

From: Dashiell Leeds <dashiell.leeds@sierraclub.org>

Sent: Wednesday, February 16, 2022 1:56 PM

To: City Council (San Mateo) <CityCouncil@cityofsanmateo.org>; Planning Commission <PlanningCommission@cityofsanmateo.org>

Cc: Clerk <clerk@cityofsanmateo.org>; City Mgr <citymgr@cityofsanmateo.org>; Gita Dev [REDACTED]; Gladwyn D'Souza [REDACTED]; James Eggers <james.eggers@sierraclub.org>; Barbara Kelsey <barbara.kelsey@sierraclub.org>

Subject: SCLP Comments on 2040 General Plan Draft Land Use and Circulation Alternatives Evaluation

RE: 2040 General Plan Draft Land Use and Circulation Alternatives Evaluation

Dear Mayor Bonilla and Members of the San Mateo City Council and Planning Commission,

The Sustainable Land Use Committee of the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club (SLU) advocates on land use issues in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. Thank you for providing the opportunity for SLU to provide input on the 2040 General Plan (GP) "Alternatives Evaluation Report" of January 14, 2022.

We have reviewed the Draft Alternatives and have the following comments for your consideration. These comments focus on Land Use and Circulation, since that is what the alternatives consider. Please see the attached letter for our full comments.

Sincerely,

Gita Dev

Co-Chair, Sustainable Land Use Committee
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

email sent by:

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SIERRA CLUB

LOMA PRIETA CHAPTER

SAN MATEO, SANTA CLARA & SAN BENITO COUNTIES

February 16, 2022

San Mateo City Council and Planning Commission
330 West 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403

RE: 2040 General Plan Draft Land Use and Circulation Alternatives Evaluation

Dear Mayor Bonilla and Members of the San Mateo City Council and Planning Commission,

The Sustainable Land Use Committee of the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club (SLU) advocates on land use issues in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. Thank you for providing the opportunity for SLU to provide input on the 2040 General Plan (GP) "Alternatives Evaluation Report" of January 14, 2022.

We have reviewed the Draft Alternatives and have the following comments for your consideration. These comments focus on Land Use and Circulation, since that is what the alternatives consider.

1. The Land Use Alternative C is the one we prefer. However, in some Study Areas, where Alternative B has higher housing density, Alternative B should be considered.

The lack of affordable housing on the Peninsula is driving many middle and lower income workers to commute long distances to work. Thus, the Land Use alternative must be aggressive in planning for significantly more housing in San Mateo. Alternative C proposes the most overall addition of housing; however, in some Study Areas, Alternative B has more density and should be considered for those areas.

The 21,080 new homes possible under Alternative C may not be enough. The new RHNA is 7,015 and covers 2023-2031. But the GP goes through 2040 which will include another Housing Element for 2032-2040. If the 2032 RHNA is twice the 2023 RHNA (as is now the case, where the 2023 RHNA has more than doubled from the last cycle), the city will need to add over 21,000 units which should include a significant number of affordable units, especially in the very-low and low-income levels, by 2040. So Alternative C has no margin for error.

Alternative C does the most to improve the jobs/housing balance as it could move San Mateo from 1.07 jobs per housing unit to .95. However, this metric does not capture the root problem, which is a lack of affordable housing to provide for the people that work in the lower paying, but important jobs on the Peninsula.

While the job/housing imbalance and jobs / housing fit¹ is a regional issue, the lack of affordable housing in San Mateo is particularly concerning. San Mateo needs to help resolve it by planning for more affordable housing especially at the Very-Low income and Low-income levels. San Mateo's RHNA of 7,015 units requires that 1,777 or 23.3% be Very Low Income, 1,023 or 14.6% be Low Income, and 1,175 or 16.7 % be Moderate Income for a cumulative 3,975 or 56.7% be Affordable. It is not clear how this Plan and associated city ordinances will make this happen.

The current GP has very low density (8 to 50 units per acre depending on location). Our [SLU Guidelines](https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/sce-authors/u4142/D-)

[sierraclub.org/loma-prieta](https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/sce-authors/u4142/D-sierraclub.org/loma-prieta) ~ 3921 East Bayshore Road, Suite 204, Palo Alto, CA 94303

[SAP%20Guidelines%20Rev%2010-14-19.pdf](#)) encourage significantly higher numbers (~100 units per acre) near transit. These higher densities should be considered.

Single Family Zoning within 1/2 mile from transit corridors, should also be considered for higher density given the proximity to transit. By adding growth along transit corridors, including within single family, transit-adjacent neighborhoods, the city can provide additional housing and the ridership to make transit viable. Land should be converted to higher end uses that increase community benefits like affordable housing, density, and pedestrian safety.

Consider the 15-minute neighborhood concept within the 20-year plan. Areas outside of a half mile from transit, currently underserved by transit, should be considered for increased commercial and mixed development using conditional use or overlay zoning as a tool. The 15-minute neighborhood planning precept would bring greater density of homes and services together and, over the 20-year plan, allow for future transit system services to grow to service the increased density. This will decrease future GHG creation and reduce environmental impacts.

Another idea is to use a Form Based Code that defines building heights, setbacks, architectural character, etc., that can be approved ministerially, to reduce the cost of housing. Then add an overlay of the updated community vision where the developer can obtain increased height and density in exchange for community benefits. San Francisco is getting 35% Extremely Low Income housing with such a system in Mission Creek.

In all of these possible approaches to land use, the need to clearly take concrete steps to improve the equity situation is essential. This is a problem that has been the result of many historical factors and will need deliberate effort to help resolve.

2. Much more rigorous evaluation is needed to confirm the probability that enough housing will be built to meet the RHNA

It appears that the increased housing is focused almost totally on the 10 Study Areas. These Study Areas are a relatively small part of San Mateo. So, expecting all of the new housing to be developed in these areas requires that a significant amount of the possible development take place in these areas. It is not clear that the needed amount of housing is likely to arise in these areas.

Areas like neighborhood shopping centers (Shoreview, Bel Mateo/Mollie Stone, Laurelwood and Parkside) are targeted for significant housing which should help support and complement these neighborhood shopping centers so people can easily walk or bike to take care of routine chores (grocery shopping, dentist, drug store, coffee shops, etc.). But, in order to retain some services, it is important that the shopping centers remain and are not completely replaced with housing.

Also, the Commercial Regional shopping centers (like Bridgepointe, Hillsdale) are likely to still have significant regional business, though less than today. Housing in these locations is desirable, but as a compliment to, not in lieu of these neighborhood and commercial regional centers. Around 2,000 units are being forecast to completely replace Hillsdale Mall. Is this realistic?

Finally, affordable housing is the type of housing that is by far the most needed. This type of housing should be planned over a wide part of the city so as to enhance equity.

3. The Circulation Alternative C is the best one.

This alternative is the only one that supports a strong improvement in both pedestrian and bike use. It also includes that most improvements in transit connections.

The adding of transit connections to Hillsdale Caltrain from Study Areas 3, 6 and 10 is very beneficial to reducing traffic and improving the environment.

Also, the inclusion of an innovative urban design downtown, modeled on the Barcelona “superblocks” is an excellent approach. This will limit car traffic downtown and encourage pedestrian and bike use.

The consideration of concepts such as automated micro-transit circulators, etc. are also a good feature of this alternative.

There is an opportunity to use RHNA mandates to green the city and prioritize pedestrians. The street rights of way are about 30-40% of San Mateo land and inserting greenways—converting streets to a create a network of pedestrian parkways planted with shade trees that are mainly for pedestrians and micromobility, with cars only allowed access to their driveways—would both provide needed green open space and recreation near homes as well as reduced use of cars. This also fits in well with the Barcelona “superblocks” concept. Our [Green Streets guidelines](#) shows how to insert a green network.

If San Mateo is to thrive in the future, it should be considering innovative solutions.

4. Comments on other aspects of the General Plan were described in our letter of May 13, 2021. We will provide more detailed comments when appropriate.

These topics include: Resilience and sea level rise adaptation and significantly increasing parks and open space.

We ask that you consider this information as you consider the preferred alternative for the 2040 General Plan.

Respectfully submitted:



Gita Dev, Co-chair,
Sustainable Land Use Committee, Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter (SCLP)

Cc Gladwyn d’Souza, Conservation Committee Co-chair, SCLP
James Eggers, Executive Director, Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

¹ **Jobs / Housing Fit:** An unsustainable jobs/housing fit means that the majority of homes within the city are not affordable to the majority of employees who work in the city, and conversely, the jobs in the city do not pay enough to cover the cost of housing in the city. This causes difficulty in hiring and retaining employees, higher worker costs, more traffic congestion, more air pollution, less time with family, and less time participating in community recreational activities and events.