



COMMITTEE FOR
GREEN FOOTHILLS

September 20, 2004

Mayor Gonzales
City Council Members
San Jose City Council
801 North First Street, Rm. 600,
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Coyote Valley Specific Plan Planning Process

Dear Mayor Gonzales and City Council Members:

The Committee for Green Foothills opposes development of Coyote Valley, but regardless of opinions as to whether the valley should be developed, the City Council needs to take action. Appropriate planning is being sacrificed solely to meet an artificial deadline of December 2005. Given the long-standing glut of office space, it is certain San Jose's economic development will not be affected if planning is allowed to take an additional year or more. We recommend that you indicate to the Coyote Valley Special Plan Task Force, to City staff, and to City consultants that they need to revamp their current proposals and should not attempt to complete the process in just one year.

To our knowledge, no reason has been offered to justify the rushed timetable except to complete it during the current mayoral term. We believe that the Mayor and City Council, whoever they may be, will make the best decision regarding Coyote Valley if they benefit from adequate planning. What you as members of the City Council need to decide is whether the damage to the planning process is worth the "prize" of meeting a deadline that is not needed by the people of San Jose.

The Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club has sent a letter summarizing the problems of the current planning process. We support Sierra Club's position, and emphasize the following points:

No economic analysis has been done for the cost impacts to the rest of San Jose. While the consultants have tried to estimate the cost of creating a transportation infrastructure in Coyote Valley, no estimate has been done for the cost of upgrading infrastructure in the rest of San Jose, a cost that would be unavoidable from adding a new city of this size. Still worse, no one has estimated how many additional people will come live in San Jose but outside of Coyote Valley, due to the fact that insufficient housing is planned for the valley. This number could be in the tens of thousands, but we encourage you to ask staff whether they know what the total will be, and how much it will cost existing San Jose communities to absorb them. Staff will not be able to give you an answer, because they have not researched this issue.

The City's process of developing the infrastructure first will lock in inadequate land use planning. To speed up the planning process, City consultants have tried to develop an infrastructure plan first, calling it the "armature" for Coyote Valley, and then making the land use planning, greenbelt protection, and wildlife protection dependent on the decisions for the armature. Because this armature includes an expensive transportation system and expensive lake with minimal environmental benefit, we expect that agriculture preservation, wildlife protection, and a true greenbelt will be dismissed as too expensive. Our understanding is that staff will be merely reporting on their progress for the infrastructure. We recommend that you inform them that they are not making progress because of their disjointed

process, and that by putting land use planning last, you are unable to oversee or provide useful comments on their process to date.

Protecting nature, open space, and wildlife has been postponed – the only way to adequately protect these values is to let the Habitat Conservation Plan process catch up with the Coyote Valley Specific Plan process. San Jose delayed for nine months before signing a Memorandum of Understanding with other agencies in the County to prepare a County-wide Habitat Conservation Plan. To our knowledge, no explanation has been given for this delay. A possible explanation is that the City delayed the habitat preservation process to keep it from affecting the Coyote Valley planning process. The price for this delay by the City is an insufficient knowledge of the effects of development and of the best way to mitigate those effects. We recommend that you ask staff whether the information that will be developed for the HCP could help the planning for Coyote Valley. We further recommend that Coyote Valley planning wait for this information to be developed for the HCP.

The rushed process is avoiding the “big picture”. No one in this rushed process is stepping back to consider the big picture of how the largest development project in decades will affect the region’s future. For example, the City could consider switching the greenbelt from south to north Coyote Valley. A grand swap of development potential could leave undeveloped the northern area, which is best suited for agriculture and wildlife. The City could also balance the jobs/housing ratio. Over ten thousand homes will be occupied by people outside of Coyote Valley that commute to the area each day, and the true number could be as much as thirty thousand homes. Despite the constant talk of “smart growth”, the City has no plans for these people. Adjusting the jobs/housing ratio so that the entire housing demand could be accommodated is the only way to keep this project from causing sprawl.

These are only some of the serious shortfalls in the City’s planning process. We urge you to intervene in order to prevent a fatally flawed outcome.

Sincerely,

<signed>

Brian A. Schmidt

Legislative Advocate, Santa Clara County