



## Committee for Green Foothills NEWS RELEASE

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### **Environmentalists call for fewer new monster mansions on hillsides following the Santa Cruz Mountains fire**

Committee for Green Foothills called today for the Santa Clara County to reconsider environmental reforms that would reduce the number of new hillside "monster mansions" in the wake of the ongoing, 4,000 acre Summit Fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains. "Taxpayer money and firefighters' lives should not be risked for more and more inappropriate, 'monster mansions' on the hillsides," said CGF Advocate Brian Schmidt. "Two years ago, the Committee for Green Foothills and other environmental groups sponsored the Measure A environmental initiative in Santa Clara County in 2006 that would have reduced new development in hillside areas, specifically including the area in the County that is now on fire. Our initiative failed by less than one-half of one percent, due to a half-million dollars spent by outside Realtors' groups from Southern California and from their national headquarters in Chicago. We now call on Santa Clara County to undertake new measures to limit inappropriate new development."

Committee for Green Foothills argues that more development in the hills increases the chance of someone doing something that starts a fire, while also making firefighting more dangerous and expensive as firefighters seek to rescue people and protect property. Schmidt said, "We're not trying to take away existing homes or even ending all new construction in the hills, but we need to stop adding to sprawl by putting more and more buildings in these fire-prone areas, especially large mansions that are difficult to protect and harder to rescue people from."

Last year, Santa Clara County Supervisors supported a motion by Supervisor Ken Yeager to draft a new ordinance toughening enforcement of fire regulations. "While the County has made a good first step, a lot more must be done," Schmidt said. "The County now lets land developers to deviate from the standard minimum parcel size in areas designated as 'Hillsides' and put up to eight times more development through a 'cluster subdivision' process. This cluster subdivision option should be eliminated in areas with significantly elevated fire risk."

Other possibilities include enactment of certain portions of the Measure A initiative during upcoming revisions for the County's General Plan. Residential building size limits to avoid "monster mansions" have also been supported by environmentalists, and giant structures favored by developers create more fire risks and are more difficult to defend.

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**About the Committee for Green Foothills**

Committee for Green Foothills is a regional grassroots organization working to establish and maintain land-use policies that protect the environment throughout San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. Committee for Green Foothills, established in 1962, is a Bay Area leader in the continuing effort to protect open space and the natural environment of our Peninsula. For more information about the Committee for Green Foothills or about our work on this issue, visit [www.GreenFoothills.org](http://www.GreenFoothills.org).