



December 5, 2018

via email: generalplan@cityofsanmateo.org

Julia Klein, Principal Planner
Lily Lim, Associate Planner
Members of the General Plan subcommittee
City of San Mateo City Hall
330 West 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403

RE: San Mateo general plan visioning

Dear General Plan Subcommittee, Julia and Lily:

On behalf of Housing Choices, I am writing to provide comments on the Existing Conditions Report and the Vision Statement for the revised General Plan. Housing Choices is a nonprofit organization that assists San Mateo residents with developmental disabilities in their effort to find an affordable home in the City where they grew up and have networks of formal and informal support. The revised General Plan is the key to the ability of the City to provide housing that is inclusive of this population.

We strongly believe that the revised Plan must address past and current exclusionary zoning policies that have had a negative impact on many San Mateo residents. To provide meaningful guidance for the next twenty years of development, the revised Plan must acknowledge the displacement and hardship that current land use policies have had on low income people, people of color, young families, renters, and people with disabilities.

Only yesterday, at our Burlingame office, Sherwin, a Comcast technician, told me that as the parent of three children, one of whom has severe autism, he has made the difficult decision to re-locate his family to Elk Grove because he can no longer afford to live in San Mateo on his salary. Because salaries for the same job in Elk Grove are lower than in San Mateo, he will commute from Elk Grove to his current Comcast job, contributing to traffic problems and taking away hours each day when he could otherwise support his wife in raising their three children, including his son with autism, whose care demands prevent his wife from working.

Sherwin's story is typical of thousands of others. The ongoing economic displacement of hardworking families and people with disabilities shows the need for systemic

solutions to the city's urgent need for housing, especially affordable housing that is inclusive of people of all incomes and all abilities.

The Existing Conditions Report, on which the revised General Plan will be based, fails to document the destructive impact that robust job growth with no accompanying building of housing has had on the San Mateo community. The Existing Conditions Report does not describe the displacement, overcrowding, housing instability, and health toll created by the jobs-housing imbalance of the past two decades. It ignores the dramatic increase in no-cause evictions in the city, most of which have affected low-income families with children, even though we referred you to the report documenting these trends prepared by Community Legal Services. The omission of these existing conditions is simply unforgivable and must be addressed in order to create a vision statement that is grounded in an honest assessment of the failings of past policies and the need for significant change.

The General Plan's vision statement should be a forward-looking document that aims to solve the problems outlined in the Existing Conditions Report. This vision should be an active, goal-based document that helps SOLVE the land use challenges, not gloss over them.

Therefore, we encourage the following as guiding principles for the vision statement:

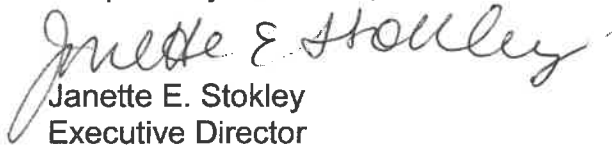
- **Racial diversity:** One of the greatest assets of San Mateo is its diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and languages. Latino communities are at the greatest risk of displacement, and have been for the past several years. Many other ethnic community members have been priced out or displaced by current exclusionary policies in place.
- **Income diversity:** In order to be a sustainable community, the City of San Mateo needs housing for workers of all incomes, including the child care worker, the gas station attendant, the administrative assistant, the restaurant server, the independent living aide, the senior home visitor, the nurse's aide and many others who work in critical but lower-paid jobs. Creating a General Plan that allows for housing only for the well-to-do is not simply unjust, it is also economically unsustainable. Such short-sighted policies will leave San Mateo's growing population of senior homeowners without the support systems that they require to age in place.
- **Ability diversity:** People with disabilities are an important part of our community and have much to contribute. But without access to housing that is affordable to extremely low-income people (defined as 30% of area median income and below), San Mateo's adults with disabilities will be forced into homelessness or driven out of the community altogether. Most of the people who work in the agencies that support this population are also extremely low-income or very low-income, and many agencies that employ the disability-serving workforce are closing programs due to the inability to pay wages to their workers that keep pace with the high housing.

- **Decreased traffic and greenhouse gas emissions:** Because of the high cost of housing, more and more of our service workers have to commute into San Mateo from neighboring counties, which strains the capacity of our roads and bridges, compounds traffic problems, and pollutes our air.
- **More room for open space:** Greater density and heights will allow us to house the people in our community who are being forced out by high housing costs, while still maintaining our open space.
- **Increased equity:** Existing height and density limits in San Mateo's land use policies make it almost impossible for affordable housing developers to build affordable housing. If we want to maintain our diverse community, we must continue to build affordable housing with income targeting that ranges from extremely low-income to moderate-income.

We hope you will take all these factors into consideration when revising the Vision Statement. We believe that the future of San Mateo as a thriving, diverse and inclusive community depends on it.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important document.

Respectfully submitted,


Janette E. Stokley
Executive Director

Email: jan@housingchoices.org

Phone: 408-713-2613