



September 24, 2014

Mr. Bill Shoe
Principal Planner/Project Manager
County of Santa Clara
Planning Office
70 West Heading Street
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Public Review Draft of the County of Santa Clara General Plan Health Element (August 2014)

Dear Mr. Shoe,

On behalf of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District), I would like to submit the following comments regarding the Public Review Draft of the Health Element of the County of Santa Clara General Plan.

The District owns and manages approximately 62,000 acres of open space land on the San Francisco Bay Peninsula. The District's mission is:

To acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity; protect and restore the natural environment; and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.

On January 29, 2014, the Board of Directors adopted a 40-year Vision Plan that has identified 54 future projects ranging from opening preserves and building trail connections to improving water quality, protecting the coastline, restoring forestlands, and creating wildlife corridors in an increasingly urbanized region. The implementation of the Vision Plan will be consistent with a number of strategies and policies within the Recreation and Physical Activity chapter. With this in mind, the District continues to promote collaboration with the County and other local and regional agencies in the acquisition of new open space and public access easements, as well as supporting County efforts to create a completely connected network of trails, parks, and open space throughout Santa Clara County.

Given this mission, basic policies of the District and the Board-adopted Vision Plan 2014, the District submits these overall comments related to specific sections, strategies and policies in the Draft Health Element. The District would like to highlight draft strategies that would be consistent with the District's Vision Plan.

As prioritized in the Board-adopted Vision Plan, the District will continue to provide public access to regional open space preserves and trail networks that are vital to improving individual and community health, and the District strives to actively engage with the local communities to ensure District services help in improving local community health.

B. Social and Emotional Health

Strategy #1 and Policy HE-B.5 in the Social and Emotional Health chapter of the Draft Health Element would be consistent with the District's Vision Plan. The District continues to provide access to regional open space preserves and trail networks, which offer vital escape and respite from the stresses of everyday life, and encourages local communities to utilize the public open space lands in order to develop a better work/life/play balance.

Strategy 1: Foster community-wide, family social and emotional health across the lifespan for all residents, including specific efforts to eliminate stigma that negatively impacts people faced with mental health and substance use challenges.

HE-B.5 Work/life/play balance. Promote the importance of balance and combat work/life imbalances that contribute greatly to a culture of high stress in the "Silicon Valley" greater metropolitan area. Explore and encourage with business groups, trade organizations, and similar groups the fullest possible array of options to reduce chronic, damaging stress levels from work demands, commute, and other employment related stressors.

C. Land Use and Urban Design

The following strategies and policies set forth in the Land Use and Urban Design chapter of the Draft Health Element would be consistent with the District's Mission, Vision Plan, and policies. Specifically, Strategy #1 and Policies HE-C.3 and HE-C.6 have the potential to directly affect the District. The District has been collaborating with the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and regional partners on the Priority Conservation Area (PCA) program which is intended to protect the regional open space areas.

Strategy #1: Maintain urban growth and development policies that accommodate future urban development appropriately within existing cities.

HE-C.3 Focused development. Focus the majority of new higher density development in Santa Clara County in "Priority Development Areas" (PDAs), consistent with city and regional plans to complement and provide for sustainable growth, greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, and coordinated transportation investment.

HE-C.6 Open space preservation. Preserve rural open space and natural areas and focus urban uses and development away from these areas to protect natural resources, agricultural lands, animal habitat, forested lands, and water supply resources.

With this in mind, the District encourages the County to review ABAG maps and plans that delineate Priority Conservation Areas within Santa Clara County in developing future land use plans and evaluating proposed development areas. Focusing development outside of Priority Conservation Areas will be important in preserving and protecting vital regional and local open space areas, critical wildlife linkages, agricultural lands, natural landscapes and regional recreation opportunities, to be consistent with the draft strategies and policies of the Land Use and Urban Design of the Health Element.

D. Active and Sustainable Transportation

Strategy 2 and Policies HE-D.8 and HE-D.14, would promote the development of new bicycle trails that would connect to existing regional bicycle path and trail networks that are offered within the District preserves. The District encourages the collaboration and partnership of local and regional agencies when analyzing existing trail networks, and planning for new and infill trail developments. Additionally, the District encourages Santa Clara County to communicate and collaborate with local, regional, and state agencies to develop a comprehensive and consistent signage program that may be implemented across multiple platforms throughout local and regional landholdings containing publicly accessible bicycle paths and trails.

Strategy #2: Develop a robust pedestrian and bicycle network that enables active transportation for both recreation and transportation.

HE-D.8 Bicycle network. Create a more robust network of bicycle facilities of multiple types that facilitates bicycling for commuting, school, shopping, and recreational trips by riders of all ages and levels of experience.

HE-D.14 Way-finding signage and information. Promote a comprehensive countywide, consistent bicycle and pedestrian wayfinding signage and information system for the most-used trails, paths, and bike corridors connecting major destinations.

E. Recreation and Physical Activity

Many strategies and policies set forth in the Recreation and Physical Activity chapter of the Draft Health Element would be consistent with the District's Vision Plan.

Strategy #1: Create opportunities for physical activity, recreation, and relaxation.

Strategy #2: Improve the usability/connectivity, aesthetics, and safety of existing parks, trails, and open space.

Strategy #3: Enhance programs in cities, school districts, other agencies, and workplaces that promote physical activity and wellness at all ages.

HE-E.4 Public easements. Coordinate with public entities to construct new parks and open space on easements and public property to be used as parks and trails.

HE-E.11 Smoke-free parks. Encourage and support local jurisdictions in establishing and enforcing smoke-free parks and recreational areas.

HE-E.12 Trails and parks network. Support County efforts to create a completely connected network of trails and parks throughout unincorporated and incorporated areas of the County that link to housing, work, commercial centers, public transit, and community facilities. Partner with cities and other organizations to complete a gap analysis of current trail system, and needed improvements to connect trails in cities and in unincorporated areas.

HE-E.17 Public information to diverse populations. Promote informational access to programs and activities in a culturally sensitive manner to the diverse populations.

F. Healthy Eating, Food Access, and Sustainable Food Systems

Strategy #1 and Policy HE-F.2 related to the preservation of agricultural lands and preserves within Santa Clara County are consistent with the District's Mission and Vision Plan. The District encourages the County to collaborate with local ranch and agriculture land holders, as well as local and regional park and open space authorities to preserving agricultural lands.

Strategy #1: Preserve and enhance local agriculture and agricultural lands as part of the local/regional food system.

HE-F.2 Agricultural land preservation. Preserve agricultural and open space land by maintaining and implementing growth management policies that limit development outside urban areas and support farming and ranching.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed Health Element for the County General Plan. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (650) 691-1200, or e-mail me at jane.mark@prk.sccgov.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane Mark", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jane F. Mark, AICP
Planning Manager
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

cc: MROSD Board of Directors