



The Honorable Matt Mahan, Mayor of San José
and Members of the City Council
via email, June 7, 2024

Subject: Council Agenda 6/18/24 Item 8.2, "Downtown High-Rise Incentive"

Dear Mayor Mahan and Councilmembers,

We in the District 6 Neighborhood Leaders Group (D6NLG) are dedicated to preserving and enhancing the quality of life in a sustainable and equitable San José. Our neighborhoods and neighbors of all cultures demonstrate the diversity of San José, and this diversity extends into our residences, ranging from historic and tract homes, duplexes and garden apartments, to the new mid-rise and high-rise homes. Our Midtown and Delmas Park downtown neighborhoods became the first in the city to embrace increased density plans as far back as 1981, and we participated fully in the development of the Urban Village plans for The Alameda, West San Carlos and Bascom Avenue as well as Downtown West and the Diridon Station Area Plan. We know the societal and environmental benefits of increased density and the importance of providing more housing for our population. We have been on the forefront of accepting these major changes to our community.

Our community can only be successful with housing AND parks. Parks and open spaces contribute to the vibrancy of a neighborhood. They can create community cohesion and a sense of identity. Well-maintained and well-used parks contribute to the economic vitality of the surrounding blocks — increasing property values and attracting investment. During COVID we saw how parks provided relief for our residents, especially youth, from the anxiety and stress of economic disaster or death. Natural green space lowers blood pressure, increases the sense of calm, reduces agitation among dementia patients, and allows for unstructured community connections that give us a sense of place and belonging. The Blue Zones research shows the critical importance of social connection and time outdoors as critical factors in longevity. Our District 6 residents deserve access to these tools for their health.

We oppose any park fee reduction for the Downtown Residential High-Rise Incentive. The consultants state all housing production at this time is infeasible due to market conditions, and fee discounts are unlikely to make a difference. Even the larger Phase-1 \$7,300 discounted rate will have no impact on high-rise housing starts in the context of a more than \$450,000 feasibility gap.

We oppose the development of a program of park fee reductions for low-rise, mid-rise and high-rise development outside the Downtown Core. In our district, the neighborhoods slated for redevelopment and densification have little or no open space and no access to open school grounds. These neighborhoods do not meet the Envision 2040 General Plan's goal PR 1.1 to provide 3.5 acres per 1000 population of neighborhood/community serving parkland. At present the *only* way to provide these residents parkland is through the leveraged use of park fees.

When the Envision 2040 General Plan and subsequent area plans and Urban Village plans were developed, open space and parks were highly desired by our District 6 communities. Many of these designated neighborhoods of intensification are lower income with communities of color. Parks were included in the plans because the health and social benefits would counteract the stress created by

increased population and traffic. We believe that fee discounting will lead to greater NIMBYism, as current residents will view new projects as providing no benefit to them while leading to a less desirable city.

While the City is waiting for the economic cycle to turn, we believe that staff time would be better spent designing ways to make San José more attractive to the high-end tenants that will pay the rental levels that will attract investment. Planners could design a city-wide funding mechanism to replace the current inequitable system. We think addressing blighted parks in our downtown neighborhood would be a good first step. Moving forward with Guadalupe River Garden, repairing the Japanese Tea Garden koi pond and rehabilitating the Chinese Community Cultural Gardens at Overfelt would provide a good marketing story to potential investors and future residents.

Parks are important to us all! Parks improve our physical and mental health, engage our youth, and build community and a sense of place – a reason to live, work, and play in San José. The City must consider equity and provide access to these green space benefits for everyone.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Lawrence Ames, Chair, D6NLG

cc: City Manager Jennifer Maguire, City Clerk Toni Taber, PRNS Dir. Jon Cicirelli