



COMMITTEE FOR
GREEN FOOTHILLS



SIERRA
CLUB

August 1, 2003

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
70 W. Hedding Street, 10th Floor
San Jose, CA 95110

RE: Providing adequate budget resources for the County Planning Office

Dear Supervisors:

The Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter, the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, Greenbelt Alliance, and the Committee for Green Foothills urgently request that the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors make no further cuts to the County's already-slashed planning staff. We request instead that the County put into place a plan to fill positions that have been frozen, most notably the position left open by the impending retirement of planner Hugh Graham.

Long-range planning staff have been cut in the County Planning Office in the last 18 months from six positions to one and one-half positions, due to some positions being frozen and others eliminated entirely. While we recognize the need for sacrifice in the face of the current budget crisis, this cut is grossly disproportionate and will cause unnecessary harm in the future, well after the budget crisis has passed.

The Planning Office must be more than a permit processing center. It must take steps to preserve hillsides, to slow the loss of agriculture from our County, and to assist in the implementation of urban growth boundaries and well-planned development. A permit processing agency does not serve these functions, so some planning capacity must be maintained.

We further note that County Planning staff are responsible for responding to state law mandates and the mandates that the County Board itself has set for staff, and both types of mandates should be considered in determining minimum staff levels. Updating ordinances to conform to the General Plan, for example, should be considered an essential part of the staff's work, and their budget levels should reflect this. If the County does not want to fund work on mandates it has set for the Planning Office, it should expressly consider and decide which priorities to suspend; otherwise all directions by the County to its staff are in force, and adequate funding should be provided.

Rather than add further injury to the Planning Office staffing capacity, we urge that the County fill the position that will be vacated by Hugh Graham in the near future. We assume that the new replacement would have a lower salary since he or she would not have Graham's seniority, so the County will still realize substantial savings over costs prior to the replacement. Cutting nearly two-thirds of the long-range planning staff is simply too much, so a plan to rebuild at least part of the office's capability must be put in place soon.

We urge the County to do everything possible to preserve the organizational ability to address long-range planning issues in County lands. Without long-range land use planning capacity at the County level, much of the good work of recent years will be threatened in the years to come. Any of the signers below would be happy to discuss this issue further with you or your staff, so please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



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