

## Re: Item 9, November 16, 2020 - Housing Incentive Program/788 San Antonio

November 14, 2020

Dear City Council Members:

**Palo Alto Neighborhoods strongly favors new housing**, as evidenced by its championship of the NVCAP Alternative M -- the proposal that delivers the BMR housing Palo Alto needs, plus provides new parkland and amenities to make Palo Alto an even more desirable city in which to live. That proposal will create a new neighborhood and blend it into an already established neighborhood.

Contrast that proposal to the current project before us -- 788 San Antonio -- and the eye-popping zoning overhaul needed to make this and similar projects possible:

### Who is this housing for?

Only 15% BMR and none at the lower income levels needed most! Really? While Palo Alto has met its RHNA market rate allocations during each cycle, this project does little to help us meet our below market rate housing levels and in fact removes space that would enable us to do so and raises property values beyond the reach of affordable housing provides.

What is needed are incentives for housing that is primarily below market rate.

### What are the negative impacts of this project?

- This exceeds the 1.5 FAR that the HIP would have granted. Increasing FAR allowances for each successive project is a reckless and chaotic way to manage our housing needs. Instead, the 1.5 FAR limit should be maintained.
- 2.0 FAR and max lot coverage. A 2.0 FAR vastly exceeds what we've allowed before, apart from hotels, and will lead to fortress-like giant looming buildings. Mountain View has gone that route and many Palo Altans are shocked and outraged that we are inviting that same massing and density to our city
- Traffic, congestion, gridlock along San Antonio, even in the pandemic, still frustrates residents and commuters. We read a letter to Council from a resident at the Greenhouse, who reports that it sometimes takes them 20 minutes to go the short distance to 101 from their complex. 788 San Antonio touts that it's close to 101, but San Antonio was never designed for this volume of traffic and little can be done to improve it. What about the impact on neighboring roads, such as Leghorn to Rengstorff and that entrance to 101?
- No parking for retail that is onsite. This is a recipe for retail failure. How can retail thrive without parking? At least the dense San Antonio Center has adequate parking for retail. We can only assume that the people who live in this proposed new zone will just get in their cars and drive for their goods and services, which makes for more traffic, less walkability, and gives the residents another retail desert.
- Retail Protection Subverted: The project would replace 5,987 square feet of retail with just 1,800 square feet. We are desperately trying to preserve retail, not get rid of it.
- Why are we considering adding this to our Comprehensive Plan, when it is in exact opposition to it, undoing all the good, visionary work of the people. Shouldn't a comprehensive city-wide analysis of the Housing Element be completed before we consign such a large area to these changes?
- Why must we continue to inundate South Palo Alto with overly dense housing?
- We would like to point you to the excellent research and advocacy done by the people at **Save Palo Alto's Groundwater**. Are we to understand that absolutely no thorough study of the impacts of a two story underground garage will be done. The potential impacts due to subsidence and

contamination on nearby properties need to be studied, as does the implicit threat to the water table and the natural flow of water through aquifers down to the Bay. The project will open up wells that are 50 feet deep. Soil and water that are known to be full of contaminants like TCE will then be moving freely into the biosphere, unleashed by the construction impacts.

**Why are we letting developers drive zoning changes to suit their goals?** Shouldn't such changes be the result of well-informed studies by city staff in consultation with the Planning Commission and City Council?

Most troubling is the zoning amendment request would extend the housing incentives for this project to all CS zoned properties on the east side of San Antonio Road between Middlefield Road and East Charleston Road as well as the Verizon station on the west. Again, this should be a city-initiated change, not developer-initiated.

**Where is the data to support that this is the right move for the city to make right now in the middle of a pandemic?**

Are we actually considering opening the door for massing, density and congestion on San Antonio Road during a pandemic? Consider that:

- Covid might be here for a long time.
- Existing office space is begging for tenants.
- There are record vacancies of apartments in Palo Alto.
- Why aren't we considering other options rather than throwing open the lid to Pandora's box and giving away all the protections that have made Palo Alto such a lovely place to live?

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Becky Sanders  
Sheri Furman  
Co-Chairs  
Palo Alto Neighborhoods