

**From:** Justin Alley [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Saturday, March 4, 2023 10:58 AM

**To:** General Plan <generalplan@cityofsanmateo.org>; Clerk <clerk@cityofsanmateo.org>; Adam Loraine <aloraine@cityofsanmateo.org>; Lisa Diaz Nash <ldiaznash@cityofsanmateo.org>; Rob Newsom <rnewsom@cityofsanmateo.org>; Amourence Lee <alee@cityofsanmateo.org>; Richard Hedges <rhedges@cityofsanmateo.org>

**Subject:** Addressing San Mateo's Height and Density Restrictions within the General Plan Update

Dear Mayor Lee and Members of the San Mateo City Council,

We are grateful to have this opportunity within the context of the General Plan Update to provide input on the vital matter of San Mateo's height and density restrictions.

First, we would like to assert a basic principle: the city of San Mateo has both a moral and legal imperative to produce enough housing for all its citizens and at levels of affordability that a diverse range can attain. The failure to produce a sufficient range of housing has spurred on the dramatic rises in both home prices and rents we have all borne witness to. The result has been an attendant rise in the number of people who are housing-cost burdened, trapped on the brink of poverty, and, tragically, too often pushed into a precarious underhoused status.

Yet San Mateo's rigid and overly broad height and density restrictions stand staunchly at odds with the city's ability to appropriately respond to the ever mounting housing crisis. It should also be noted that San Mateo's height and density restrictions represent the modern-day extension of the explicitly racial lockout that accompanied the creation of most of San Mateo's R-1 neighborhoods and which leads right to the doorstep of our present crisis. The situation has been a long time in the making, and it calls out for decisive course correction on behalf of policymakers.

Given the above state of affairs, we would urge the city to pursue thoughtful and inclusive changes to the General Plan in order to allow for a more flexible range of heights and densities. In our view, the following specific changes are more than warranted:

- Increase height limits to 12 stories in the downtown core of San Mateo
- Increase height limits to 12 stories within a half mile of Caltrain stations
- Increase height limits to 8 stories along the El Camino corridor

These recommendations are in line with a great deal of thinking on how to achieve more equitable and sustainable cities. Such changes are of critical necessity if the city is to make a good faith effort at achieving its state-mandated RHNA requirements and avoid losing local control over housing decisions. But higher density transit-oriented development, besides helping the city meet its housing needs, yields other positives, such as environmental preservation, healthier lifestyles, and enlivened neighborhoods. The city's own polling shows broad support for higher density TOD.

We recognize that in order to make the changes necessary to meet the imperative of the day, the city must contend with the straight jacket imposed upon it by Measure Y. To put it plainly, Measure Y is of a bygone era and has directly pushed us into our current difficulties. However, the precipitous drop in voter support for Measure Y's policies, as evidenced by their exceedingly narrow re-authorization in 2020, shows that the public can see the writing on the wall. The city needs to forge ahead now in crafting a more nuanced and nimble landscape for the production of housing.

The very question of whether to allow San Mateo's onerous height and density caps to go unchanged for yet another decade is part and parcel with the question of what manner of future San Mateo will have. Will it be a diverse, economically just, and environmentally sound future? Or will it be something else which those of us who care about this city dare not allow to come to pass?

Sincerely,

Justin Alley  
Secretary of Communications of One San Mateo