

Chair Lorie Zapf and Committee Members
Smart Growth & Land Use Committee
202 C Street, Floor 12
San Diego, CA 92101

October 4, 2016

RE: City Poised to Break Promise to San Diego Families and Not Meet Climate Plan Goals

Dear Chair Zapf and Committee Members,

Less than one year ago on December 15, 2015, we proudly stood with our Mayor, City Council, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown San Diego Partnership, CleanTECH San Diego, labor, environmental, equity and community-based organizations to celebrate the unanimous and bipartisan vote by the San Diego City Council to adopt our groundbreaking Climate Action Plan (CAP).

We received acclaim from across the country and the world for being the largest city in the United States to legally bind ourselves to slashing our carbon footprint in half by 2035 by committing to a future with 100% clean electricity, zero waste and at least 30% of our families biking, walking or taking public transit to work. Our shared decision to be at the vanguard and define new climate-friendly urbanism generated a lot of hope and excitement in cities nationally and worldwide.

With all eyes on our City, the first big test of our commitment to implementing the plan comes to us in the form of our community plan updates -- the long-term roadmaps for growth, development and mobility in our many diverse urban neighborhoods. We cannot reach the 2035 climate targets without creating compact, mixed use and transit-rich neighborhoods close to where families work.

As you know, four community plans are coming to a vote this fall, including North Park, Uptown and Greater Golden Hill. Communities surrounding downtown and jobs are the most appropriate places to begin building these more compact neighborhoods where folks would have real options to go to work and access services without a car.

After months of calling for an analysis of how well these three draft community plan updates implement the CAP and achieve its goals, the city finally did conduct and reveal its analysis. Unfortunately, none of these three draft urban community plan updates conform to the CAP nor meet the minimum thresholds set for shifting commutes to biking, walking and transit.

North Park and Uptown stand at 58% of residents still driving to work in 2035, and in Greater Golden Hill almost 64% of residents will still rely on single car use for their commutes. The Climate Action Plan calls for 50% of families living in transit priority areas using bike/walk/transit to work.

If our most urban core neighborhoods adjacent to downtown are not planned to meet the CAP goals, which communities in the City will meet them? The City will not tell us. The City's response thus far is to say that they have plans to increase those biking/walking and transit numbers, though those measures are not identified or quantified in the Community Plan updates

nor in the environmental review document. Or, alternatively, they say they will go back and redo the Community Plan updates at some unknown date, though the City does not have the resources or capacity to do that and homebuilders won't wait. They also suggest – probably the most far-fetched response – that other measures outside of transportation and land use will make up for the missed opportunities to slash greenhouse-gas emissions. Given that the universe of options to hit the required targets is limited and we are already planning on 100% clean energy and zero waste, all of the city responses fall short.

The better option, and in our opinion the only option, is to do these Community Plan updates right in the first place and connect them more holistically to our regional and local transportation planning efforts. Rather than suggest it is okay for the City to miss the targets in these key urban core neighborhoods, let's take a deep breath, slow down and identify solutions for these urban neighborhoods while we are planning for them for the next 30 years. Let's put this mode-share shift in the Environmental Impact Report, identify the impacts and mitigate for them.

In the end, we ask what is the rush to adopt decades-long growth plans that don't serve our communities' needs, and lock in counterproductive decisions for decades that will prevent us from meeting our commitments to our kids and their future? We know that retrofitting our older neighborhoods is no easy task and that there are many special interests who want to fight for the status quo, but the Mayor and Council passed the CAP knowing they would have to do things differently – and knowing that the task will only get harder and more costly the longer we wait to begin.

The climate crisis isn't interested in what is politically expedient –the only thing that will stop it is to quit burning polluting fuels. Changing how we grow and move people around our city is at the heart of that solution. The city made a legal commitment to reach these GHG reductions – which are consistent with the state of California's legislative goals.

The nation is watching to see if we keep faith with our promise to the families and children in San Diego and implement the goals and strategies of this plan. Together, we can transform our older urban neighborhoods into thriving, revitalized places where people can live, work and shop closer to home. We stand here ready to work with you to do the right thing and protect our kids future.

Sincerely,

Nicole Capretz
Executive Director
Climate Action Campaign



Sara S. Kent
Programs Director
Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation



Bruce Bekkar, MD

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Climate Reality Leadership Corps, Doctors for
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