

COMMENTS

RESPONSES

From: [Dan Silver](#)
To: [Ehsan, Beth](#)
Cc: [Loy, Maggie A](#); [Wardlaw, Mark](#); [Gretler, Darren M](#); [Spurgin, Andrew](#); [Elias, Alexandra](#); [Fogg, Mindy](#); [Farace, Joseph](#); [Citrano, Robert](#); [Bray, Kelly](#); [Lacey, Cara](#)
Subject: Valiano Specific Plan
Date: Wednesday, June 10, 2015 12:32:38 PM

June 10, 2015

Beth Ehsan
 Dept of Planning and Development Services
 5510 Overland Ave Suite 310
 San Diego, CA 92123

RE: Valiano Specific Plan and DEIR

Dear Ms Ehsan:

Endangered Habitats League (EHL) appreciates the opportunity to comment on this proposed project.

This proposed General Plan amendment in San Dieguito/Harmony Grove would change SR 1 and 2 to SR 0.5, resulting in a substantial increase in density. Via the adopted General Plan of 2011, this community accepted Harmony Grove Village as an urban/suburban node and anticipated certainty for continued rural uses elsewhere. *There is no demonstrable need for increased housing capacity beyond the robust population targets built into the 2011 Update.*

The proposed GPA would cause a large change to community character and aesthetics from existing conditions. While the document argues that such density would be located within reasonable proximity to urban centers and transit in San Marcos and Escondido, it is not within the accepted 1/4-mile walking distance. Development within municipal boundaries would be a superior way to meet locational tests for transit accessibility. And neither the County nor SANDAG has identified the Valiano site as a Smart Growth Opportunity Area. Thus, we do not find a compelling planning rationale for the proposed GPA.

EHL generally supports smaller lots as opposed to dispersed 1 and 2 and 4-acre estate lots. However, the use of smaller lots should be accompanied by significant preservation of intact natural or agricultural resources. That is not the case here, as compensatory benefits are paltry. Preserved agriculture is small compared to the development area and on the steepest slopes. The biological open spaces are small and isolated. As an alternative that should be considered, EHL recommends lot area averaging or use of the Conservation Subdivision *based on existing densities and unit yield*. This might allow 50% of the site to be preserved as agriculture or recovering natural habitat.

Finally, the County's LARA model for agriculture impacts remains a *wretched* tool. It is, frankly, an affront to San Diego's important agricultural resources. Here, only 13 acres of well over 100 acres of orchards and intensive agriculture were considered significant and worthy of mitigation. It is long past time to discontinue use of the LARA model as inappropriate to San Diego's local and unique farm values.

Thank you for considering our views, and if you might acknowledge receipt, that would be appreciated.

N-1a See Topical: General Plan Amendment and Subarea Boundary Adjustment CEQA Analysis and Responses G-6, I-7, and I-8 for the definition of urban versus rural and how the Project fits the area, and M-18 regarding the need for increased housing capacity.

N-1b The commenter states that the Project would impact community character and that the Project is not smart growth. See Responses G-6, I-3, I-7, and I-8, regarding community character.
 See Responses D-1, D-4a, and I-15 for an explanation of the Smart Growth aspects of the Project.

N-2a The comment states that the preservation of resources achieved by the Project does not justify the small lot sizes proposed. With respect to agriculture, the Project site includes approximately 137.2 acres of important agricultural resources, with approximately 13.1 acres of associated significant impacts identified pursuant to the County Agricultural Guidelines. The analysis in EIR Subchapter 2.3 also identifies associated mitigation requirements at a 1:1 ratio (per the County Guidelines), with acquisition/preservation of 13.1 acres of appropriate on- and/or off-site agricultural easements to be required as mitigation for Project development. In addition, while not proposed as mitigation, the Project includes a Design Feature to establish a 35.4-acre on-site agricultural easement that would maintain the availability and viability of this area for agricultural use. The proposed 35.4-acre agricultural easement includes areas recently used for commercial avocado production, and represents approximately 26 percent of the total on-site agricultural resources (35.4 out of 137.2 acres), and over 30 percent of the recently active on-site avocado orchards (35.4 out of 117 acres). It should also be

N-2a noted that, while the proposed 35.4-acre agricultural easement is located in areas of steep slopes as stated in this comment, virtually all of the 117 acres of recently active on-site agricultural operations encompass similar slopes (with these areas comprising over 85 percent of the identified on-site agricultural resources [i.e., 117 out of 137.2 acres]). Accordingly, the proposed 35.4-acre agricultural easement area is currently viable for agricultural use (i.e., based on recent operations), and would remain so under the proposed easement. Based on the described condition of on-site agricultural resources, the potential use of alternative design scenarios to preserve additional agricultural areas as suggested in this comment would involve primarily sites with steep slopes similar to the proposed 35.4-acre agricultural easement (see Responses K-20 and I-69a for additional information on agricultural resources, associated Project impacts, and the proposed 35.4-acre agricultural easement).

N-2b The commenter requests a clustered alternative or the use of lot area averaging based on existing densities and lot yield. One way to design the suggested alternative of using the Conservation Subdivision based on existing densities and unit yield would result in a tightly clustered development of approximately 137 units located mainly in the western portion of the Project site (in the areas Neighborhoods 2 and 4) since this portion of the Project site contains fewer sensitive biological resources and CDC candidate soils. This alternative would result in substantially more grading and blasting due to the larger development footprint on the steepest slopes; it would also result in a much larger undesirable impact to visual elements in the area. In addition, roadways and improvements would be required to access these more remote areas and those impacts to habitat would not be removed under this design. This alternative would result in fewer impacts to biological resources; however, the Project site does not include habitat areas designated as proposed Pre-Approved Mitigation Areas (PAMAs) in the draft NCMSCP and as such, the Project site is not considered a priority area for conservation under the draft MSCP.

Given the remoteness of the homes under this plan, from the primary access along Eden Valley Lane, fire access would be difficult as well as sewer and water service extension difficulty. This design would also increase the fire risk to the residents by leaving large unmaintained areas of very combustible native vegetation between the new homes and the existing homes. See Responses K-24 and N-2a for agricultural resources.

Overall, this proposed alternative would not meet the Project objectives in that it would not be designed to respond to the unique existing natural topography of the Project site since the flatter portion of the site would not be utilized in order to avoid impacts to biological and agricultural resources. It would not be possible to provide a variety of lot sizes since the development would be tightly clustered in the steeper portion of the site. Large flat areas would need to be cut into the hillside to create

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N-2b
cont.

developable pads for clustering of the homes resulting in a substantially greater negative impact to visual features in the surrounding area.

A second way to design a clustered project based on the existing General Plan yield of 137 homes would be to retain Neighborhood 1 as designed (96 lots), reduce the lot yield in Neighborhood 5 to 41 lots, and eliminate Neighborhoods 2, 3 and 4 except for a road connection through Neighborhood 3. This would result in a tightly clustered project with reduced road improvements and grading; however, there would still be significant biology impacts because Neighborhoods 1 and 5, which would be impacted, contain more sensitive habitat than Neighborhoods 2 and 4, which would be avoided. This scenario would also still result in significant agricultural impacts, as substantial areas of agricultural resources and CDC candidate soils are present in Neighborhood 5, and over 88 percent of the significant agricultural impacts identified for the Proposed Project occur in this area (i.e., 11.6 out of 13.1 acres). In addition, focusing density on the east side of the Project site retains the proposed smaller lots in close proximity to existing neighbors, making the transition in lot sizes more abrupt than if the homes were clustered onto the western hillsides. The lot sizes are also much smaller than the lot sizes in the current General Plan Density alternative. For this reason it is expected that the surrounding neighbors would prefer the current General Plan Density alternative.

Finally, for any alternative with a reduced number of homes, the required acreage of community parks would be reduced. It would not embrace the equestrian nature of the surrounding area since none of the lots would have the space to accommodate animal enclosures. In addition, the Project has been modified in the EIR in response to comments to have fewer impacts to habitat by deleting a major roadway as well as elimination of lots within some of the sensitive habitat areas. For these reasons, this alternative is not included for further consideration.

N-3

Comments on the LARA Model are noted. This model, and the associated Agricultural Guidelines, however, represent the adopted and required methodology for evaluating agricultural resources and impacts in the County. Accordingly, the described conclusion of approximately 13.1 acres of Project-related impacts to important agricultural resources requiring mitigation is accurate under the LARA Model and County Agricultural Guidelines.

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Yours truly,
Dan Silver

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