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October 10, 2018

Members of the General Plan Subcommittee  
c/o Julia Klein, Senior Planner, City of San Mateo

**Re: Striving for a Livable and Sustainable San Mateo**

Dear Members of the General Plan Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Bohannon Development Company, I would like to thank all of you for your history of public service and, particularly, for your willingness to serve on this important Subcommittee. As briefly described below, my family has deep roots in San Mateo, and we have significant financial and emotional investments in the City's future, so the City holds a special place in our hearts. And as the City commences the process to update its General Plan amidst upheaval in the housing market, retail, and transportation sectors, our commitment to our community compels us to participate more than we have in the past.

As you know, the Bay Area is facing many socio-economic challenges as economic growth continues to far outpace the ability to build, improve, and redevelop the infrastructure to accommodate more people and redress decades of poor regional transportation planning. Unfortunately, this is nothing new for jurisdictions throughout California, which have historically struggled to keep up with population increases. Yet, despite the current housing affordability crisis and our crumbling infrastructure, we are optimistic about the future because of the growing consensus that the status quo is unacceptable. And, we're particularly excited about San Mateo's future as the General Plan Update process commences – which couldn't be more timely.

The purpose of this letter is to briefly introduce ourselves, explain our questions and concerns as the General Plan Update proceeds to the substantive portions of the process, and to outline our intentions as we engage with the community. We believe that we can be a valuable resource and provide an important perspective as the plan is formulated.

**I. Why We're Here**

The Bohannon Development Company's interest in San Mateo's current and future well-being is multi-faceted. While we have developed property all over the Bay Area dating back to the 1930s, San Mateo is particularly important to us. My family built the Hillsdale community starting with a grocery store at the corner of Hillsdale Blvd. and El Camino Real in the 1940s, which we later expanded into a regional shopping center and adjacent residential neighborhood. We are proud that the shopping center continues to be a popular destination and significant financial contributor in and to the community. Still, the shopping center has been forced to evolve considerably over the last 60 years in response to cultural and economic trends.

Longtime San Mateans are probably more familiar with the Bohannon name. For newer residents, we are more likely to be associated with the Hillsdale Shopping Center, which is undergoing another substantial improvement (renovation of the north block) to attract new tenants in response to changing lifestyles, shopping habits, and tastes. Although we try to maintain a low profile, we believe you'll find that residents of all ages appreciate our commitment to be thoughtful stewards of our properties, as well as our genuine concern for the City's well-being evidenced through our support of local schools and charities.

We see that San Mateo is at a crossroads. The lack of affordable housing and efficient transportation options in the region are well-documented. Less documented, but of equal concern, should be changes to the retail environment, which chip away at the viability of brick and mortar establishments. What is less well understood is how these issues are related.

From our perspective, there is no question that the Hillsdale Shopping Center will need to continue to evolve, as will the environment in which we operate. This is especially true given changes in the way we live and work, the influence of the internet and online shopping, and changing demographics and economic conditions. How we shop, where we choose to live and work, and how we move around are all in dynamic transformation, as the region continues to grow and add jobs. Thus, in order to remain economically viable and vibrant destinations, retail environments, including Hillsdale, will need to incorporate housing, entertainment options, and office space so that people can live, work, and play in the same area.

## **II. Initial Questions for Consideration**

The Subcommittee has an incredible opportunity to address the City's housing and transportation challenges, and to serve as a leading example of how cities can achieve a more sustainable, livable future. I hope we can all agree how important this process is. Maintaining the status quo is not a viable or sustainable response to the problems facing our community. If we do nothing while other cities invest and accommodate growth, we will continue to deal with higher housing costs and increased congestion, while reaping none of the benefits afforded to those other cities. Our local businesses will continue to struggle, leading to the slow erosion of San Mateo's character, and the undermining of the City's fiscal platform. These risks are real, and they are imminent. But we are optimistic that the Subcommittee will be successful in addressing them in a meaningful way.

This process won't be easy. One city cannot solve all of the region's problems. But we know there are local solutions that can work – if there's the will to see that those solutions are adopted. Among the solutions that we will advocate for are additional height and density along El Camino Real in proximity to the train stations as well as in the downtown area, at levels that will support retail and serve the needs of those who are struggling to find affordable places to live, while fully preserving our residential neighborhoods.

We understand just how difficult the Subcommittee's job is and how your leadership will dictate whether the process produces the outcome the City needs and expects. This means that for the process to be productive, all of us will need to keep an open mind and not lose sight of the big



picture, and the committee will need to incorporate stakeholder and expert input, ask difficult questions, and think outside of the box. Accordingly, some of the key questions we believe that you should consider as part of this process are:

- How do we plan for a sustainable future with a larger population that will continue to experience changes due to technological innovations?
- How can San Mateo promote equitable, affordable housing that is inclusive and diverse, so that current residents and their children, as well as local workers at all income levels, and future residents have housing options that meet the changing tastes of younger generations?
- How can we create a vibrant, healthy, livable, pedestrian-friendly downtown, as well as vibrant, livable areas adjacent to transit that will help support and sustain our retail environment?
- How can we promote growth while keeping new traffic impacts to a minimum?
- How can we ensure that the ultimate plan is economically feasible so that it can be realized?

These questions are not exhaustive and are merely meant to help aid your thoughts as you prepare the plan's vision. Your thoughtful consideration of these questions, however, will likely affect the direction of that vision and, ultimately, whether this process is successful.

### **III. Team Introduction**

To help supplement the City's efforts, we have hired a planning expert, Matt Taecker, who has substantial expertise in transit-oriented development throughout the Bay Area. We intend to combine Matt's knowledge with our own expertise in development to provide meaningful input throughout the process, and we encourage you to be open-minded about our ideas as you tackle the difficult issues and questions outlined above. Matt will touch on some of our initial thoughts in his separate comment letter.

Please know that we are here to help facilitate the process, including the necessary conversations to ensure the process is productive. So please do not hesitate to reach out to any of us if you have any questions or could use another perspective.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to engaging with you throughout this collaborative process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Bohannon", with a stylized flourish at the end.

David D. Bohannon