



November 18, 2019

Mayor Paul McNamara and City Council members
City of Escondido
201 N. Broadway
Escondido, CA 92025

RE: Request for transit-oriented land use development decisions in Escondido

Dear Mayor and City Council,

The undersigned organizations are members of the Quality of Life Coalition committed to building a vibrant, inclusive economy that delivers economic and environmental justice, lifts up communities, creates healthier communities, addresses the climate crisis, and ensures resource conservation.

As leaders of the city, you will make critical decisions about the future of the region in the next few months. From a planning perspective, the city of Escondido is uniquely poised, in time and in place, to be a model for how local government can realize economic and environmental sustainability through land-use decisions.

The city's location on multiple transportation corridors, the urgent need for housing stock that is affordable, the opportunities presented to increase density in the urban core, the need to create good, middle-class jobs for local workers in the region through collective bargaining, including project labor agreements, especially in vulnerable neighborhoods, and the ability to stop the haphazard development in remote and inappropriate areas make your decisions even more critical.

Consider these important facts and issues:

- Escondido has significantly underbuilt housing in the low, moderate, and very low income categories. Of special concern is that Escondido has only built 2.2% of needed housing for moderate-income earners and met only 11% of the low-income need. More density in the urban core would provide more opportunity to address these important needs.
- Increased housing density is needed to support the greater use of transit needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The California Air Resources Board's 2018 report on SB 375 implementation identified a need to provide more affordable housing choices near jobs and transit to help reverse the trend in rising Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). Escondido is lucky to have a Sprinter station and well-defined transportation corridors in place. Escondido has vacant and developable areas near and on these corridors where housing density, in accordance with the general and specific plans, should be maximized. Unfortunately, so far, in the places where density is desirable from a planning perspective, the actual projects being built are falling far short.
- The region has cutting-edge, state-approved apprenticeship facilities and a highly skilled, trained and qualified construction workforce. As we have seen many times, linking strong job quality and workforce standards with development projects that provide training and work opportunities for County residents through a Project Labor Agreement with key provisions including participation in state-approved joint labor-management apprenticeship; local hire with enforceable standards targeting vulnerable communities and populations, like veterans; and labor peace result in successful projects that deliver community and local economic benefits.
- Protecting the natural environment, air quality, and creation of open spaces are paramount to creating a livable city. Reducing pressure on significant habitat areas and creating more open space options for residents will result in a city that is more attractive to residents and businesses.

In this light, the undersigned organizations urge the city's elected officials and staff to take actions in the next year to move the city in the direction of sensible land use, creation of housing that is needed, promotion of urban infill, and to move away from inappropriately located development.

Specifically, we request the city take the following actions.

1. Hold-off on decisions related to the proposed redevelopment of Palomar Hospital until a project that includes at least 1,000 units is proposed. The current proposal is less than one third of what is allowable on the site. The location, directly on a transportation corridor and adjacent to downtown, should not be squandered on a low-density, luxury townhome development. This site would be perfect for a public private partnership and should add housing in the ranges needed in the city. The city could also require that some portion of the units be affordable to lower and moderate income families and individuals to help address the goals in the housing element of its General Plan and maximize the opportunity to connect low- and moderate-income households to transit.
2. Initiate a review of development opportunities on parking lots and other areas in transportation corridors to address the need for more affordable units and increase density in the area. These sites, including the hospital site, are prime examples where the Request For Proposals process should be utilized to solicit the kind of partners and development the city and Escondido residents need.

3. Create a stakeholder working group to develop an urban infill/transit oriented development strategy that also addresses the housing needs of lower and moderate income households for downtown and other corridor areas already in the urban footprint prior to making further development decisions. This strategy should then be incorporated into the city's Climate Action Plan Update, to make Escondido the region's leader in implementing the kind of smart growth tools needed at the local level to meaningfully address the climate crisis. We believe the city would have many coalition partners ready to support and help develop the projects needed to activate and enrich Escondido. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you on such an effort.
4. As more development projects come before you, to focus and maximize resources now and to realize a successful transit-oriented future, projects adopted by the city should meet clear objectives. Projects that the city supports should reduce (not increase) VMT; avoid high-risk fire areas; ensure safe evacuation routes for all residents; add to affordable housing stock; qualify as infill developments; contribute to the support of transit; preserve and protect core habitat and open space areas; are on or near transportation corridors; require the job quality and workforce standards referenced above; address climate impacts in the near and long-term; and, implement land use patterns consistent with tenets of good planning. Projects that do not meet these objectives, should not be pursued.

The decisions the city will make soon will set the course for the livability and success of Escondido in the changing world of the future. Whether those decisions will take the city in a positive or negative direction will depend on your actions. Please use these opportunities to bring your development decisions in alignment with transit-supportive land use plans that provide the housing we need for residents of all income levels and in the locations we need them.

We hope you will call on any of our organizations to assist and support the city in these critical decisions.

Sincerely,

Sophie Wolfram, Climate Action Campaign, Chair, QOL Transportation Committee

Rick Bates, UNITE HERE Local 30

Diane Takvorian, Environmental Health Coalition

Bee Mittermiller, Chair Transportation Team, San Diego 350

Tom Lemmon, Business Manager, San Diego County Building & Construction Trades Council

Jennifer Hunt, Advocacy Coordinator, San Diego County Bicycle Coalition

Jeremy Abrams, Business Manager, IBEW 569

George Courser, San Diego Sierra Club

Jim Miller, American Federation of Teachers, Local 1931

Laura Hunter, Escondido Neighbors United

Pamela Heatherington, Environmental Center of San Diego

Cc

Jeff Epp, City Manager

Jay Petrek, Assistant City Manager

Bill Martin, Community Development

Adam Finestone, Planning