



COMMITTEE FOR
GREEN FOOTHILLS



PROTECTING OPEN SPACE AND PROMOTING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES



Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society
Founded in 1926

November 18, 2002

Board of Supervisors
Santa Clara County
70 West Hedding St.
San Jose, CA 95110

RE: Recommendations regarding the Viewshed and Greenbelt Project for 2002 Work Plan

Dear Chairman Gage and Members of the Board,

On behalf of the Committee for Green Foothills, Greenbelt Alliance and Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, we are writing to follow up on our comments at the September 25th, 2002 Land Use Workshop and our January 25, 2002 letter regarding Santa Clara County Work Plan priorities.

Staff has been working diligently on many of the issues raised and much progress has been made towards protecting County open space and natural resources. We thank the Board and staff for this strong effort to create new policy, which moves the County substantially closer to achieving the resource protection goals established in the Santa Clara County General Plan. Our organizations are glad to be assisting you in this effort.

We want to take this opportunity to focus on one particular goal over which the Board expressed concern last September. It was the need to create stronger and more uniform protections for the County's ridgelines and hillsides, based on a number of examples of visually scarring homes that were allowed under the current County Hillsides standards. The three work items identified by staff for the Viewshed and Greenbelt Project portion of the 2002 Work Plan do not include the key goal of establishing protections for the County's ridgelines and viewsheds. The 2002 Work Plan should take on the issue of countywide viewshed protections; we are concerned that if it is not addressed now it will be overlooked.

The Board set protection of viewsheds, ridgelines and hillsides as a priority

In response to the viewshed issues raised in September 2001, the Board included Viewsheds and Greenbelt Areas as a priority in the 2002 Land Use Work Plan, specifically: *“review appropriate means of furthering County policies to protect viewsheds, hillsides, ridgelines and greenbelts from impacts of development. Includes (a) priority-setting studies, (b) measure focused specifically on ridgelines and hillsides protection and (c) possible greenbelt studies with Morgan Hill and others concerning land use preservation methods.”* (January 29, 2002, Planning Office's 2002 Work Plan report – inventory of Planning Office Projects and Activities.)

The staff report goes further to state that *“Scenic resource protection and related goals and policies of the current General Plan define this general subject to be a significant component of maintaining the quality of life of the County, both for natural resource conservation a viewshed protection. Additional studies are necessary before priorities and recommendations can be made concerning the need for additional policy and/or regulations and the extent of their applicability.”* (January 29, 2002, Planning Office's 2002 Work Plan report – inventory of Planning Office Projects and Activities.)

Santa Clara County's hillsides provide a dramatic natural backdrop for our urban areas. Given that existing Hillside zoning does adequately protect these assets, the County should ensure that hillside protections are moved forward as directed in the 2002 Work Plan.

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In our September 20, 2002 comments we showed pictures of invasive roadcuts, and scarring ridgeline development.



THESE HOMES, PART OF CALERO LAKE ESTATES, MAKE NO ATTEMPT TO BLEND INTO THE HILLSIDE. THEY DOMINATE THE RIDGELINE. IN ADDITION, MORE THAN HALF A MILE OF RETAINING WALLS (AND HIGHLY VISIBLE ROADCUTS), SUCH AS THE ONE SEEN IN THE PHOTO, WERE NEEDED TO CONSTRUCT COUNTRY VIEW ROAD, WHICH CURRENTLY PROVIDES ACCESS TO ONLY THREE HOUSES.

Unfortunately, to date, protection of County hillsides has been addressed in a piecemeal fashion, with more protective measures established only for portions of the County. For example, the more protective d-1 and d-2 combining zoning districts apply only to the West Valley Hillsides (north of Los Gatos) and the Milpitas Hills.

Policy direction for the Board to consider

The Town of Danville has developed a progressive Scenic Hillside Ordinance, which Santa Clara County may find helpful when reviewing its own hillside policies. Danville created their ordinance to protect the hills and ridges of the Town, because of their physical dominance, comprising a large part of the natural open space and scenic resources of the community. Their goal was to retain the natural character of the hillside and ridgeline areas, and to preserve the predominant views both from and of the hillside and ridgeline areas. Their ordinance states the following goals *“passive open space is desirable and necessary to maintain the quality of life enjoyed by the residents of the community ... and the retention of scenic hillsides and ridgelines in as near a natural state as is feasible consistent with the rights granted by law to property owners to develop their properties is important to the community’s aesthetic qualities and will preserve a desirable visual identity of the Town.”*

To enforce this policy objective, their ordinance reads, *“No development is permitted within one hundred feet (100’) (measured vertically) of the centerline of a major ridgeline.”* And *“The subdivision of lands identified as Major Ridgeline or Scenic Hillside Areas shall not result in the creation of a building site within one-hundred feet (measured vertically) below the centerline of a Major Ridgeline...”*

We urge the County to move forward with the viewshed goals established in the 2002 Work Plan and we hope that the example provided of Danville’s ordinance could be used to guide this important effort.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Denice Dade
Legislative Advocate
Committee for Green Foothills

Anne Crealock
South Bay Field Representative
Greenbelt Alliance

Kelly Crowley
Environmental Advocate
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society