

March 24, 2015

Santa Clara County Planning Commission
70 West Hedding Street, 7th Floor
San Jose, CA 95110

Dear Planning Commissioners:

On behalf of SPUR, I am writing to express our support for the draft Health Element of the General Plan that will be heard at the Planning Commission on March 26. The Health Element includes many strategies that align with recommendations SPUR had made in numerous reports and we believe it will help guide county policy in a positive way.

Regarding Section C: Land Use and Urban Design

We wholeheartedly support the general aims of concentrating future growth in already urbanized areas of the county, promoting walkability and designing projects at a human scale. Our 2013 report, *Getting to Great Places*, provides in-depth recommendations for how projects could achieve these goals.¹

Regarding Section F: Healthy Eating, Food Access and Sustainable Food Systems

We commend the Planning Department for taking such a holistic approach to the food system in the county. The five strategies of preserving the county's agricultural land, promoting urban agriculture, improving food retail options, reducing food insecurity, and promoting healthy food literacy will all improve the livability and health of the county.

As we outlined in our most recent report, *Healthy Food Within Reach*, county residents face barriers in finding, affording and choosing healthy food.² The Health Element includes strategies to address each of these barriers, which is critically important as it focuses local government policy on both the supply and demand of healthy food at the neighborhood level.

Specific to addressing economic barriers to food access, we support the broad policies aimed at reducing poverty, including those detailed in HE-A.14: Adequate Wages and Benefits. The goals of improving wages and benefits as well as encouraging workforce training are ones we endorsed in the *Economic Prosperity Strategy* we published in 2014.³ While food assistance programs can also help reduce food insecurity, reducing poverty and increasing family income is a more sustainable solution over the long-term.

¹ *Getting to Great Places: How Better Urban Design Will Strengthen San Jose's future* (December 2013): <https://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2013-11-18/getting-great-places>

² *Healthy Food Within Reach* (February 2015): www.spur.org/foodaccess

³ *Economic Prosperity Strategy* (October 2014): www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2014-10-01/economic-prosperity-strategy

Regarding Section D: Active and Sustainable Transportation

SPUR also supports the Health Element's promotion of better transit options for county residents. For San Jose specifically, we outlined some potential ways of increasing walking, biking, and pedestrian use in our March 2014 report, *The Future of Downtown San Jose*.⁴ And, more broadly, we recommended a series of transportation policy changes for Santa Clara County to shift commutes and other trips away from being car-dependent in our report *Freedom to Move*.⁵

Regarding Section G: Air Quality and Climate Change

Lastly, we commend the Planning Department for recognizing the importance of planning for climate change impacts, including the health impacts of more days of intense heat in the county and reduced air quality. In *Climate Change Hits Home*, we offer six recommendations directly related to public health, many of which align with those in the Health Element.⁶

This draft Health Element brings together many forward looking policy recommendations that SPUR supports. We think the document will prove to be a valuable guiding document for the county and respectfully ask that you vote to support it.

Sincerely,



Eli Zigas
Food and Agriculture Policy Director

⁴ *The Future of Downtown San Jose* (March 2014), www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2014-03-17/future-downtown-san-jose

⁵ *Freedom to Move* (July 2014), www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2014-07-17/freedom-move

⁶ *Climate Change Hits Home* (May 2011), www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2011-05-02/climate-change-hits-home