

June 23, 2005

Chairperson Grotte and Planning Commissioners
330 West 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403

Re: Comment on Bay Meadows draft Specific Plan

Dear Chair Grotte and Planning Commissioners:

On behalf of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition (TALC), I am writing to comment on the draft Specific Plan for the redevelopment of the Bay Meadows racetrack. TALC is a collaboration of more than 90 social justice, environmental, and community groups who work together to create a more environmentally sustainable and socially just Bay Area.

We congratulate the city on the recent adoption of the Rail Corridor Plan. Neighborhoods near transit are our best hope for addressing two of the most significant problems in San Mateo and the rest of the Bay Area: traffic congestion and the lack of affordable housing.

The Bay Meadows site, 83 acres immediately next to a major mass transit station, represents an enormous opportunity. You are wise to take extra care in soliciting wide input over a lengthy period to develop the best plan for the new neighborhood. As you move forward with this effort, we offer the following comments, a mix of praise for the draft Specific Plan and suggestions that we believe could make the plan even better:

1. Build at least 1500 homes that are affordable to families at a variety of income levels. We strongly encourage you to maximize the number of homes you approve, at least the 1500 homes contemplated in the "Maximized Residential" program option. This will both encourage higher use of Caltrain and Samtrans and also address the critical lack of homes people can afford.

Californians who live within a half-mile of a train station are five times more likely to use mass transit regularly than other residents of the same city, according to a recent statewide study. These findings held true across the state: the study looked at areas near Caltrain, BART, VTA light rail, and several transit lines in Southern California and Sacramento.

In addition, we encourage the city to work with the developer and a non-profit housing developer to set aside land that the non-profit would use to build new homes. In so doing, the project could exceed the city's requirements and provide 15% or more of the homes as affordable housing. We believe that setting aside land will help make sure the city gets high-quality homes that are affordable to families at a variety of income levels.

2. Tailor parking requirements to this unique site. Managing parking well is a crucial and often overlooked part of making sure neighborhoods near transit work well. Excess parking generates traffic by attracting people who want to or need to drive for all their trips, exactly the opposite of what's intended for the new Bay Meadows. At \$20,000 per space or more, too much parking needlessly increases costs, as well as increasing the subsidy needed for affordable housing. And excessive parking takes up valuable space that can better be used for parks or other uses that benefit the community.

In an area such as Bay Meadows, the provision of parking needs to be tailored so that it does not exceed the likely demand; that demand can also be reduced significantly by appropriate incentives and pricing. For example, TALC's study of parking requirements in Santa Clara County (*Housing Shortage/Parking Surplus*, 2002) found that 50% of renter households own one or zero vehicles. Proximity to transit and income also have a big effect on auto ownership rates. For housing near transit, that report recommended parking ratios of 0.65-1.6 spaces/unit, depending on unit size and whether the units are affordable housing, with additional reductions allowable based on transportation demand management (TDM) programs.

The draft Specific Plan amendment (page IV-51) includes several good elements on parking management. We particularly applaud using *maximum* parking ratios, requiring a parking study as part of every block-specific Site Plan and Architectural Review, and the city's adoption of the TDM program as part of the Rail Corridor Plan. As the project moves forward, we recommend:

- **2a: Maintain parking maximums and do not impose minimum parking ratios.** This is one of the most useful things you can do to protect neighbors from traffic.
- **2b: Strongly encourage the developer to “unbundle” parking costs from housing prices.** For renters, all parking should be rented separately. While some for-sale housing may have 1-2 spaces provided as part of the home, all additional spaces should be leased separately. For offices, all parking should be leased separately.
- **2c: Allow “tandem” parking** in units where individual homes must have two designated parking spaces, as several other Bay Area cities have done. Often used in townhouses, tandem parking saves costs and space by allowing two spaces to share the same entrance.
- **2d: Expedite implementation of the TDM program** adopted in the Rail Corridor Plan, for residents as well as for employees. For example, parking cashout and/or direct parking charges should quickly become standard practice for offices (this alone will reduce peak traffic generated by 20-40%).
- **2e: Minimize the impacts of parking on the neighborhood** by requiring that parking structures be wrapped with active uses, and that surface parking lots – if any – are screened from the street by landscaping or solid fences.
- **2f: Manage on-street parking** with programs such as residential permit parking and metered parking in retail areas.

3. Prioritize pedestrian access. Encouraging people to walk creates healthy environments. The project includes numerous pedestrian-friendly features, such as an interconnected street grid, small blocks, required retail/active use frontage in key areas, and a network of parks throughout the neighborhood. Keeping Delaware as a two-lane street, with extended curbs at street crossings, is vital. Throughout the project, some areas (such as adjacent to neighborhood parks and Delaware's retail area) are appropriate places to design for pedestrian access as the top priority. One way to do this is to specifically designate the level of priority for pedestrians, bicyclists, cars, and transit for each street, as the city of Seattle has done. As the project moves forward, the city should ensure that the final street and building designs continue and strengthen this focus on pedestrian-oriented design.

4. Improve bicycle connectivity. The Specific Plan needs to better recognize the importance of the neighborhood as a part of San Mateo's bicycle network, providing convenient north-south connectivity, access to Caltrain, and improved access across adjacent high-traffic corridors

outside the site. To achieve this, **transportation mitigation fees should be used to contribute to bicycle and pedestrian improvements, as many other cities around the region have done.**

5. Consider the impact of the project's build-out phasing. Starting construction in the northeast corner of the project, as currently envisioned, may push the initial buildings towards freeway-oriented development. By contrast, starting construction in the southwest corner, close to the existing Caltrain station (and to the new one once it is relocated), and including Delaware Street retail in the early phases of the project, could encourage sticking to the transit-oriented mission stated in the draft Specific Plan.

In summary, the city deserves credit for initiating and following through on an extensive public involvement process that has significantly improved the quality of the new neighborhood proposed for the Bay Meadows site. We encourage you to set up the formal agreements that will ensure that this project is not just adjacent to transit, but truly a transit-oriented development. In doing so, you will reduce the traffic impacts on current and future neighbors and help create a great place to live.

If you have any questions about our comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at (510) 740-3102.

Sincerely,



Jeff Hobson
Policy Director

Cc: City Council, City of San Mateo
Jeff Holzman, Bay Meadows Land Company