and to play, to have contact with nature, to not feel inferior. A good city invites you to be outside with people. A good city is one that is good for children, the elderly and the handicapped.

You may have some pain when streets are downsized and parking spaces removed, but the gain is significant when great public spaces are created.

Schools

Greenbelt Alliance shares the concern of many General Plan Task Force and community members that counting school playgrounds towards the City-wide goal of 3.5 acres per 1000 residents is inadequate. This is especially concerning if school acreage is being counted in the absence of a joint use agreement. While this is one creative approach in

MAIN OFFICE • 631 Howard Street, Suite 510, San Francisco, CA 94105 • (415) 543-6771 • Fax (415) 543-6781
SOUTH BAY OFFICE • 1922 The Alameda, Suite 213, San Jose, CA 95126 • (408) 983-0856 • Fax (408) 983-1001
EAST BAY OFFICE • 1601 North Main Street, Suite 105, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 • (925) 932-7776 • Fax (925) 932-1970
SONOMA OFFICE • 555 5th Street, Suite 300B, Santa Rosa, CA 95401 • (707) 575-3661 • Fax (707) 575-4275
MARIN OFFICE • 30 North San Pedro Road, Suite 285, San Rafael, CA 94903 • (415) 491-4993 • Fax (415) 491-4734

INFO@GREENBELT.ORG • WWW.GREENBELT.ORG

providing additional park space for San Jose residents, the uncertainty of whether or not changing school administrations will allow continued use of their facilities must be factored in. Residents deserve permanent park space as the city grows. San Jose must seek additional parks and trails to meet current and future demand.

San Jose can become a great and green City. A strong commitment to parks, open space and trails is critical to ensuring that residents and businesses find San Jose an attractive place to locate. Great places have great parks, sidewalks, and trails that are safe and easy to access. They are what transform buildings and streets into vibrant, walkable and inviting neighborhoods. Greenbelt Alliance hopes you will take our comments into consideration. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Greenprint 2009 Update.

Sincerely,



Michele Beasley
Senior Field Representative

Cc: Joseph Horwedel, Director of Planning
Laurel Prevetti, Deputy Director of Planning
Andrew Crabtree, Principal Planner

MAIN OFFICE • 631 Howard Street, Suite 510, San Francisco, CA 94105 • (415) 543-6771 • Fax (415) 543-6781
SOUTH BAY OFFICE • 1922 The Alameda, Suite 213, San Jose, CA 95126 • (408) 983-0856 • Fax (408) 983-1001
EAST BAY OFFICE • 1601 North Main Street, Suite 105, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 • (925) 932-7776 • Fax (925) 932-1970
SONOMA OFFICE • 555 5th Street, Suite 300B, Santa Rosa, CA 95401 • (707) 575-3661 • Fax (707) 575-4275
MARIN OFFICE • 30 North San Pedro Road, Suite 285, San Rafael, CA 94903 • (415) 491-4993 • Fax (415) 491-4734

INFO@GREENBELT.ORG • WWW.GREENBELT.ORG