



COMMENTS	RESPONSES
<p style="text-align: right;">Comment Letter No. PC01</p>  <p style="text-align: right;">May 22, 2018</p> <p>VIA E-MAIL</p> <p>County of San Diego Planning Commission c/o Lisa Fitzpatrick 5520 Overland Avenue San Diego, CA 92123</p> <p>Re: <u>Harmony Grove Village South Project and EIR: PDS2015-SP-15-002, PDS2015-GPA-15-002, PDS2015-REZ-15-003, PDS2018-TM-5626, PDS2015-MUP-15-008, PDS2018-STP-18-011, PDS2015-ER-15-08-006</u></p> <p>Dear Honorable Planning Commissioners:</p> <p>This letter is submitted on behalf of The Escondido Creek Conservancy ("TECC") regarding the proposed Harmony Grove Village South project ("Project") and Environmental Impact Report ("EIR"). As a conservancy, TECC owns and manages properties in the Project vicinity and has a strong interest in protection of water quality, habitat, and the local environment. Unfortunately, as my June 20, 2017 and April 9, 2018 letters explained, the environmental analysis is insufficient, and the Project violates several important requirements.</p> <p>The Project will "detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community or localized area ...." The Project would introduce high density uses in a largely rural and undeveloped area. There is only one side of the site with higher density development, and that area is on the other side of Escondido Creek and Harmony Grove Road. Indeed, even the EIR acknowledges "the Project would vary from the immediately abutting uses to the west, which generally have been individually designed and landscaped, set into large lots." The same can be said of the uses to the east of the site. And both to the immediate south and north is open space. Furthermore, the neighboring Del Dios Highlands Preserve "provides a direct view into the Project." The Project would change views of the site substantially, introducing substantial constructed elements and verticality into a terrain that currently has very little of either.</p> <p>Contrary to the General Plan's "Community Development Model", the Project does not respect the rural and semi-rural areas surrounding the Project site, it does not locate "housing closer to retail, services, schools, and job centers," it does not provide an appropriate "transition to the lowest density category," and it does not increase "the efficiency of delivering police, fire, and other public services ...." And contrary to the</p> <p style="text-align: right;">www.DELANOANDELANO.com</p> <div style="position: absolute; right: 0; top: 50%; transform: translateY(-50%); font-size: 8px;">       EVERETT L. DELANO III Admitted in California and Colorado        M. DARR DELANO Admitted in California and New York        104 W. Grand Avenue, Suite C Escondido, CA 92025        (760) 741-1200 :: Office (760) 741-1212 :: Fax     </div>	<p><b>Response to Comments PC01-1</b></p> <p>These are summary introductory comments to the letter, addressing TECC's interest, referring to prior letter submittal of June 20, 2017 and April 9, 2018 and providing a conclusion that the Project violates "several important requirements." These summary comments are noted. Additional responses are provided to specific comments that follow.</p> <p><b>Response to Comments PC01-2</b></p> <p>The comments focus on the property line and what is on either side, whereas in reality visual character is provided by what the eye sees overall. Please see the response to your similar comment on the DEIR in Response to Comment O4a-10. Additionally, EIR Subchapter 2.1, <i>Aesthetics</i>, discusses contrast with existing visual character in the discussion of long-term visual effects of the Proposed Project. As stated in the subchapter:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The long-term visual effect of the Project from both KVs selected for detailed analysis would be related to the change from an undeveloped parcel to a village extension. Although the built nature of the Project would vary from the existing condition, it is expected to demonstrate a character that is consistent with the village overall, as well as the development pattern visible in the County, City of Escondido and distant City of San Marcos.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Although the visual character of the site would change from existing conditions, Project development would be generally consistent with the relative scale of development planned in the area, as well as general distance from the structures, intervening uses and landscaping. The Project would not result in new dominant visual elements within the larger viewshed. The Proposed Project would be visually compatible with existing and planned surrounding uses, as well as the surrounding topographic features. For instance, the harmony court and farmhouse structures, encircling a common driveway and courtyard, mimic the compound formations on HGV. As noted above, the granaries' height and architectural projections would reference the steep and pointed peaks around the valley. Character compatibility, therefore, would result from the diversity</i></p>

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	<p><i>of elements that would be visually consistent throughout the Project site based on conformance with the Project Specific Plan, as well as neighboring development (particularly nearby residential portions of the abutting HGV project). The scale and contrast between the proposed development and the surrounding area would not be dominant in views toward the Project site as the greatest number of viewers would either be looking toward the Project from the north (from a setting in the heart of HGV), or from the south, from which vantage point the Project would be seen as the southernmost part of a consistent HGV development pattern. Additionally, retention of the highest on-site existing topographic forms in the southern portion of the Project, retention of sight lines to surrounding mountains and ridgelines, and revegetation with native and/or locally compatible plants would lessen the visual dominance and scale of the proposed development features from all cardinal directions.</i></p> <p><i>Taking all these factors into consideration, although implementation of the Project would represent a change from the past, the combination of all Project elements, in conjunction with its setting at the HGV crossroads, would result in less than significant effects on the area's visual character or quality following Project buildout and vegetation maturity (EIR pp. 2.1-46 to 2.1-47).</i></p> <p>Relative to introduction of verticality into views of the Project, please also see EIR Figures 2.1-8a and 2.1-9, which are simulations from the north and south. Built elements are set into a setting of increasing elevation in Figure 2.1-8a, and the verticality is dwarfed from the south by the increased elevation of the viewer from the Del Dios Highlands Preserve fire break road in Figure 2.1-9. Please also see the response to your similar comment on the DEIR in Response to Comment O4a-12, relative to views from that trail.</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Comment Letter No. PC01</b></p> <p>County of San Diego Planning Commission May 22, 2018 Page 2 of 3</p> <p>Community Plan, the Project does not preserve the “unique features of a rural lifestyle” nor does it preserve “the rural small town feeling of Harmony Grove.” It does not ensure “[c]ontinued preservation of mature native trees.” Nor does it provide for the “historic equestrian character of Harmony Grove” or “leisure and market animals grazing in fenced front yards.” And it is not “compatible with and sensitive to [Harmony Grove’s] natural setting; unspoiled views of intact hills, valleys, and creeks.”</p> <p>The Project would introduce a high density of uses into a rural area with a very high fire danger. The EIR discusses response times to the site, but fails to analyze the potential that a need to evacuate in case of wildlands fire and the substantial numbers of people attempting to evacuate all at one time could have on the ability of both new and existing residents to leave safely. This is despite the fact the EIR acknowledges “a typical fire in the Project vicinity would be a sage scrub-chaparral fueled fire that moves quickly, burning with moderate to high intensity.”</p> <p>The Project will negatively impact Escondido Creek and the habitat it provides and supports. I provided extensive analyses from Dr. Richard Horner regarding significant water quality impacts and from Robb Hamilton regarding biological resource impacts. The responses to these remarks were insufficient to justify the incomplete analysis and the Project’s significant effects.</p> <p>The EIR claims the “Project incorporates and would facilitate Smart Growth principles and alternative transportation ....” But there is little evidence to support this claim. There is no indication the Project will provide for additional transit stops and facilities, despite the recognition of the need for such, as expressed by Mobility Element Policy ME-8.1. The EIR claims two transit centers are “located nearby” and the “proximity” of the Nordahl Transit Station would allow residents to walk or bike. The response to my comment that it is at least three miles away claims: “Three miles is indeed a reasonable walking distance for people who focus on pedestrian travel ....” The Escondido station is approximately 5 miles away, and Amtrak is not available at either station. Furthermore, there are narrow roadways with no sidewalks or street lights. To claim these two transit centers are “nearby” is highly misleading and an inaccurate description of the Project’s isolation from reliable transit service.</p> <p>The EIR claims the Project “would complement and support the [Harmony Grove Village (“HGV”)] Village Core by diversifying the mix of housing opportunities and providing limited commercial/civic uses that are compatible with the existing and planned elements of HGV.” In fact, the HGV project already has substantial housing, much more than would support a jobs/housing balance, such that adding more housing, no matter the type, would only further distort the jobs/housing balance. Likewise, the EIR claims “the Project is proposing to expand the southern extent” of the Harmony Grove Village project. This is both a misleading statement about the Project and about its impacts. The Harmony Grove Village project involves the development of 742 single-family homes on approximately 500 acres. This is slightly less than 1.5 units per acre. The Project, however, proposes 453 residential units on approximately 111 acres. That</p> <p style="text-align: right;">PC01-3</p> <p style="text-align: right;">PC01-4</p> <p style="text-align: right;">PC01-5</p> <p style="text-align: right;">PC01-6</p> <p style="text-align: right;">PC01-7</p>	<p><b>Response to Comments PC01-3</b> The first five lines of this comment were previously submitted on the DEIR. No change has been made to comment content. The comments do not raise any new issues that would require additional response. No new information has been provided that require further discussion. Please see the DEIR Response to Comment O4a-17. The remainder of the comment was previously submitted and an itemized response was provided in DEIR Response to Comment O4a-25. The comments do not raise any new issues that would require additional response. No new information has been provided that require further discussion.</p> <p><b>Response to Comments PC01-4</b> Fire danger is an important issue that received extended focused review. Please see the Global Responses to Fire Hazards Impact Analysis and Adequacy of Emergency Evacuation and Access.</p> <p><b>Response to Comments PC01-5</b> This comment is general in nature and simply states that negative impacts to Escondido Creek and its habitat would occur and that responses provided were insufficient. The County disagrees that the responses to comments provided by Dr. Horner and Mr. Hamilton (in Letters O4b and O4c) were insufficient. The technical analyses (based on over 30 visits to the site by Project biologists, resulting in detailed resource mapping) and EIR discussion are adequate to identify significant effects, and responses to questions raised are informative. Because the comment is general, without specifics, no more specific response can be provided.</p> <p><b>Response to Comments PC01-6</b> As noted in the current comment, these comments on “smart growth” and alternative transportation were previously submitted on the DEIR, and responses were provided in DEIR Response to Comment O4a-37. The comment does not raise any new issues that would require additional response. No new information has been provided that require further discussion. The specific portion of the response questioned here, a less than 3.0-mile distance to the Nordahl Transit Station was simply in response to the issue of distance. It is acknowledged that many users of such stations drive to associated park and ride locations. The reference to “nearby”</p>

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	<p>relative to north County transit stations is relative. Most residents of unincorporated County communities (Ramona, Dulzura, Jacumba, etc.) reside farther from transit stations. HGV South residents would benefit from access to two centers located in the denser adjacent City of Escondido. It should also be noted that, in response to comments received, prior to Planning Commission, the Project incorporated a set-aside for a future bus stop on site in anticipation of future extension of bus services to the Project area.</p> <p><b>Response to Comments PC01-7</b>  The comments on diversification and jobs/housing balance were previously submitted on the DEIR. The comment does not raise any new issues that would require additional response. No new information has been provided that require further discussion. Please refer to DEIR Response to Comment O4a-2 for discussion. Relative to the second half of this paragraph and village expansion, this comment was previously submitted on the DEIR as Comment O4a-15. The comment does not raise any new issues that would require additional response. No new information has been provided that require further discussion. Please see the Global Responses to Project Consistency with General Plan Policy LU-1.4 for a full discussion relevant to this issue.</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Comment Letter No. PC01</b></p> <p>County of San Diego Planning Commission May 22, 2018 Page 3 of 3</p> <p>equates to slightly over 4 units per acre. The Project is not merely an “expansion” to the south of the Harmony Grove Village project; it is a vastly increased density in a rural area. Indeed, the EIR acknowledges the site is currently designated Semi-Rural Residential and Rural Lands.</p> <p>The EIR fails to adequately analyze greenhouse gas emission impacts. The EIR claims average vehicle trip lengths from the Project would be 7.88 miles. But there is inadequate justification for this short length, particularly in light of the site’s distance from employment opportunities for the many residents who will reside there. And the EIR fails to ensure that “off-site carbon credits” will be real, enforceable mitigation. CEQA Guidelines § 15126.4.</p> <p>TECC supports responsible development in the area, but the EIR fails to adequately analyze alternatives. The EIR discusses what it claims is a “Biologically Superior Alternative.” But this alternative still significantly impacts important and protected biological resources. The EIR must analyze a truly biologically superior alternative, one that avoids important on-site biological resources, including coastal sage scrub and southern mixed chaparral habitat.</p> <p>Additionally, the Project should be required to adopt enforceable mitigation for impacts to things like biological resources and greenhouse gas emissions within the watershed.</p> <p>The EIR is sufficiently lacking that the only way to fix these issues is to revise it and recirculate an adequate report.</p> <p>For the foregoing reasons, TECC urges you to reject the Project and EIR as proposed. Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sincerely,  Everett DeLano</p>	<p><b>Response to Comments PC01-8</b> The statement that the EIR fails to adequately analyze greenhouse gas emission impacts contains no specifics. Although no specific responses can be provided as a result, the reader is also referred to DEIR Responses to Comments O4a-46, 48 and 49, which were also provided under a similar heading in your DEIR comment letter. The sentences of this comment regarding average vehicle trip length were previously submitted on the DEIR. The comment does not raise any new issues that would require additional response. No new information has been provided that require further discussion. Please see the DEIR Response to Comment O4a-45. Regarding assurance that off-site carbon credits would be real and enforceable mitigation, please see the Global Responses to Carbon Offsets. The mitigation meets CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4 standards.</p> <p><b>Response to Comments PC01-9</b> The EIR alternatives address each of the significant impacts identified for the Proposed Project and lower or eliminate those impacts. The Biologically Superior Alternative was designed in the field with County and resource agency staff to minimize impacts to Diegan coastal sage scrub and avoid impacts to California gnatcatcher; complete avoidance of all habitat is not the required standard.</p> <p><b>Response to Comments PC01-10</b> Project mitigation is enforceable, and meets state and County requirements for feasibility and adequacy. Location of mitigation within the watershed may not be feasible or enforceable. Preference for biological mitigation to take place within the Community Plan area, and preference for greenhouse gas emissions mitigation/credit purchase to be located within the County, are both noted in the relevant EIR mitigation measures. In order to ensure that adequate mitigation is available, however, alternative locations are acceptable, as detailed in the FEIR in Subchapters 2.3, <i>Biological Resources</i>, and 2.7, <i>Greenhouse Gas Emissions</i>. Standards and necessary agency review are noted as necessary.</p> <p><b>Response to Comments PC01-11</b> These conclusion comments request a recirculated report and rejection of the Project and EIR. None of the comments provided resulted in identification of need for new technical review, and no recirculation is required. The request for Project denial will be before the decision makers during Project review and is part of the Project record.</p>

