

– SAN MATEANS FOR RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT –

March 3, 2022

Drew Corbett, City Manager
City of San Mateo
330 W. 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403
Via email: dcorbett@cityofsanmateo.org

Subject: One Year Later

Dear Mr. Corbett,

Just over a year ago, in February 2021, the five undersigned representatives of San Mateans for Responsive Government (SMRG), met in the City Hall atrium with you, Community Development Director Christina Horrisberger and Planning Manager Sailesh Mehrah. It was two months after voters approved Measure Y. As major stakeholders in the City, our purpose was to pledge our cooperation and our assistance in an effort to move forward together in a more unified, productive and positive fashion. It's one year later and unfortunately no one from the City has followed up on our good faith offer.

Consistent Message

For the third time in 30 years, the voters of San Mateo made it clear what kind of community they want to live in and what shape it's future should take. Voters have been consistently emphatic on this point, approving responsible and sustainable growth policies by over 60% the first time, and by nearly 70% fifteen years later. In 2020, San Mateo voters again chose this path despite a competing ballot measure and the most expensive opposition campaign in the history of San Mateo.

Over and over again, San Mateo voters have "determined that high-rise developments threatened the viability of the valued suburban character of the community, do not have the support of San Mateo residents, would irrevocably change the character of San Mateo for the worse," and "cause serious adverse impacts to its citizens and reduced quality of life." Voters also determined that future growth should not "unduly impair the City's ability to achieve its economic development goals," and that it was necessary to "increase the City's commitment to the production of affordable housing." (Quotes from actual ballot language).

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Simply put, the majority of San Mateans have consistently supported the construction of more housing, particularly affordable housing, continued job growth and economic development. But they don't believe it is necessary - nor are they willing - to sacrifice their homes, neighborhoods, quality of life, or character of their historic downtown in the process. The voter's consistent message should continue to guide the development of the community and should be at the core of the General Plan update.

But somehow the views and desires of the people of San Mateo have been distorted. They have been painted, not as an affirmation of a positive community vision, but as an obstacle that needed to be extinguished. Rather than working with the community to find common ground, the City fell under the spell of a special interest agenda that used the cover of soaring housing prices and climate change to push for deregulation, up-zoning, extreme heights and densities, by-right development, and unlimited housing and job growth. The consistent message of sustainable growth and neighborhood protection is being swept aside in a frenzied scramble to fast-track maximum development to "meet" housing demand and RHNA mandates. The notion that a win-win solution exists and that San Mateo residents would be receptive to moderate changes to accommodate RHNA is being ignored.

Pulling Out the Stops

Typically after an election, city leaders would accept the results and work towards setting policy accordingly. If there were any conflicts with State law, city leaders would work to align them with community interests by engaging in dialogue, negotiations, and compromise.

But instead of working together for the sake of the community, in the year following the election a concerted effort to overturn the results appears to have taken hold at City Hall. Pushing extreme densification and maximum building heights at every turn; advocating for the extreme build-out of General Plan Alternative C; expanding heights and sizes of ADUs so they resemble full size two-story homes; prioritizing the up-zoning of single family neighborhoods via SB 9 and 10; recommending the "elimination" of General Plan language that protects homes and neighborhoods; and falling silent when neighborhoods cry out for help and protection. There is no compromise here. There is no acknowledgment of the community's vision, only the advancement of a special interest agenda.

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Election “Remedy”

Can it be a coincidence that just four days after the Measure Y election results were certified, Scott Wiener introduced SB 10 to the State Legislature? Can it be a coincidence that two days later Councilmembers Bonilla, Goethals and Lee appeared as honorary speakers alongside Weiner at the 'No on Y' team meeting to discuss a strategy to negate the results of the election by working with their “statewide partners” to “remedy” the election outcome? And, can it be yet another coincidence that three city council members agreed to prioritize the possibility of adopting SB 10 in San Mateo. It is difficult to interpret these “coincidences” as anything other than an effort to override the election results and ignore the democratically expressed wishes of voters who have the audacity to love the city in which they live and dare express their wishes for its future.

Where Do We Go From Here?

City Council member Eric Rodriguez was recently quoted in the Daily Journal regarding the three Land Use and Circulation alternatives under discussion for the General Plan and the concerns of residents who voted for Measure Y. “I think we need to keep those sentiments of that part of the community in the back of our minds while we’re coming up with this General Plan because they are going to have to sign off on it,” Rodriguez said during a General Plan subcommittee meeting.

It is a sentiment that we have apparently lost sight of over the past year. We think it is time to take a step back and begin a dialogue that can lead to common ground. We reaffirm our offer to work collaboratively and cooperatively with the City in a manner that ensures that the will of the voters is honored and that moderate, beneficial and sustainable growth is accommodated. The future can be good for us all.

Sincerely,

San Mateans for Responsive Government

Karen Herrel, Hillsdale

Keith Weber, Aragon

Lisa Taner, Beresford

Maxine Turner, Aragon

Michael Weinbauer, Central

Cc:

Christina Horrisberger

City Council