

November 16, 2020

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
70 West Hedding Street
San José CA 95110

Re: Item #12 – Reid-Hillview 2021 Vision Plan

Dear President Chavez and Supervisors:

On behalf of SPUR, I write to commend you for your foresight and diligence in developing a Vision Statement and Vision Plan for the conversion and redevelopment of Reid-Hillview Airport. We appreciate very much the County's community outreach and engagement efforts to date to inform and guide the design of such a plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying economic crisis have laid bare the inequities in our city and the vulnerability of our immigrant communities and our East San José residents in particular, so many of whom are essential workers at risk of contracting the virus and often live in overcrowded households. These conditions have led to East San José being the area in the county with the most cases per capita.

Residents in the surrounding neighborhood have voiced concerns about airport impacts, including air pollution, noise, and safety and environmental hazards. In our view, a commitment to race equity and social and environmental justice means it is necessary and appropriate to commit the airport site to a large-scale community redevelopment initiative that will benefit directly the residents of East San José and be responsive to their needs and aspirations.

As part of the "Big Ideas" component of SPUR's Regional Strategy, we have identified redevelopment of the Reid-Hillview Airport and public investments and improvements in the surrounding area as a major opportunity to improve the quality of life of residents. In fact, in November of 2019, SPUR joined with SOMOS Mayfair to convene residents for a charrette to identify their top priorities, vision and aspirations for the redevelopment of Reid-Hillview Airport. The same themes arose in this meeting as in the County's subsequent Community Workshops: residents are very interested in affordable housing, educational opportunities, workforce and economic development, social services and parks and open space.

For the visioning process, and based on community input we have received, we recommend the following:

Phase out Reid-Hillview Airport and repurpose it as a new hub for the East San José community.
Develop a mix of affordable housing, social services, education and industrial uses.

Start at the core, with a community center nearest the future Eastridge Center transit station. Draw on public, private, and philanthropic resources to build a compact, culturally-relevant, human-centered, mixed-use hub, centered on a public gathering space. Create a place to deliver community services, local retail, a public market, and cultural events, complemented by affordable and mixed-income housing.

Establish a walkable urban pattern that emphasize the comfort, health, and safety of people of all ages and abilities. Make clear connections to transit, open space, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Make Reid-Hillview a model for equitable development. Center community voices at every stage of the process. Work with community-based organizations to design feasible structures for management, governance, and ownership. Retain public/community ownership and use ground leases, a land trust or other tools.

Focus on jobs and economic opportunity, including a workforce partnership among CDCs, community colleges, labor and industry. Draw on local expertise to support training in skilled trades, construction and green tech. Consider an innovation center focused on housing, producing temporary shelter, accessory units, and even modular housing production to be used on-site and nearby. Incubate local entrepreneurs through the site's retail space, public market, and industrial/maker spaces.

Use the Reid-Hillview site for flexible interim uses, taking advantage of its large scale to innovate. It could host such uses as vendors markets, temporary shelter for the unhoused, or a construction training and innovation lab, while banking land for long-term job-generating development.

Consider the large sites together. Reid-Hillview, Eastridge Center, Lake Cunningham, and the Mt. Pleasant Golf Course site together represent an opportunity to dramatically transform East San José while meeting community needs, promoting equity and sustainability, improving the quality of life of residents, and generating economic development. This will, of course, require close coordination between the County and City of San José.

Stabilize housing and improve conditions in nearby neighborhoods. Use strategies like nonprofit acquisition of buildings, temporary rental assistance, and foreclosure prevention to prevent displacement of long-time residents. Provide a turnkey affordable Accessory Dwelling Unit program, offering permitting, design, and financing in exchange for a commitment to serve low-income tenants. This will help ease crowding, deliver affordable housing and provide income to residents.

Make green connections, built around the watershed. Tie nearby open spaces into a seamless network of public amenities. Restore and enhance the ecology and hydrology of Lake Cunningham, Thompson Creek, Silver Creek and the golf course site. Use green infrastructure for flood management. Ensure that trails are complete and continuous to support healthy and safe active transportation. Integrate a community farm and agricultural park, connected to the community market.

We fully support closure of the airport and development of a Vision Plan for East San José, the Reid-Hillview site and its environs. We stand ready to work with the County of Santa Clara, City of San José, stakeholders and community groups and residents to bring this vision to fruition.

Sincerely,



Michael Lane, San José Director - SPUR