

Valley Center Design Review Board

July 22, 2014

TO: Mark Slovick, Kristin Blackson, Mindy Fogg, Sami Real, Darren Gretler and Mark Wardlaw
San Diego Department of Planning & Development Services
CC: Oliver Smith, Ann Quinley, Steve Hutchison, Margarett Morgan
RE: **Comments on the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report for Accretive Investment Group's GPA12-001, SP-001, Master Tentative Map 5571, Implementing Tentative Map 5572.**

The Valley Center Design Review Board has commented extensively in the past on each successive submission of the Accretive SP/GPA and on the DEIR of a year ago. None of our previous comments have been addressed to date. The VC Design Review Board re-submits all the comments we have submitted in the past and asks that they be addressed and responded to, as CEQA requires.

The Accretive SP/GPA remains unchanged in any significant way from the previous submission, the one before, and the one before that. Further, the *Revised* DEIR, like the previous DEIR, persists in steadfastly ignoring significant conflicts with adopted planning documents: Valley Center's Design Guidelines, the VC Design Guidelines Checklist, the Community Plans of Valley Center (and Bonsall) and the San Diego County General Plan. These issues and many others have been identified and discussed over and over again, most recently by the deluge of public comments to the original DEIR that was circulated a year ago. Regardless, the REVISED DEIR reaches the same nonsensical conclusion that this GPA – which amends virtually every adopted County planning document -- does not conflict with any applicable land use plan.

It is one thing to confront the realities of a transformational proposal like this one AND then to decide that its benefits outweigh its significant impacts. It is quite another to obscure the obvious Truth of the proposal. We have asked before and we ask again ... what is preventing forthright disclosure of the obvious? How strange and inexplicable it is that today's *professional planning staff fail even to identify issues that caused the department to recommend DENIAL of the PAA for this project just a few years ago. WHY would this be? Whose job is it to enforce the adopted County General Plan? Why is PDS supporting the claim that the baseline condition is NOT the adopted General Plan but, rather, the GP as this project proposes to amend it? Please explain the logic of concluding that this proposal is CONSISTENT with these baseline planning documents when they all must be amended in order to approve this project?*

The VC DRB again **highlights the following critical issues:** *Both Accretive Investment Group's SP/GPA 12-001 and the County's REVISED DEIR fail to identify and/or discuss critical differences between existing plans for this rural area and the plan proposed by the applicant:*

1. The Revised DEIR fails to follow the County's own CEQA procedures for determining significance by failing to analyze Valley Center's Design Guidelines and Design Guideline Checklist against the proposal.
2. The Revised DEIR fails even to address Valley Center's most basic design objective: the Protection of Natural Features. (see pages 8, 10, 15-22 *Valley Center Design Guidelines*). It is ludicrous to argue that grading 4 Million cubic yards can possibly preserve any of the site's natural features. See comments below.
3. The Revised DEIR obscures with circular arguments and double talk the proposal's significant inconsistency also with General and Community Plan Goals and Policies. See comments below.
4. The Revised DEIR also avoids discussion of the LEED Neighborhood Design mandates that the applicant claims the project exemplifies. See article by LEED-ND author, Kaid Benfield, "*Sprawl is Still Sprawl Even If It's Green,*" (<http://www.citylab.com/design/2013/09/sprawl-still-sprawl-even-if-its-green/6756/>), and DRB comments below.

Valley Center Design Review Board

August 11, 2013

TO: Mark Slovick, Larry Hofreiter, Jarrett Ramaiya, Kristin Blackson, Darren Gretler and Mark Wardlaw
San Diego Department of Planning & Development Services
CC: Oliver Smith, Ann Quinley, Steve Hutchison, Margarett Morgan
RE: **Accretive Investment Group's 3rd revised submission (06-21-13):
GPA12-001, SP-001, Master Tentative Map 5571, Implementing Tentative Map 5572
and Draft Environmental Impact Report**

This submission is unchanged in any significant way from the previous submission, the one before, and the one before that. Again, it lacks details that have been requested in the past, and still the issues are major and many. These have been addressed at great length in the comments of our Board (this document contains our previous comments), and in previous and current comments of the Valley Center Planning Group. In this edition of our comments, the VC Design Review Board wants to re-iterate the comments we have submitted in the past. We want to highlight especially that this re-submission still fails to follow the LEED Neighborhood Design mandates that it claims to exemplify, and still fails even to address the proposal's consistency with other General and Community Plan Goals and Policies, analyses which were requested by the PDS staff in 2012. These points are elaborated in order below.

1. The Accretive project fails to follow the LEED Neighborhood Design mandates that it claims to exemplify. It fails to meet required criteria for LOCATION and for NEIGHBORHOOD PATTERN AND DESIGN. (See LEED 2009 for Neighborhood Development, pp. 1-9, and pp. 41-47.)

The San Diego County General Plan (SDGP) sets specific criteria for both the location and internal design of new Village development in ***Land Use Policy 1.2: Leapfrog Development. Prohibit leapfrog development which is inconsistent with the Community Development Model. Leapfrog Development restrictions do not apply to new villages that are designed to be consistent with the Community Development Model, that provide necessary services and facilities, and that are designed to meet the LEED Neighborhood Development Certification or an equivalent. For purposes of this policy, leapfrog development is defined as Village densities located away from established villages or outside established water and sewer service boundaries. (See applicable community plan for possible relevant policies.)***

By referring both to the SDGP "Community Development Model" and to LEED Neighborhood Development Certification standards, this GP policy makes very clear its intention to place special emphasis on the site location AND the site design of Village projects. The choice of LEED **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT** (emphasis added) standards, rather than LEED building standards, is purposeful: LEED Neighborhood Development standards speak specifically to requirements for site location and site design that other LEED building standards do not address.

LEED for Neighborhood Development places emphasis on the site selection, design, and construction elements that bring buildings and infrastructure together into a neighborhood and relate the neighborhood to its landscape as well as its local and regional context. The work of the LEED-ND core committee, made up of representatives from all three partner organizations, has been guided by sources such as the Smart Growth Network's ten principles of smart growth, the charter of the Congress for the New Urbanism, and other LEED rating systems. LEED for Neighborhood Development creates a label, as well as guidelines for both decision making and development, to provide an incentive for better **location**, design, and construction of new residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments.

The project fails in the following respects to abide by site location and site design requirements.

- **The site location meets NONE of *location options* for LEED ND:**
 - Not an Infill Project;
 - Not an Adjacent Site with Connectivity (does NOT have is at least 90 intersections/square mile as measured within a 1/2-mile distance of a continuous segment of the project boundary, equal to or greater than 25% of the project) boundary, that is adjacent to previous development;
 - Not a Transit Corridor or Route with Adequate Transit Service. (The only mass transit remotely near this location are two bus routes 4 miles north of the Project which run the circuit of the 4 Indian Casinos on SR- 76.)
 - No infrastructure adequate to serve urban development exists or is planned. The Accretive project is a compressed suburban sprawl design plopped into a functioning agricultural area where water infrastructure serves irrigation requirements for agriculture. Water and wastewater infrastructure to serve this urban project will have to be completely invented.

- **The site design fails to meet even the most basic requirements for LEED ND *Neighborhood Pattern and Design***
 - It is too large (exceeds the 320-acre maximum size).
 - It is not “walk-able”. The LEED-ND standards were developed through the research of a core committee which that sets the standard for a walk-able neighborhood at no more than 320 acres, with all services, civic uses, employment, and high density housing contained within that 320 acres.
 - It is not compact. The site stretches 2 miles in both directions.
 - Site designs for most of the project neighborhoods are missing. How is possible to claim compliance with LEED Neighborhood Pattern and Design when no “design” exists?
 - The one neighborhood design that is included woefully lacks “connectivity” that LEED ND specifies clearly and precisely. There is no urban grid, no city “blocks” let alone “short blocks” that characterize a “walk-able” neighborhood. To quote LEED ND booklet (pp. 44), the site design is not “such that its internal connectivity is at least 140 intersections per square mile.” Nor is the project designed with “at least one through street and/or non-motorized right-of-way intersecting or terminating at the project boundary at least every 800 feet, or at existing abutting street intervals or intersection.” Instead, the Accretive 3-town configuration strings together three conventional automobile- centric bubbles, unrelated to one another, each its own suburban sprawl pattern and calls the conglomeration a LEED ND facsimile. Home sites are strung along a meandering road with few intersections with no break between them even for non-motorized trails. This is NOT the distinct urban neighborhood pattern that LEED ND illustrates with innumerable graphic examples in the booklet, LEED 2009 for Neighborhood Development (available on line).
 - It does not have all its residential uses within ½ mile of its “CENTER.” The sprawling site requires three “centers” even to claim that its residences are within a ½ mile of the center. Two of these are tiny areas that cannot even in a stretch qualify as “Town Centers.” The third, too, very questionably provides urban services and amenities that LEED ND location standards intend.
 - There is no site design for any of these “Town Centers.” (Nor is there any requirement in this “Master Plan” Specific Plan that any Town Center is required to actually be built.) How is it possible to claim LEED ND compliance when no site design exists?

2. The Accretive project fails to address the proposal’s consistency with other General and Community Plan Goals and Policies, analyses which were requested by the PDS staff in 2012.

To quote the County Scoping letter and the Project Issue Checklist: ***“Major Project Issue #1: In our February 7, 2011 Major Pre Application Letter, staff indicated that your project was inconsistent with the County’s Draft General Plan in Major Project Issue 1. Since that time, the General Plan update was adopted on August 3, 2011. Based on the newly adopted General Plan, County staff has confirmed that the proposed project remains inconsistent with the land use map and numerous General Plan policies.***

Staff will be revising and updating the submitted comprehensive Draft General Plan Amendment Report submitted to detail these inconsistencies. Please immediately review the policies and indicate to staff how you would propose to

*revise these policies or if you disagree with staff's analysis. **If policy revisions are required to the County's General Plan, then the project's EIR must also analyze the impacts to the County's General Plan.***

Where are these analyses? The DEIR refers the reader to the Specific Plan for these analyses. But, there is no General Plan Amendment Report or any form of GP consistency analysis in the Specific Plan. The applicant argues that a "general plan amendment" (the content of which is never specified beyond a change of Regional Category from Semi-Rural to Village) will somehow make this SP/GPA "consistent" with all the Principles, Goals and Policies that must be revised in the County General Plan, the Valley Center and Bonsall Community Plans, and the Valley Center Design Guidelines in order to accommodate this project. So, what IS going here? Is the plan to subordinate all County and state planning documents to this proposal's parameters without ever detailing what they are?

The Valley Center Design Review Board has detailed in three previous letters the ways that this project is inconsistent, in the first place, with Valley Center fundamental design goals. Our previous comments and questions are incorporated into this document to be absolutely certain they become part of the administrative record as of this date, August 5, 2013, and are also provided the courtesy of a response as required by CEQA.

Very Sincerely,

Lael Montgomery, Chair
Robson Splane, Vice Chair
Susan Moore, Secretary
Jeff Herr
Keith Robertson

Valley Center Design Review Board

February 25, 2013

TO: Mark Slovick, Larry Hofreiter, Jarrett Ramaiya, Kristin Blackson, Beth Murray and Mark Wardlaw
San Diego Department of Planning & Development Services
CC: Oliver Smith, Ann Quinley, Steve Hutchison, Margarett Morgan
RE: **Accretive Investment Group's 2nd revised submission (02-13-13)**
GPA12-001, SP-001, Master Tentative Map 5571, Implementing Tentative Map 5572

Why is this applicant permitted to abuse the process?

Ordinarily we appreciate the opportunity to comment on projects that are being proposed for our community. We are accustomed to working closely and amicably with real estate developers, especially of Village projects, to develop plans that reflect the community's vision. We very much look forward to the completion of Village projects in Valley Center's central valley which have been planned for many years. This is the traditional heart of Valley Center where businesses, churches, schools, playing fields, and library are located, where very significant road infrastructure improvements were completed several years ago at a cost to the taxpayers of some \$50 Million, where wastewater treatment facilities are located and low-interest state loans have been secured for expansion. Here Village residential and commercial development will be welcomed.

In glaring contrast, we are deeply disturbed and alarmed by this project and this application. Review after review of a proposal that fails repeatedly to respond to previous comments seems to be a design to demoralize the staff and discourage community participation.

This project is a sad anomaly that continues to disappoint citizens who care deeply about our community. Though the applicants claim to have “worked with the community”, in fact they have done whatever they can behind the scenes to undermine what state law defines as the “constitution of land use” and what tens of thousands of San Diego County citizens understand and depend upon as a kind of contract with our County government -- our County General and Community Plans. These applicants share San Diego County with hundreds of thousands of citizens who are invested in the region’s plans for the future and who benefit collectively by a common set of rules. What encourages and then allows this applicant to bull and bully its way past procedures that everyone else follows? From the get-go this applicant has gamed the system, disregarded the processes and products of public planning, misrepresented basic and essential facts, ignored input and correction. On and on it goes, seemingly endless deviations from standard protocols are tolerated. From the sudden appearance of a surprise Specific Plan Area on Valley Center’s land use maps in 2008, through the Planning Commission’s approval of the PAA application (against staff’s recommendation AND contradicting the Commission’s unanimous endorsement of the General Plan Update just weeks before), and now to this 2nd iteration -- the review process has been corroded and frustrated. Why is this applicant permitted to abuse the standard process, and what will become of San Diego County when we all abuse the system similarly?

Concerning this submittal and the process:

Except for increasing commercial square footage (75K SF to 90K SF, increasing hotel beds (20-50) and adding kitchenettes to 200-units in the group home facility (more intensity, not less) and a few minor changes – this submission is unchanged from the previous submission and the one before that; and, again, it is incomplete. This submission lacks details that have been requested in the past; it also lacks a letter from the applicant which, according to County protocol, is required to explain how the new submission addresses the Project Issue Checklist. (The Project issue Checklist is the 364 page document, prepared by the PDS staff and released in December 2012, which lists more than 1000 items that the applicant needs to address.) Without this letter one can only guess whether the applicant is misunderstanding, overlooking, ignoring, or merely defying the issues that have been raised several times already by staff and community groups.

Nevertheless, despite missing pieces, community groups have been given 30-days to review the material and submit comments to the County. At the same time, evidently, the applicant has been given a 60-day extension to submit the Project Issue letter and has submitted “some studies” for the staff to “preview”. Information about which studies have been submitted is not being made available to the community. Nor can anyone predict, obviously, how these will be assessed and what revisions may be requested by staff after they have been previewed. As a result of these considerable uncertainties, several of us suggested that formal community review should be delayed until the resubmission is complete rather than pushed forward with so many missing pieces. We were told accommodatingly that we could submit our comments anytime -- but within 30-days if we wanted our comments to be included in staff’s comments. Given the infamous “one-bite policy” and the fact that this project threatens to set aside Valley Center’s entire community plan, volunteers who are reviewing this project on behalf of the community feel that we cannot risk being told in a few months that we had a chance to comment -- and chose not to. So we are complying with the 30-day deadline even though compliance requires volunteers to drop everything, hold special meetings and respond immediately to yet another incomplete submission, and do it all over again in

60 days. All this is to accommodate an applicant who requires one extension after another, who is also unresponsive to staff and community comments and ignores County protocol.

This said, after reviewing the Specific Plan text and maps which show zero effort to remedy the project's basic problems, it's hard to imagine what a Project Issue Letter from this applicant might add (more frosting on a missing cake?) We will all have to wait for the long-anticipated "studies" to understand the substance of the applicant's plan for this property. At this point, issues we raised in September 2012 and the previous June 2012 all remain unaddressed.

In addition to our previous concerns, which are attached, we emphasize the following:

SPECIFIC PLAN

The Specific Plan text is still riddled with wiggly information and assertions that are contradicted by the facts. This creates a confusing stew: information too vague and mutable to assess, indecipherable nonsense, and plain misrepresentations of the truth – all dangerous in a serious planning document. A Specific Plan is not a sales pitch. It is a proposal to amend and then to implement the San Diego County General Plan. This particular Specific Plan will govern the development of an entire new city of 5000-people. This proposal DOUBLES the growth planned between now and 2020 for the entire 55,000 acre planning area. According to SANDAG's Regional Growth Forecast Valley Center adds 989 homes between 2010 and 2020. The Accretive project alone proposes twice that on just 608 acres: 1746 homes, a 50-bed hotel, a 200-unit (bedrooms & kitchenettes) group care facility and 90,000 SF commercial.)

Vague and inconsistent particulars are too numerous to list. As every reviewer has exclaimed, there is no definitive plan beyond the plan to explode the development potential of this rural area by more than 1800%. Design vignettes and "conceptual" layouts are meaningless substitutes for genuine design standards and a commitment to a specific approach. Even unit allotments for each phase are subject to change. Virtually the entire "masterplan" is one concept that is subject-to-change laid over another concept that is subject-to-change. Nothing about this project is clear except the statement that this nebulous Specific Plan will prevail over every official County planning document. Processing should be halted until the Specific Plan is, at least, complete, factually correct and internally consistent. It is none of these.

The plan is laced with ludicrous claims, misrepresentations and outright inaccuracies, again too numerous to detail here. However, to assist the fact checkers, the whoppers are most pervasive in sections that pertain to community character, both the character of the proposal and the character of other properties in the area. Perhaps because "consistency" with legal planning documents and "compatibility" with existing and planned development on the ground is, one would hope, requisite for approval of this proposal, the applicant persists in these claims whether or not they make any sense. For example:

1. MIS-CHARACTERIZATION OF EXISTING SPECIFIC PLAN AREAS IN VALLEY CENTER

Page I-10, Section H, 1st paragraph

ASSERTION: *"the Valley Center planning area has a number of existing specific plans ... containing large scale urban development"*. This is not true. Specific Plans in VC have a minimum of 40% open space and, with the exception of a section of Orchard Run, are built or clustered at Semi-Rural densities. The VC Community Plan lists the facts of these 7 Specific Plans:

1. Lilac Ranch: permanent open space preservation
2. Circle R Resort: recreational community on 361 acres. Density 1 du:2ac clustered.
3. Live Oak Ranch: 307 acres. 40% preserved in open space. Clustered 1du:1ac minimum lot size
4. Ridge Ranch I: 138 acres, 25 homes. 1 du: 5acres

5. Ridge Ranch II: 687 acres, 108 homes. 1du: 6 acres
6. Woods Valley: Village golf course community on 437 acres. 40% preserved in open space. Clustered 1du:min 1/2 acre
7. Orchard Run: Village core community on 118 acres. Minimum 40% open space. Density from 1.5 du:ac to 7.3du:ac

2. MIS-CHARACTERIZATION OF SURROUNDING RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Page I-10/11 2ND paragraph

The applicant claims that a Metroscan analysis “documents a robust diversity of parcel sizes” within a five mile radius of their site. This “study” misses the mark completely and comes to a preposterous conclusion that a drive through the area would reveal. The study overlooks hundreds of acres of open space that characterize the resort and recreational communities along Old 395. These are not spot-zoned urban enclaves as the applicant’s study mis-concludes, but are mainly recreational destinations that advertise their country settings, recreational amenities, wildlife and so forth.

1. Circle R Resort: recreational community on 361 acres. 118-acre golf course. Homes clustered. Underlying density 1 du: 2 acres.
2. Lawrence Welk Resort: vacation resort on 600-plus acres. 326 vacation villas. Two 18-hole golf courses, 8 swimming pools, 5 recreational areas, small retail area to serve vacationing guests.
3. Champagne Lakes RV Resort: RV vacation resort on 50 acres. RV campsites. The resort website says, “The resort is 50 acres of nature and wildlife preserve with 3 lakes that are fed by the local mountain streams. Wild ducks and geese have made these lakes their homes for over 40 years.”
4. Lake Rancho Viejo, which IS a Fallbrook CPA residential community on 469 acres, allows an overall density of 1.48 dus:ac. Flood plain and uplands are preserved open space.

3. MISCHARACTERIZATION OF THEIR OWN PROJECT

Assertions about their project are not supported and, in many cases, are contradicted by the applicant’s own plan. For example: The assertion that “natural landforms remain” is ludicrous when 4 MILLION cubic yards will be graded, and 20% of that blasted. (For comparison, 4,000,000 cubic yards of dirt is just shy of the amount of concrete in Hoover Dam, enough to build a 2 lane road from Seattle, Washington to Miami, Florida or a 4 ft. wide sidewalk around the Earth at the Equator.) Nothing could be less “natural” than grading and compacting 80% of the site, creating 20-30-foot cut/fill slopes (two and three stories high!) and lining streets with row upon row of identical symmetrical lots.

More than 80% of the site will be bulldozed, blasted, stripped of organic material, compacted and covered solidly by development; the narrow ribbons of biological open space (less than 20% of the property) that lace through the blasted, bulldozed “natural contours” will be massively impacted: 265 acres will be covered in home sites, 75 acres in “manufactured slopes”, 83 acres in asphalt, 40 acres in facilities, a mere 23 acres in parks (see #4).

This is a from-scratch city with MORE HOMES, PEOPLE AND CARS than the City of Del Mar on HALF THE LAND AREA. (City Data: Del Mar: 1.8 square miles, population 4224. The Accretive project: .95 square mile, population 5063.) The project is NOT in accord with the General Plan Community Development Model as the applicant claims. Quite to the contrary, the project defies the General Plan and corrodes its integrity. The applicants propose to explode a 608-acre city in the middle of the rural countryside without adequate feathering or buffering to soften impacts on neighboring farms, rural estates or even biologically sensitive creek beds.

The site is NOT COMPACT, as the applicant claims. It stretches two miles in each direction, with some 8 miles of edge effects. The project is NOT WALK-ABLE, the sprawling configuration of the Accretive site requires the design of three separate Town Centers to justify the contention that this is a pedestrian community; it is an automobile-dependant community. The project quite obviously does NOT meet the most basic location criteria for LEED Neighborhood Development. This is NOT an in-fill site with existing infrastructure; this is a rural site. Building 1746 homes here quite obviously does NOT reduce the need to build and operate new road networks, emergency and law enforcement facilities, libraries, schools, parks and other public services; it CREATES the need to build all of these on green fields that are many miles from jobs, transit, shopping, churches, movie theaters and other accoutrements to support a population of this size. The project does NOT reduce development impacts or reduce traffic trips; it creates devastating impacts and adds thousands of cars to rural roads. The site plan does NOT integrate development into the natural features of the property; it obliterates the natural features of the property. Moreover this project's edge effects will cause the destruction of about 2000 acres of rugged, remote and rural property where hundreds of families have invested in a rural quality of life.

Absolutely NOTHING of the natural site or the rural lifestyles of the people who live there will remain. The applicant needs to quit claiming otherwise. The project requires extremely significant amendments to the General Plan and to the Valley Center and Bonsall Community Plans because it completely overturns these public visions. Period.

4. PARK AREA FAILS TO MEET THE COUNTY STANDARD

The County standard for parks per 1000 residents is 10 acres of local parks, and 15 acres of regional parks. This project seems to provide 23 acres for 5063 people, less than half than the standard, and in an area where very dense development requires MORE parks, not less. Phase 1 of this project (350 houses/1000 people on 62 acres) requires 10 acres of parks, it has 3.2 acres; Phase 2 (466 houses/1351 people on 36.3 acres) requires about 15 acres of parks, it has 3 acres ... and so forth.

A point quite minor in the context of everything else: there are no proposed tree/plant species listed for "Parks" in either the Conceptual Landscape plan or the specific plan text, even though there are symbols and a proposed layout.

5. PREEMINENCE OF THE COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

The Specific Plan states on page II-2 that, in the case of conflicts or discrepancies between the Accretive project Specific Plan and the County's General Plan, the Valley Center and Bonsall Community Plans, and County development regulations and zoning standards, the Accretive Specific Plan will prevail. State law requires consistency across these documents, there should be no "conflicts or discrepancies". A Specific Plan is required by law to implement the General Plan and Community Plans, and cannot "prevail" over them. This language should be revised for its inconsistency with state law while the entire Specific Plan should be purged of marketing braggadocio and revised as a serious planning document to reflect its proper place in the hierarchy of legal planning documents.

6. AUTHORITY OF VALLEY CENTER DESIGN REVIEW

References to the "authority" of Valley Center Design Review are splayed through the Specific Plan, most prominently in Section III. We believe that this Village project is subject in its entirety to Valley Center Design Review and Valley Center's Design Guidelines based upon the information in the Introduction of the Guidelines themselves, the content of the booklet overall and the fact that the VC Design Review Board has reviewed every commercial, industrial and residential project that has been proposed for the North and South Villages. We have worked closely with developers of these areas for more than ten years. Although residential development on Semi-Rural and Rural parcels outside our "Country Town" (now

called "Village") area is NOT subject to Design Review, planned residential development proposed for our Village areas has always participated in design review in accord with our understanding that Village design is the intended focus of the County design review program.

The Specific Plan text also asserts or implies in several places in Section III that Valley Center's Design Guidelines will also be replaced by the applicant's Specific Plan. This applicant's Specific Plan requires considerably more attention to design, and more elaboration of standards for this particular project, for this Specific Plan to merit authority. The entire planning and design community recognizes the importance of forethought and thoughtful design to the functioning of even the tiniest place, let alone an entirely new city. Again, the content of this Specific Plan is severely inadequate to perform this responsibility.

Our previous comments still apply and are attached.

Respectfully,
Lael Montgomery
Robson Splane
Susan Moore
Jeff Herr
Keith Robertson

Valley Center Design Review Board

October 15, 2012

TO: Mark Slovick, Jarrett Ramaiya, Rich Grunow, Mark Wardlaw
San Diego Department of Planning & Development Services
RE: **Accretive Investment Group revised submission (09-25-12)**
GPA12-001, SP-001 Master Tentative Map 5571, Implementing Tentative Map 5572 and respective grading plans.

The Valley Center Design Review Board met on October 9, 2012 to again discuss Accretive Investment Group's proposal for the West Lilac triangle in light of September's revised submission. We were disappointed that neither the applicant nor the political consultant, Chris Brown, attended the meeting because the DRB Chair had expressly invited Chris Brown to present the revisions.

Comments Focus on Macro Planning Issues:

The revised submission fails to remedy the basic problems with the proposal which we addressed in our comments of June 14, 2012, which are attached below. Therefore, our comments continue to focus on macro development issues.

- 1) This is still an urban project in a rural area.
- 2) The proposal fails in the same basic and essential ways as the previous submission to respect Valley Center's rural character and its most fundamental design principles.
- 3) New sections describing lot, architectural and landscape design follow the same pattern.
For example:
 - a. "Conceptual Architectural Elevations" shown are generic in nature and have no relevance to the site, its surroundings or to the community in general. Pages 25-37 of the Valley Center Design

Guidelines specifically incorporate the design principles of Early California Architecture which reflect the character of the state's early missions and adobes. None of the proposed elevations reflect any of these design principles.

- b. Lot designs, also generic and out-of-context, ignore both spirit and letter of Valley's Center Guidelines and depict exactly the monotonous development that Valley Center wants to avoid.
 - c. Landscape design is uniform and urban; species selected are ill-advised in some cases for particular locations (eg. fruit trees for road edges and medians) and in other cases for Valley Center microclimates.
 - d. The proposal further ignores requirements for private open space in accordance with the County of San Diego Zoning Ordinance Section 4915: a minimum of 200 square feet per dwelling. Further, the design recommendations call for private open space on the ground to be a minimum of 10 feet in length and width and should be screened from public view by landscaping, a wall, privacy fence or other acceptable method. None of the proposed configurations meet this requirement.
- 4) The proposal provides no evidence that the project is necessary: the new County General Plan already accommodates more growth than SANDAG projects for 2030. There is no demonstrated need for increasing the capacity of the new GP by building a new city many miles from existing infrastructure and services. The proposal fails to justify a change of GP Regional Category from the largest SEMI RURAL parcels (SR-10 and SR-4) to VILLAGE densities as high as 27 dwellings per acre; a 1587% increase in dwelling units (from a total of 110 units allowed under the current GP to 1746).
- 5) The Master Planning approach avoids showing the locations and relationships of residential lots, interior streets and other elements of the site design. This also avoids revelation of site development issues that should deeply concern decision-makers as they consider such extreme and precedent-setting transformation of this rural property. Out-of-sight = out-of-mind looks to be an overall strategy for this application.
- 6) The Master Planning approach coupled with GP Policy LU-1.8 (which the applicant cites to argue that densities can be transferred across land use designation boundaries) make the entire proposal, first, too vague and, second, too mutable to take seriously. This application is a one-way street that asks unprecedented density increases for – what exactly? What IS specific about this Specific Plan?
- 7) The applicant's political consultant insists that "Master Planning happens all the time" and that this project is "the same as the 4-S Ranch project". However, fundamental differences are obvious: the 4-S Ranch project was CONSISTENT with General Plan Regional Categories, Goals and Policies, and Land Use, Mobility and Conservation Elements. 4-S Ranch was inside the existing Current Urban Development Area (CUDA). This urban project proposes -- for the sole benefit of a single private real estate speculator/developer -- profound revisions of County public planning policy as well as the complete transformation of the rugged and rural countryside.
- 8) **The proposal is riddled with Orwellian "doublethink"** and other convoluted logic. (Orwell defines "doublethink" as accepting two mutually contradictory ideas or beliefs at the same time). A few examples are:
- a. destroying agriculture conserves agriculture;
 - b. adding 1746 homes/ 5000 residents to back-country roads improves traffic;
 - c. "compact" urban development of this rural area allows for increased open space and natural habitat;
 - d. grading 4 million cubic yards of dirt respects natural landforms and preserves natural resources;
 - e. pronouncing the Accretive site a "Smart Location" under the LEED ND Certification Program when the project will actually *BUILD* the "Nearby Neighborhood Assets" that LEED ND certification requires as a pre-requisite. (By this logic LEED ND criteria can be manipulated to justify urban development of any Semi-Rural location.)
 - f. insisting that the Accretive GPA/SPA is in accord with the GP Community Development Model simply because their context-free development plan is a New Urbanist design. (Again, by this logic,

new cities can be plopped into any Semi-Rural or Rural area – NOT what most stakeholders believed was the intention of the new San Diego County General Plan.)

- g. *(And, incredibly for a GP Amendment that seeks to overturn the last 12 years of work on the parts of hundreds of planners, residents, and property owners to create the new San Diego County General Plan) ... calling on “General Plan Consistency” to declare that Valley Center and Bonsall Community Plans cannot be allowed to interfere with the applicant’s audacious ambitions to re-write them!*

9) **The proposal is also rife with errors, distortions and/or misrepresentations.**

A few examples are:

- a. Claiming that Lilac Ranch and Circle R both are consistent with the proposal’s Village densities. Both are, in fact, inconsistent. Lilac Ranch is permanent conservation land and Circle R is a CLUSTERED Semi-Rural project (underlying residential density is 1du:2 acres);
- b. Slopes mapped with 10-foot contours reveal significantly less coverage in 25% slopes than County standard contours;
- c. Claiming that the project site is ½ mile from the I-15 without citing that road construction along the route the crow flies is prohibited by a mountainous ridge;
- d. Touting “walkable” design when the project site jigs and jags across two square miles and requires three retail nodes in order to claim “walk-ability.” More than half the homes, including Senior and Assisted Living neighborhoods, are a mile and a half from the Village Core. This is an automobile-dependent community.
- e. Asserting “compact development” when edge-effects of this sprawling configuration impact adjacent rural properties for a distance of some 8 miles.
- f. Extolling “planning collaboration” with the Valley Center community. This is an overreach that abandons reality in order to invent points toward LEED ND certification. For several years the Accretive Investors have held, not community meetings by any stretch of the term, but closed “private” meetings with cherry-picked supporters. Meetings have pointedly excluded, sometimes disinvited, folks who have voiced opposition to the project, particularly those people who are most familiar with County planning history and the rationale underlying the new General and Community Plans.

Contained in the 82-pages of the Valley Center Design Guidelines are numerous diagrams and sketches, as well as lengthy descriptive copy that make all of these points, and others, quite clear. The Design Guidelines themselves are meant to work together to produce an integrated, whole objective. They cannot be cherry-picked and also produce their intent.

As in any “design”, success is a result of combining the right design elements in the right way – in the right place. This project appears off the mark on all counts.

Our comments dated June 14, 2012 continue to apply. Please refer to them, beginning on the next page.

The Valley Center Design Review Board
Lael Montgomery, Chair
Jeff Herr
Susan Moore
Keith Robertson
Robson Splane

Valley Center Design Review Board

June 14, 2012

TO: Mark Slovick, Rich Grunow, Jarrett Ramaiya, Jeff Murphy
San Diego Department of Planning and Development

RE: **Accretive Investment Group GPA 12-001, SP 12-001, Master Tentative Map 5571,
Implementing Tentative Map 5572 and respective Grading Plans**

1. Insufficient Detail

The applicant has submitted maps and documents that lack sufficient detail for the group to understand any the development plan for this property. Further, there has been no presentation of the project by the applicant; as a result the most basic facts of the development plan remain murky.

The applicant has filed this GPA/SPA much earlier in the project-development process than developers who have co-developed their plans through community meetings before filing a GPA or an SPA. Therefore, we are accustomed at the point of application to having much greater familiarity with a project, and to the provision in the application documents of considerably more detail.

Neither the DRB nor the Planning Group has worked with this applicant in the way we have worked with the developers of the North and South Village where the land uses proposed have been in accord with the community plan, which is not the case with this project. We received a copy of the Specific Plan Text on Tuesday 6/5/12. Chris Brown encouraged the group to take more time with our review and comments on the text. (He said he is requesting an additional 30-45 days from the County.) However, from a cursory reading, the SP Text fails to provide sufficient additional substantive information to warrant any delay.

Considerably more detail about the overall development plan is necessary. We understand from the County planner, Mark Slovick, and from the developer's consultant, Chris Brown, that there will be revised iterations of the project. More detailed comments will come in response to more detailed plans.

2. Focus of Comments.

Our comments at this time are focused in areas which are pre-requisite for any development proposal to meet Valley Center's community character objectives.

3. Project Undermines the Vision for VC.

DRB members believe that this project fails in basic and essential ways to respect Valley Center's rural character and its most fundamental design principles. If approved, this General Plan Amendment would upzone this property by about 2000% to allow 1746 dwellings and three commercial areas. The Regional Category would change to Village from its recently-approved GP Regional Category of Semi-Rural which allows approximately 350 homes on 2, 4 and 10 dwellings per acre.

The imposition of an artificial "village" in Valley Center's rural countryside dismantles the community's recently-approved Community plan. County planners along with Valley Center residents, property owners and developers have invested hundreds of hours, and extensive public and private resources to create the VC Community Plan, and to plan the private Village development to support it. This work was approved by the Board less than a year ago. VC's plan is a two-part growth strategy: first, 25% of the future growth is compact "infill" development of two existing Village "nodes" in the central valley along Valley Center Rd;

second, residential density feathers from the village core to Semi-Rural and Rural designations in remote, hilly, fire-prone areas to the east, north and west. These “green-field” areas, in accord with principles of the new General Plan, also “buffer” the community from adjacent communities. This is a classic “Smart Growth” plan, it concentrates intense development in the Village area which has evolved over the last 150 years as the business “crossroads” of Valley Center, as has been the formal intention since the first community plan of the 1960s, and it retains existing larger parcels for agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry that have historically characterized Valley Center.

This faux Village both undermines the plan to attract new businesses and residential vibrancy to existing genuine Village areas AND destroys greenfields, as well.

The following comments refer directly to particular VC Design Guidelines. We have not re-typed the Guidelines here. Please refer to the pages that are cited below.

4. P 3. The Purpose of Design Review

Comment: The proposed project fails to consider the community context in which it takes place, and fails to make an effort to develop a compatible relationship to the natural setting, neighboring properties and community design goals.

5. P4/10 Community Design Objectives

Comment: The proposal ignores the most fundamental of Valley Center’s Design Objectives, which is to PRESERVE NATURAL FEATURES and OPEN SPACES. For starters, the project will move 4.4 MILLION cubic yards of dirt on 608 acres. Do the math. There are 3,291,200 square yards in 608 acres. This means *the project will move more 1 ¼ cubic yard of dirt for every square yard of the property.* Natural land forms, vegetation and wildlife will all be obliterated.

This development plan completely disregards Valley Center’s “strong requirements for the protection of existing natural features (that are) provided in the Design Guidelines for new development” (among them) ‘special measures to preserve oaks and sycamore trees, significant resources that contribute to the character of the valley and the community.’ The applicant should address how grading, scraping and denuding what looks to be at least 80% of the site reconciles with being sensitive to the natural environment?

6. P16. Site Analysis

Comment: No site analysis has been submitted. The site design process should begin with a thorough analysis of the site.

7. P17. Site Design Concept

Comment: General Criteria 1 and 2: There is no evident effort for the project design to comply at all with these criteria. The project ignores the rural residential character of the area, and destroys all of its natural features. As for General Criteria 3 and 4, the application does not include enough detail to determine anything about the internal integrity of the project. We will say, however, the pre-requisite site location issues make internal design details quite irrelevant. All of its failures to comply with the community’s design objectives are rooted in this basic incompatibility of locating urban development in a rural area.

8. P18-22. Protection of Natural Features (to include Oaks and Sycamores)

The Guidelines state, “All development proposals shall demonstrate a diligent effort to retain existing natural features characteristic of the community’s landscape. Existing topography and land forms, drainage

courses, rock outcroppings, vegetation and views shall be recorded in the Site Analysis and incorporate, to the maximum extent feasible, into the future development of the land.” See pp. 18-19 items A-H, all numbers under each item, noting the general rule, the “hand of man” is to be felt lightly”, And pp. 20-22 about mature tree preservation and handling.

Comment: No effort evident. How much of the natural environment will be left... out of how much destroyed? How many trees? Rock outcroppings? Natural canyons? Hilltops? And so forth.

9. P26-35. Architectural Character and Compact Building Groups

Comment. Chapters 5 and 6 in Part III of VC’s Design Guidelines address the array of requisite site planning and architectural approaches, and the ways these elements of design must be combined in order to produce Village development that aligns with historic patterns. Based both on the Master and the Implementing Tentative Map and Grading Plans, the Accretive plan for Village housing shows hyper-conventional suburban sprawl, little rectangular lots lined up cheek-to-jowl like rows of teeth on both sides of every road, obscuring from view the very countryside the plan claims to celebrate.

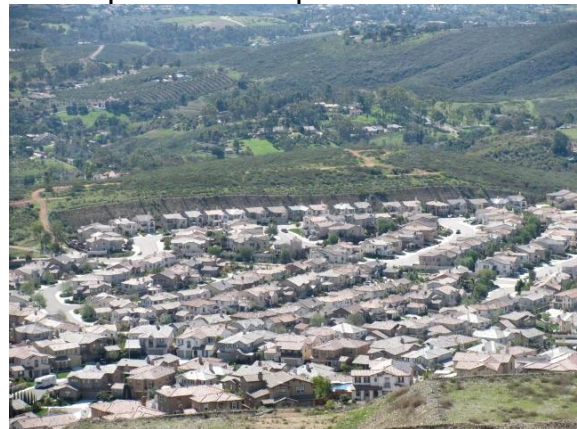
The Specific Plan Text for this project waxes rhapsodically about “Italian Hill Villages” that bear no resemblance to Accretive’s development plan for this property. Italian hill villages are characterized, first and foremost, by their location at authentic “crossroads” and their gradual development to meet the authentic needs of the surrounding authentic community; and are further characterized by their irregularity and by the charm of a built environment arranged around the natural environment. The Accretive project is a rote suburban tract overbuilt to urban densities, sprawled across remote, roadless greenfields.

Nothing but a complete revision of this plan would hope to achieve what the Guidelines or the Specific Plan Text for this project describes.

Italian hill villages are characterized by their locations at authentic well-travelled “cross-roads”, by the charms of irregularity and diversity, and by the arrangement of the built environment around the beauty of the natural landscape.



The Accretive plan imposes a monotonous sprawling geometric sameness on a contrived cut and filled landscape in a remote location. Below is a photograph of this developer’s San Elijo project that shows cuts in landscape similar to their plan for West Lilac.



10. P67. Hillside Development

Comment: The applicant’s development plan will destroy the natural topography in this area and “re-grade” the land. The applicant’s consultant asserts that that “contour grading” of home sites -- so that each little geometric rectangle is a few feet higher or lower than its immediate neighbor -- is the same as retaining the natural organic land forms. This is a ludicrous assertion that demonstrates the extreme extent to which this proposal contradicts the most basic concepts of rural design.

11. Landscape Concept

Susan Moore's Comments: The master TM lacks sufficient detail for a thorough review. However, from the documents that have been submitted, I can make the following comments. In my opinion, following the lot design as it does, the landscape plan is also an urban concept that needs to be completely re-done to be compatible with the property's rural surrounds. To create the "natural" character of Valley Center requires an organic, asymmetrical landscape design.

As for plant material, there are too few species; diversity (of trees, shrubs and ground covers) needs to be much greater. Several specified trees will not grow well in our zone generally and will definitely not succeed in Valley Center's colder micro-climates. Another is an allelopathic variety (suppresses growth of different plants other than itself due to release of toxic substances) tree listed for medians/entries where other plants are listed. Trees listed for the medians will not grow due to conditions that characterize road medians. "Grove" trees will not thrive in road median conditions and will be messy for automobiles and pedestrians. Fruit-producers are typically specified AWAY from streets and sidewalks where human activity is present.

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