

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, October 27, 2023 2:24 PM
To: City Council (San Mateo) <CityCouncil@cityofsanmateo.org>
Cc: Patrice Olds <polds@cityofsanmateo.org>; Zachary Dahl <zdahl@cityofsanmateo.org>
Subject: 10/30/23 City Council meeting - comments on draft General Plan

To the City Council:

Here are my written comments on the draft General Plan in advance of Monday night's meeting. In copying Mr. Dahl I am asking him to please ensure that these comments are added to the ones already available in the Strive San Mateo website, and/or wherever else they should be available as part of the permanent record of the development of the plan. I am also copying City Clerk Patrice Olds to ensure these comments become part of the permanent record for the meeting.

One of the main reasons that I am writing, rather than expecting to speak Monday night is that the concept of **public input** on agenda items has become a pro forma pretense. No one can be sure that they will be lucky enough to be part of the limited number of commenters allowed both in person and remotely. If an item is of wide public interest, and "too many" people want to speak, each chosen person is given a meaningless 1 minute for thier comments. Other than a quick "I'm in favor" or I'm not in favor", it becomes impossible to provide significant input for the Council's decision. The message becomes clear. The Council is really not interested in hearing from the public. If this widely held belief is wrong, I encourage you to find a better way to make public comment a reality again.

Hence my written comments.

The overall intensity of development proposed in the 10 study areas by **this plan is excessive to our needs** over the next 15 years, and well beyond what the community has said it wants for our future. It needs to be scaled back, overall. Surveys have been conducted over the past 3 or 4 years, trying to determine what San Mateans value and what they want. The city's surveys may be "statistically valid", but I suggest that you have seen the very best statistical survey of all - the 2020 election - where the development parameters originally put in place in 1991 were reconfirmed as Measure Y. No series of leading (or misleading) questions answered by 638 probable voters can replace the tens of thousands of people who voted to keep San Mateo as a moderate growth suburban community.

Although City Hall has spent the time since 2020 acting as if Y did not pass, I think you ignore that message at the risk of having to reinvent this whole General Plan process. The rationale always falls back on the necessity to meet the State imposed RHNA numbers. Staff has repeatedly told you that the 2030 RHNA numbers (widely regarded as over inflated; questionable at best) can be met with a Measure Y-friendly General Plan update. Please keep that in mind as you proceed to adopt a General Plan.

Commenting on a draft General Plan can be overwhelming. I'll focus on one particular land use change in this plan as the "poster child" of what is **wrong with the process and outcome**. The 10 story apartment building at **120 W. Third Ave. (Ryan Towers** - notice it has always been considered a "tower") is being increased to a Residential High II designation. According to the Measure Y comparison on the Strive site, this is "the one site" so designated that falls outside of the study areas; "however this designation is proposed because the site contains an existing 10-story residential building." When I asked staff for details, I was first told this change was "required". When I pushed for better information, that changed, being called "best practices". No one has cited public input or request in making this change. I suggest that using such an outsize designation for what appears to be cleaning up the map is ludicrous. What "best practices" harm has come to this site since at least 1991, when it has had a height limit of 45', and a density cap of 50 units per acre? Why aren't the staff recommendations and decision makers' discussions focused on a General Plan that should codify what we actually want for our city, for our neighborhoods? This building is in the midst of very attractive 2 and 3 story multifamily, and the next block is the Baywood single family neighborhood. No one can justify the idea that, were something to happen at Ryan Towers - and unforeseen things happen all the time - that we would want it replaced with another 10 story building with up to 200 units per acre. Please do not allow that to happen.

Please be sure that this General Plan lives up to the stated goals, particularly including the one to "**Enhance Neighborhood Fabric and Quality of Life**", particularly through "context sensitive neighborhood design". Do not increase the land use at 120 W. Third Ave.

In another location, I support staff's recommendation for **removing the church parking lot from the 25th Ave. study area** for the same reason. Its inclusion creates a potential for greatly intensified land use, right in the midst of single story homes, which would fly in the face of the stated goal of enhancing neighborhoods. Please remove it.

What other designations have become part of this draft plan without much or any public interest or notice?

Back to the "poster child", Ryan Towers. It is a concerning example of what is being proposed throughout this General Plan. Is it true, as staff has written, that this is the only building that needs such an egregious "spot zoning" type designation? (Yes, I know, this is not technically zoning, but anyone with this intense a land use designation will expect an equally intense zoning.) Is that statement true only because it is residential, or does it also apply to commercial and mixed use buildings throughout the city? If that is true, broadly, it speaks to just how much **the land uses in the 10 study areas have been over-intensified**.

Are all of the other "standing out" tall/dense buildings in San Mateo now being "protected" by a major increase in the land use categories? Does this apply to ones like the Bay View building at 21st and El Camino Real? It is on land with a height limit of 40/55'. Will it be regularized by the 2040 plan? Some have called such a building a sore

thumb, others more kindly just saying, well, we certainly don't want to do that again. This is the same reaction people had to the Pan Am building on the west side of ECR north of 92. I can't make out the colors on the land use map. What will its designation be? Does the plan regularize that building and make it conforming with the 2040 land use? Similar comments could be made about certain other buildings on the west side of ECR closer to downtown. They all have become background "never again".

Will the 2040 plan say that this taller/denser is better approach is our future? I think you'll find that **San Mateans say, NO.**

Many San Mateans have become accustomed to individual taller/denser buildings which have been part of our city for well over 30 years. When asked about height (and density) I often hear people say that they have no objection to a specific building, usually one that stands alone, on a wide street with plenty of landscaping, sunlight and visibility around it. But imagine creating a long line of such buildings on both sides of the street, or for most sides of a block or 2 and they see an oppressive looming presence that is not what they want for San Mateo's future. We can appreciate the history and proportions and decoration of the Ben Franklin building. Put a row of them down both sides of Third Avenue and you have destroyed a major part of our downtown. Please don't let this "it looks reasonable on a map, it makes sense to make uses match what is there today" kind of thinking dominate our 2040 plan.

I urge you to **revisit many of the details of the Option A in your earlier discussions**, choose the most reasonable, and modify this draft plan to better match what San Mateans can support.

Karen Herrel
Hillsdale Blvd.

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