Coyote Valley Specific Plan Task Force

January 9, 2006

Task Force Members,

As discussed in the staff memo there is strong precedent for mitigation of the conversion of agricultural land in Northern California. The examples of Davis and Fairfield demonstrate an exemplary commitment through the creation of an in-lieu fee structure generating funds for the purchase of easements and fee-title to alternative land. Given the high value of land in Santa Clara County these two cases are instructive, but should be considered a starting point for a discussion of what an appropriate fee structure would entail for Coyote Valley.

The Sierra Club would like to make the following comments regarding policy for addressing the significant loss of farmland that will occur with the development of Coyote Valley.

- We support at least a 1 acre :1 acre mitigation of all farmland converted to non-agricultural, development purposes.
- We believe that all farmland lost to all forms of development – from residential to industrial and commercial -– should be included in the acreage identified for mitigation. We do support a distribution of burden among types of residential properties such that affordable housing is responsible for little or no cost of mitigation.
- We recognize that it is not possible, given the scope of farmland conversion throughout the state of California, to fully mitigate the significant impact that the loss of farmland in Coyote Valley represents. However, we do insist that mitigation, in addition to a financing and management plan, should be included in the specific plan.
- CEQA requires that if feasible mitigation is available it must be pursued. As demonstrated by the review of agricultural mitigation programs in other communities there are a number of feasible strategies the City can pursue.
- We believe that is it unreasonable to pursue a "multiple mitigation" approach to agricultural mitigation. Farmland is not the same as open space, wildlife habitat or riparian habitat. There are exceptions, but they are rare and specific.
- The use of the proposed LESA model should not be undertaken in such a way that undermines the reality of the loss of prime soils in Coyote Valley, which is significant regardless of the reason. Conversion of Coyote Valley to development is not necessary for San Jose to accommodate anticipated growth. There are adequate infill opportunities within urbanized San Jose that should be developed before Coyote Valley.

Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter 3921 E. Bayshore Rd. Ste 204, Palo Alto CA 94303