



February 17, 2012

Chair Farr, Supervisor Wolf and Santa Barbara County Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara
123 E. Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Supervisors:

The Coastal Housing Coalition is a local non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the housing needs of thousands of South Coast employees.

The Coalition has followed and commented on the Goleta Valley Community Plan Update throughout its process, urging both the Goleta Valley Planning Advisory Committee (GVPAC) and the Planning Commission to ensure that the recommendations ultimately brought to the Board of Supervisors included implementation policies and sufficient zoning to meet the stated objective of providing a wide range of housing options at various price points.

Specifically, we expressed hope that higher densities would be studied in the draft EIR on suitable sites throughout the Eastern Goleta Planning Area. We urged this both because the County is mandated to do so by the State Housing and Community Development Department (HCD), and because we believe that future residential development should be targeted to meet the needs of local workers and their families now and into the future. We also noted a concern that a lack of planning for long term residential development near jobs and transportation corridors would be inconsistent with AB32 and SB375, as well as the County's own emerging climate action plan.

The Coalition supported a number of the GVPAC recommendations, including encouraging a mixed-use district along the Hollister/State Street corridor, and recommending a residential neighborhood for the MTD and Tatum sites. We are pleased that the Planning Commission recommendations include studying additional sites, and at higher densities, than had been previously recommended by the GVPAC. However, we encourage the Board of Supervisors to make additional changes to the scope of the EIR so there is a broad range of options for the decision-makers.

The Goleta Valley Community Plan is meant to help guide planning and development in the Eastern Goleta Valley for the next generation. Because of the lengthy time period and cost involved in conducting the EIR, we urge the Board not to exclude potential sites that might be suitable for housing years from now from being studied in the EIR – including sites once deemed “opportunity sites” by the County, such as San Marcos Growers, or those discussed by the Planning Commission such as the Giorgi South Property on Hollister. Studying these sites will provide critical information for planners and decision-makers over the next twenty years in determining how best to meet the needs of the community.

Additionally, we urge the Board of Supervisors to ensure that the method for calculating density is consistent with the intention of State HCD and the Planning Commission recommendations. It is our understanding that the standard way to calculate density is to apply the density to the whole site in determining the number of allowable units on the site. For example, at 20 units/acre on a 1 acre site, 20 units would be allowed to be built, despite the fact that some portions of the land due to building constraints, open space requirements, design decisions, etc. might not be used for those units. It seems counterintuitive that if a site is slated to be studied at 20 units/acre, you would first deduct land from that site – shrinking the acreage - before calculating the allowable number of units. This approach actually reduces the proposed density being studied to something less than 20 units per acre (i.e., the effective density of the MTD site would be 12.3 units/acre). In addition, the zone district that would be applied to these sites actually promotes clustering as a way to protect natural resources, respect constraints, and provide open space.

The Coastal Housing Coalition has called for compact development that is compatible with the surrounding areas for one simple reason – the ongoing and overwhelming need to provide housing on the South Coast that is affordable for local workers and their families. Some believe that the Great Recession has solved our area's housing problems. Unfortunately, that is not the case. A forthcoming study commissioned by the Coalition finds that despite the drop in home prices, the gap between median income and housing prices has dramatically widened much more here than in the state or nation since 1980, and that the percentage of households who can afford to purchase a home or condo along the South Coast is only slightly higher than in 2000. As the economy recovers, the affordability gap will undoubtedly grow wider.

Some also question the ability to build housing that is affordable to workers. In conjunction with Plan Santa Barbara, the City's general plan update process, a group of planners, architects, designers and others sponsored a public design charrette to explore the question of whether housing prices could be brought down with higher densities. Using real world examples of specific sites and working for weeks on design, financing and the like, the answer came back that it was absolutely possible to lower prices by increasing density. The design charrette also proved that this could be done through well designed, beautiful projects.

The Goleta Valley Community Update is critical to the County's overall efforts to plan for the future of our community – including meeting the community's housing needs - over the next twenty years. We hope that you will use the forthcoming EIR to objectively study those sites which have been discussed as possible sites for housing to determine their suitability and arm yourselves and future decision makers with information to make the best decisions possible for our community.

Thank you for allowing us to comment on this important community issue.

Sincerely,



Debbie Cox Bultan
Executive Director

cc: Planning Commissioners, GVPAC Members, Jeff Hunt, Erika Leachman