

Winter Faith Collaborative
484 E. San Fernando Street
San Jose, CA 95112

MARCH 20, 2018

Harry Freitas, Director of County Roads and Airports
2500 Cunningham Avenue
San Jose, CA 95148

County Airports Study / Reid-Hillview Business Plan

Dear Director Freitas,

We are submitting this letter in comment to your request for feedback on County of Santa Clara Airport Study and Reid-Hillview Business Plan Recommendations and Reports.

We are a network of faith communities committed to providing shelter and services to and advocating for the unhoused population in Santa Clara County. Several members of our network attended your presentation on March 1st regarding the upcoming Business Plan.

It is our view that the short-term plan should include capital improvements limited only to those urgent needs to maintain safety and comfort for businesses and users of the airport. A long-term plan should include the re-purposing of the Reid-Hillview 180-acre property for housing for longtime residents and families who are facing displacement in San Jose. Because of the jobs-housing imbalance many families are being forced out of the area due to high rents and the shortage of housing for those in almost all income levels.

The California Legislature recently passed AB 932, which allows the County to declare a sheltering emergency and move quickly to house individuals and families who are unhoused on county-owned land and avoid the typical land use restrictions and approval processes. *Under this law, during a crisis, the county has the following requirement:* “(a) (4) On or before July 1, 2019, the city, county, or city and county shall develop a plan to address the shelter crisis, including, but not limited to, the development of homeless shelters and permanent supportive housing, as well as onsite supportive services. The county shall make the plan publicly available”

Recently, the County Board of Supervisors unanimously declared just such a shelter crisis and directed staff to initiate both emergency shelter planning process and search for appropriate county sites to establish additional housing immediately, under the provisions of AB 932. The Reid Hillview site should be part of the inventory of real property owned by the county to be considered for both emergency sheltering and long term affordable housing.

I, along with other of our members, attended at the meeting you held on March 1st at Meyer Elementary School regarding development of an updated Reid-Hillview Airport Business Plan.

It seemed clear that the majority of the neighbors, as well as other San Jose residents who spoke, were in favor of asking the Board to strongly consider use of the property for housing.

Our group of communities works collectively, based on the commitment to house our neighbors who live outside, to advocate for better overall housing solutions. We have experienced an increase in the numbers who have shown up at our doors seeking housing help over the last 3 years, many of them working individuals with families. Because of this, we recognize that the housing crisis is real and creates great harm not only the health and welfare of unhoused people but also to the whole community. Medical studies have shown that living outdoors has shortened the average life span by 25 years - a number that currently stands at 54 years old.

Beyond this, the housing shortage in our County restricts local economic development, job opportunities and business growth. Many families are leaving our valley for more affordable areas, resulting in splitting up families generationally, breaking down family stability and with this, community stability and cohesiveness. This is not to mention the loss of a trained and valuable labor force needed to maintain economic health and vitality.

We urge the County to prepare plans for Reid-Hillview Airport to wind down the use of these 180 acres as an airport and convert it to provide adequate affordable housing for current residents of this neighborhood and the entire east/south regions of San Jose.

Because the County Board of Supervisors has taken great steps to pass Measure A affordable housing funding and to declare a homeless shelter crisis, it must take the next relevant step: To identify the Reid-Hillview site along other county underused land holdings to address the urgent need for housing.

We urge that you include in your plan a provision to wind down the use of the airport, resolve any financial encumbrances and to find ways to end the relationship with the FAA, all within the short-term business plan that you are preparing.

We appreciate your hosting the March 1st community meeting and your request for public input. We are grateful for your ongoing efforts. Winter Faith Collaborative is committed to informing our member communities about this issue and to stay engaged with your process. Our hope to help the County meet its overall goals and responsibility to keep all residents to the community safe and healthy. Please let me know how we can support this important effort going forward.

Feel free to contact me to discuss these issues and recommendations at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Phil Mastrocola
Winter Faith Collaborative
Pamastrocola@aol.com
408-839-9815