

From: Seema Patel [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, October 29, 2023 6:23 PM
To: City Council (San Mateo) <CityCouncil@cityofsanmateo.org>
Subject: Draft General Plan Land Use Element

Hello City Council!

Attached are my personal comments on the Draft General Plan Land Use Element. I appreciate your time and consideration!

Respectfully,
Seema Patel

Mayor Lee, Deputy Mayor Nash and Councilmembers Hedges, Loraine & Newsom,

Although I currently serve as a Planning Commissioner for the City of San Mateo, I am submitting these comments on my own behalf as a private resident of San Mateo.

Our Draft General Plan has three key themes: Sustainability, Environmental Justice, and Community Engagement. We have a once in twenty year opportunity to make meaningful progress in these areas and shape a San Mateo where anyone and everyone can thrive. Our current Draft General Plan sites a significant amount of new residential development within 500' of heavily trafficked freeways. Just over 48% of the new housing units on our Housing Element Site Inventory are located within this buffer, contrary to the recommendations of both the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD). Almost 42% of the low-income units on our Site Inventory are located within this buffer, reinforcing what is stated in BAAQMD's [Best Practices for Centering Environmental Justice, Health and Equity](#), "The burden of breathing unhealthy air is often disproportionately borne by low-income communities and communities of color, many of which are situated closer to busy highways, ports, factories, and other pollution sources."

I do not believe our Draft General Plan is meeting our theme of environmental justice and would like to offer specific suggestions to remedy this.

Commissioner Wiggins gave a [great overview of the air quality risks](#) at the September 26, 2023 Planning Commission meeting. He explained that CARB's [Air Quality and Land Use Handbook](#) considers the risks of poor air quality on sensitive receptors such as homes, daycares, etc., and recommends against placing these uses within 500' of a roadway that averages in excess of 100,000 vehicles/day. [CalEnviroScreen 4.0](#) shows that census tracts adjacent to Highways 101 and 92 have high levels of particulate matter. The intersection of Highways 101 & 92 in particular has more than half a ton of particulate emissions per year. This level of particulate matter is 95% higher than other census tracts in CA and 6x the particulate emissions in San Mateo Park.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District's #1 tool in their [Planning Healthy Places](#) guidance is to place sensitive receptors away from heavily trafficked highways, including Highways 101 and 92 (pg 10). While air filtration systems can mitigate the impact indoors, the City requires residential projects to provide open space for residents, effectively requiring that residents have access to unhealthy air. Placing the open space as far from the roadway as possible may help, but many of these residential parcels are located entirely within the 500' buffer.

Concerned about the impact to future residents (and the disproportionate impact to low-income residents) both the General Plan Subcommittee and Planning Commission have repeatedly suggested "swapping" specific land uses to move residential uses away from Highways 101 and 92. This is in line with BAAQMD's recommendation, "...when updating or making revisions to a zoning code in an area characterized by elevated levels of air pollution (such as immediately adjacent to a

freeway), local government may choose to designate the land use as commercial, office, or parking instead of residential..." (pg 37).

Specific suggestions include:

1. Do not allow residential uses on any land within 500' of 101 & 92. Instead, designate this land as commercial or office.
2. Change the land use of the "Service Commercial" area at 10th Ave and S Claremont St to "Residential High I". This area is located 0.7mi from both the Downtown Caltrain Station and Hayward Park Caltrain Station and would be a great opportunity for Transit-Oriented Development.
3. Increase each land use in the area roughly bounded by E Santa Inez Ave and Tilton Ave, and N Delaware St and San Mateo Dr by one level.
4. If residential uses must be designated within 500' of 101 & 92, create a 100' buffer against the roadway that is designated Office High so that office buildings can serve as barriers between residential uses and the roadways.

I would like to offer responses to counterpoints I've heard when raising these concerns:

1. If we don't build housing near freeways the housing will just be built farther away, increasing sprawl and vehicle miles traveled, ultimately making air pollution worse.

While this argument is applicable when deciding whether or not to build a specific project adjacent to a freeway, that is not the decision before us at this moment. The question before us is not whether or not to build the housing, but **where** to build the housing, and we have many options that fall outside both the 500' roadway buffer and R1 neighborhoods.

2. With restrictions on diesel engines and adoption of electric vehicles, air quality is improving.

As Commissioner Wiggins explained, the primary source of PM 2.5 particulates near roadways is brakes and tires, which is actually getting worse due to increasing vehicle weight.

3. At the Planning Commission's suggestion, Policy LU 8.6 is being modified to ensure that open space is aggregated away from pollution sources to the greatest extent possible.

"Greatest extent possible" is not a hard requirement. Even an objective design standard that requires open space to be contained within a protected courtyard or sited as far from pollution sources as possible would be a likely target for a state density bonus waiver or concession as it would be a significant constraint to the design of the project.

4. The area designated "Service Commercial" at 10th Ave & South Claremont St is outside a Study Area.

When the Study Areas were created, Council stated that changes outside the Study Areas were possible, but most changes would be concentrated within the Study Areas. Ultimately this decision will go to the voters and based on the recent survey results, I believe voters would be amenable to concentrating new housing development within 0.7mi of two Caltrain stations.

5. Due to the high cost of construction, new service commercial uses are not being built. If the area at 10th Ave & S Claremont St is redeveloped into residential, San Mateo will likely lose those businesses.

While it would be unfortunate to lose those businesses, when faced with the decision to retain those businesses or provide healthy living space for future residents, I believe we must prioritize the health of our residents.

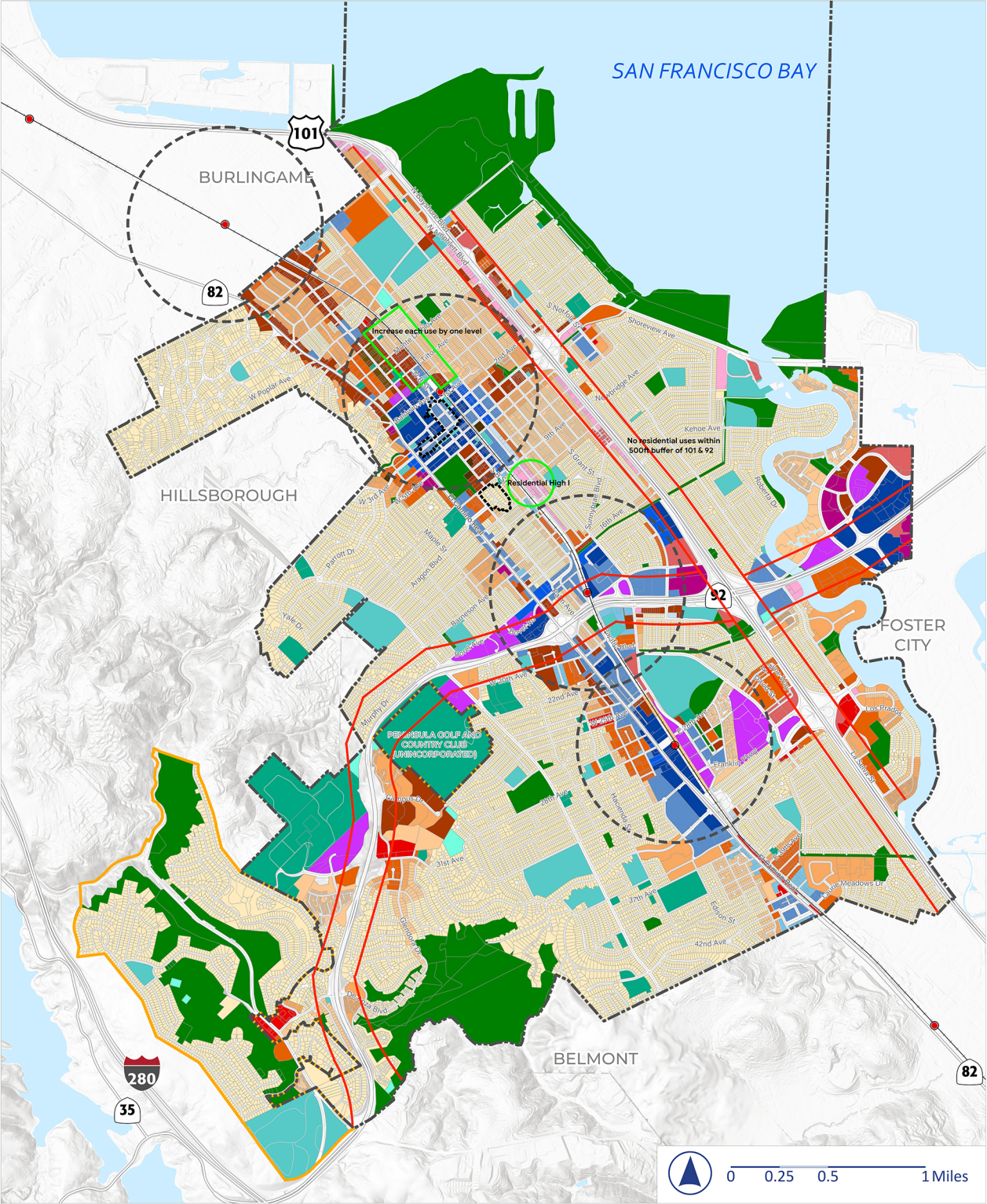
6. We cannot change the designation of the existing residential uses within 500' of 101 & 92 because we are not legally permitted to downzone residential uses.

SB 330 prevents local jurisdictions from downzoning residential uses *unless they upzone an equivalent amount elsewhere within their boundaries*. I believe we have the ability (and opportunity) to add equivalent capacity elsewhere, without altering R1 neighborhoods outside the 500' buffer.

Thank you for your consideration of my suggestions. I appreciate your support in building a healthy San Mateo for current and future generations.

Regards,
Seema Patel

Draft General Plan 2040 Land Use Map



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|---|---|---|
| City Limits | Residential Medium I (3-5 stories, 36-50 du/ac) | Mixed-Use Low (2-4 stories, 10-35 du/ac) |
| Sphere of Influence | Residential Medium II (4-6 stories, 51-99 du/ac) | Mixed-Use Medium I (3-5 stories, 36-50 du/ac) |
| 1/2 Mile Radius Around Caltrain | Residential High I (5-8 stories, 100-130 du/ac) | Mixed-Use Medium II (4-6 stories, 51-99 du/ac) |
| Caltrain Station | Residential High II (6-10 stories, 100-200 du/ac) | Mixed-Use High I (5-8 stories, 100-130 du/ac) |
| Caltrain | Service Commercial (1-3 stories) | Mixed-Use High II (6-10 stories, 100-200 du/ac) |
| Historic Districts | Regional Commercial (1-3 stories) | Parks/ Open Space |
| Residential Very Low (1-3 stories, 1-9 du/ac) | Neighborhood Commercial (1-3 stories) | Public Facilities |
| Residential Low I (1-3 stories, 9-19 du/ac) | Office Low (1-2 stories) | Quasi-Public (1-3 stories) |
| Residential Low II (2-4 stories, 20-35 du/ac) | Office Medium (2-4 stories) | Utilities |
| | Office High (3-5 stories) | |