

Allied Neighborhoods Association

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Santa Barbara City Council
City of Santa Barbara
De La Guerra Plaza
Santa Barbara, California 93101

Re: Agenda, March 1, 2005, 6:00 p.m., Item No. 24
Las Positas Valley

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

As you know, numerous large construction projects are being contemplated for the Las Positas Valley. The Allied Neighborhoods Association fully supports the request made by one of its seventeen members, the Veronica Springs Neighborhood Association, for a comprehensive study of the cumulative environmental impact of these projects.

We believe that such a study is necessary before individual major projects are approved in the Las Positas Valley, which contains some of the few remaining pristine areas of the City. After all, City Charter Section 1507 mandates that Santa Barbara's "land development shall not exceed its public services and physical and natural resources" which "include, but are not limited to, water, air quality, wastewater treatment capacity, and traffic and transportation capacity." If Santa Barbara is to live within its resources, it behooves us to determine just what the City's resources are before risking to do further damage to our quality of life.

Such damage has already resulted from numerous previous instances of piecemeal rather than comprehensive planning and of granting far too many zoning "modifications" rather than adhering to the minimal state requirements for granting "variances" to zoning laws. Furthermore, any new major development in our almost completely built-out City has the potential of precluding preferable alternatives that would be more beneficial to the community and do less harm to the environment and thus to the people who live and/or work here. Yet the City continues to use tax dollars to subsidize all development by retaining a fee structure that doesn't even cover the labor costs for processing applications, let alone provide for the infrastructural expenses necessitated by growth (e.g., sewage treatment improvements, road construction and repair, increased fire and police protection).

We are aware of the main arguments used to justify the practices in question and propose that they be re-examined on the present occasion:

1. Is it true that more planning staff would need to be hired if the approval of a set of large

projects in a vulnerable area depended on the comprehensive assessment of their cumulative impact on the environment?

2. Is it true that the existing zoning requirements, designed to keep the interest of a few from prevailing over the interest of the community as a whole, need to be subverted so that we can meet state-imposed quotas for growth?
3. Is it true that realistic development and mitigation fees would drive real estate prices even higher?

In the next three paragraphs we briefly explain why we doubt that those three questions need to be answered in the affirmative and urge our decision makers to draw the appropriate conclusions (printed in italics):

1. High quality staff time spent on comprehensive planning is likely to streamline the subsequent detailed consideration of a smaller number of individual projects, some of which could be discouraged without further detailed analysis. *Hence we urge the City to focus more of the planning efforts of its current staff on the large picture of cumulative environmental impact both within particular districts and in the City as a whole.*
2. It is our understanding that the City has provided adequate zoning to meet its requirements under the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), established by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and the Santa Barbara Association of Governments (SBCAG). *Hence we urge the City to put to voters any proposed change in zoning laws, including those that limit density, rather than practically revoke existing laws by council or administrative action.*
3. Recent surveys reinforce the common sense observation that market rate home prices are largely determined by eager out-of-town or even foreign buyers including speculative investors, while below-market prices are obviously determined by various existing formulas for low, moderate, and middle-income buyers without regard for the developer's expenses. *Hence we urge the City (a) to reevaluate its general development fee structure so that development fees cover the full cost of processing applications and (b) to impose additional development fees where adverse impacts of development can be mitigated within a reasonable period of time.*

The Allied Neighborhoods Association volunteers its efforts to protect and even improve all neighborhoods of our City. We realize that some population growth will occur in most jurisdictions of the South Coast but hope that any new housing development here will make the Santa Barbara way of life accessible to more people rather than take it away from "old timers" and "newcomers" alike. This is why we urge comprehensive planning, especially in such sensitive areas as the Las Positas Valley and along our precious few traffic corridors.

One such overburdened corridor is Outer State Street, which is being targeted for the piecemeal development of at least five large housing projects in just two city blocks (3700 and 3800). Even though only the Las Positas Valley is officially on today's agenda, the staff report wisely includes several attachments dealing with the long but often ignored history of protective measures for Outer State Street. Supervising Planner Rob Dayton's January 27 presentation to the Planning Commission also demonstrated that the significant traffic problems of the Las Positas Valley and the Outer State Street area are inextricably interwoven.

At some level, of course, anything that happens in one neighborhood or business district affects all the others. This is why we believe that, in many respects, a city is like a living organism and should be treated as such. It is not surprising that the Las Positas Valley is sometimes called the "lungs of Santa Barbara" and that proper circulation in the City is known to require the health of such traffic "arteries" as Las Positas Road and Outer State Street. We plead with you, Madam Mayor and all Members the Council: do practice preventive medicine *now* rather than attempt to cure *later* the strokes and heart attacks that would be caused by damaged lungs and plugged-up arteries.

Thank you for your consideration.

Board of Directors
Allied Neighborhoods Association