

**From:** San Mateo United Homeowners Association <[sanmateounitedhoa@gmail.com](mailto:sanmateounitedhoa@gmail.com)>

**Sent:** Friday, November 4, 2022 1:38 PM

**To:** Zachary Dahl <[zdahl@cityofsanmateo.org](mailto:zdahl@cityofsanmateo.org)>

**Cc:** kiss bob [REDACTED]; Thomas Morgan [REDACTED] Lisa Taner

**Subject:** General Plan Input from SMUHA

Zach:

I apologize for the late submission, but better late than never!

Here are two documents in response to your request for neighborhood input to the General Plan. The GP Comments document is my summary of comments made at SMUHA meetings, to me in personal conversations, and in writing that I used to convey the opinions expressed as accurately as possible. I do believe a scientific sampling procedure for public input would provide clearer results. However, the uniformity of comments among those who contributed was significant, which is worth noting.

The second document, "Comments..." is a copy of emails I received from the neighborhoods.

I do hope that this helps.

Please call or email me if you have any questions.

Regards,  
Mike Nash

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# GENERAL PLAN COMMENTS

## 1. Land Use – and ensuring sufficient services to match growth.

There is widespread concern that the planned growth targets are excessive. The 21,000 number is a much faster growth rate than San Mateo has ever experienced. Can our infrastructure support that much change? Will this significant growth rate change the personality of the city? The General Plan should include a substantive analysis of the ability of our infrastructure to support the growth numbers as well as a description of what impacts this will have on quality-of-life measures such as parking, noise, and traffic congestion.

Our RHNA target of 7,015 is a third of this total. An explanation has yet to be provided for such a significant increase above the required development other than a concern about having a buffer for the next housing cycle (that fits within the General Plan period) which could ask for much larger numbers than 7,015. That big of an increase is unlikely to be needed in any case.

The State Audit committee discredited the RHNA numbers. The findings suggest they are double what they should be due to double counting key factors and applying incorrect vacancy rates. A simple calculation would lead to a lower RHNA target for San Mateo. If the State repeats the broken process for the next cycle, the city should protest vigorously as the burden of the error falls on the city.

There is widespread mistrust of the current City Council due to such decisions.

Also, there are many concerns about the quality of life that would result from this much growth.

1. Can PG&E provide enough electricity to deliver adequate energy to San Mateans if we grow that much? Add the goal of eliminating gas cars to this demand. Who has done the analysis that shows we can provide enough electricity? What costs are associated with this? Proper planning calls for this analysis before we commit to growth that depends on these resources. PG&E saying they can do it is not an analysis.
2. We know we are short on water. We know there is a desire to recycle water. Has an analysis been done to determine if recycling will support the 35% + population growth? It would seem logical to identify the potential for additional water and recognize it as a limit to growth.
3. How many more police officers will we need to remain safe and support the expanding responsibilities that the City seeks from its police? Will we need more police stations? Already traffic prevents desired police response times in parts of the City. A GP that makes police less effective will not be well regarded.
4. The same can be said for fire protection and schools. A careful examination must be done to determine the required growth for schools and fire services.
5. Will our sanitation systems be able to process the volumes that come from this level of growth?
6. Quality of life issues are also of concern. What is happening to our charming downtown area? There is little regard for the historic district evident in the proposed construction. We are losing retail shops. San Mateo has lost Trags; Draeger's is "on again off again," Molly Stones, Whole Foods, and Trader Joe's seem stable, but zoning changes threaten the El Camino Safeway. We lost Jos. Banks, Talbots, and other retailers. Will downtown become a haven for office workers with little to offer residents? 800,000 square feet of mixed-use glass boxes will make downtown a very different place.

7. Residents are concerned that the design of the new office buildings is simplistic and without personality. The appeal of downtown is diminishing with the change from an urban shopping zone to a conclave of biotech workers who will commute in from other cities as there is no balance for the office space with housing.
8. "Mixed-use" buildings do not provide enough housing to solve the problem and provide too small a population of homes to create a sense of community. Likely these will be rented or sold to building tenants for visiting workers.
9. People want to know that they will not have to travel to Burlingame or Belmont to shop for food or use home delivery services as grocery stores are eliminated. What other retail establishments won't survive?
10. Hillsdale mall wants to change to a recreational, commercial, and housing center as well. Their planning process has merit, but it is still being determined as to what will be proposed. How will this impact downtown?

## **2. Circulation**

The lack of Grade Crossings in the downtown area cannot stand. How can the City be cut in half for 45 minutes of every hour of travel? This is what the studies show as likely with grade separations. The City is seeking funds to study the cost and engineering needed to create grade separations for the downtown area. We should acknowledge this will be an inappropriate barrier in the City. We need a plan to mitigate this problem.

The conversion to VMT from LOS as a measure of traffic is an example of how to distort with statistics. People want less congestion. A car at idle for one hour emits more pollution than a miles traveled measure reveals. As electric vehicles expand, the VMT measure is less relevant. Our residents want to be able to drive without being stuck in traffic – our measures need to focus on that and pollution.

The belief that living within a half mile of a train station will eliminate the need for a car is hopeful at best. As a practical matter, a major east coast city's transit agency that I have dealt with use a one-quarter mile standard, as their customers won't walk a half mile.

Landlords tell me people in their apartments get cars as Caltrain is too expensive. The reasons for owning a vehicle are not eliminated by living near a north-south train in a city with no retail presence.

How realistic is our parking assumption? The cost of getting it wrong is extreme. We should validate this fundamental assumption before we bake limited parking spaces into our general plan.

## **3. Housing:**

People who are opposed to affordable housing are few and far between. The issue has been the draconian measures that State Bills use to build market-rate housing under the false premise that that will lower prices. Has denser construction been effective in reducing the prices of rental units in San Mateo?

Despite these State mandated changes, the housing market may not be robust enough for developers to see new housing as a good investment. How many approved projects are not being built in the Bay Area? Two major housing projects (Essex House and Concar) in San Mateo have been delayed or abandoned. Why is that?

It is too expensive to build an affordable home, so we need a better solution than building market-rate homes and hoping for prices to drop.

The State driven programs to densify the suburbs will increase the value of the land, which makes the problem worse, not better.

A description of the workforces that need to live here would make the issue more personal to the residents who are being asked to accept a degradation of their neighborhood's personalities, to accept worse traffic, more congestion, and less privacy to support housing. How will the city benefit from such a transformation?

The plan talks number of units intended for different income groups but not the kinds of workers that earn that income. That would help people understand. How do nurses, teachers, police, firefighters, baristas, restaurant servers, and childcare workers fit in the picture? What type of housing best appeals to these groups?

I understand those who choose to live remotely are not only lower-income workers ~~the poor~~ but **also** people who want space, not density. If we increasingly urbanize San Mateo, will we make it less appealing to these groups? Will it result in lower rental rates without financial subsidies?

We need to humanize the affordable housing discussion and enforce the described intent of the project with the actual tenants who benefit from the lower rent.

#### **4. Community Design and Historic Preservation**

Many people comment that they moved to San Mateo due to the nature of its downtown and the good vibes they feel in their neighborhood. As we look forward, we see primarily commercial office space being built downtown, with street-level retailers being replaced with offices. We see a fervent desire in Sacramento to urbanize our suburbs, a plan that is endorsed by too many of our City Councilors. Residents feel they are of no importance to the Council.

The City has ignored its historic assets since 1989. It seems the Council doesn't want to protect the rich Spanish Colonial, Tudor, and other architectural styles that are here. Instead, they favor design-and-build boxes or McMansions that will negatively affect the personalities of our neighborhoods and downtown.

Adding multiple housing units to single-family home areas flies in the face of current market trends and resident wishes.

#### **5. Conservation, Open Space, Parks and Recreation**

Everyone says they like open space but are unwilling to expand into preserved areas for growth. In fact, they are seeking more large-scale parks, not small parklets, so that they can enjoy the outdoors. How much land is available for parks, and can we meet the city's park percentage goals with this level of growth? Some are calling for a softening of the current goal, but that is moving in the wrong direction if we want a healthy environment.

## **Comments from SMUHA Members:**

### **Beresford Hillsdale Board members Concerns with General Plan**

#### **Item One:**

- Moving towards more High density, crowded, high traffic environment which will not provide solution to reasonable housing shortage, but will help raise property prices.
- Declined Schools quality and ratings
- Scarce Medical services: availability and quality to residents in normal times and times of emergencies.
- Old Infrastructure - capacity- city sewer lines, power, water: availability and cost to residents
- Stressed out Crime/fire prevention and law enforcement: Capacity and training of Police and Fire force.
- Low affordable retail (rental) offerings within city limits.
- Lack of fast transportation from San Mateo to/from other far away cities with more land area where workforce could enjoy living with better quality of life and have more affordable housing

#### **Item Two:**

I feel it's useless to give a list of concerns. I don't feel the City Council and other officials in the city listen to resident concerns. It's all about developers and lobbying from Bohanon!

That said, here are my concerns:

1. Epidemic of crime in the city. Catalytic convertor thefts. Car breakins. House burglaries. Even when the police can arrest a suspect, he/she is out on the street the same day.
2. There is little attention paid to infrastructure, sewer, water, traffic while most building is approved without requirement to support infrastructure. We are in the middle of a drought and yet more and more building is approved that will use more water.
3. Our streets are less safe because of dangerous drivers who speed, go through stop signs and in general drive recklessly.
4. There is a push by the city to allow multi family buildings to be built in single family zoned neighborhoods. This is done without regard to concerns of residents and lack of attention to parking availability.

5. Large Multi family buildings are being approved without mandated parking enough to accommodate the residents. Therefore their parking will spill into local neighborhoods.
6. The proposed construction on the Hillsdale Inn site will be a disaster for that neighborhood and that intersection. The builders and the city are minimizing the effect.
7. Forums are held to get public comment, but I rarely see anything change as a result!!

I have lived in San Mateo the majority of my life and I have never felt less safe and more frustrated by our city leaders who seem to be at the beck and call of developers to build, build, build no matter how it affects residents!

===== From Thomas Morgan Sunnybrae

A new concern has risen out of a discussion at work about the retail portions of the mixed use developments. Apparently, many of the retail spaces do not have "hood" which would mean it is difficult to prepare food on site. This makes those spaces primarily limited to a retailer who is selling a good, a service provider, or a drink oriented business that would not need a hood. This would also appear to significantly underestimate the number of trips these would generate as the residents would need to go out if they want to sit down at a restaurant.

Along the same line how does the General Plan account for Uber, Lyft and all the packages and food deliveries?

Thanks,

Thomas

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Hi Mike -

I submitted feedback to the city through the survey, including some comments. My main comment points were:

City should avoid putting in place transportation policies that are based on aspiration rather than human reality. Meaning, do not assume that a

significant decrease in cars on the road will occur just because you encourage bicycling and walking and make those targeted improvements. People in general are not giving up cars. This must be acknowledged in ALL planning processes. No more allowances for developments with inadequate parking. We need to stop punishing residents with inadequate parking situations to please developers pockets. Parking in residential areas and residential complexes must be adequate as a first principle. Reduction in traffic congestion needs to, and can be, addressed in other ways more targeted to work patterns.

City should not pit neighbor against neighbor with continued ill-advised policies that encourage and allow unfettered ADUs that will clearly impact neighborhood character, privacy, and parking (again). And especially given that the number of added beds by ADUs makes no significant contribution against the overall housing shortage. San Mateo should roll back the recent ordinance that went beyond CA law requirements on ADU allowances.

Future development must include water availability as a factor in planning and approvals.

Thanks,  
Bob

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