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From:

Date: Tue, Mar 16, 2021 at 1:20 PM

Subject: Comments on Item 5.1: R3 (Multiple-Family Residential) Zoning District Update

To:

Honorable Chair Bill Cranston, Vice Chair Kammy Lo, and Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on item 5.1 “R3 (Multiple-Family Residential) Zoning District Update”

I am generally supportive of the goal of providing multiple R3 zones to better align with Mountain View’s housing production goals.

However, I do have some concerns about these specific aspects of the staff proposal:

1. **Timing:** This is a widespread re-zoning that is being proposed while we are during the COVID-19 crisis. In response to the crisis, many people in the tech field are doing their work remotely, and many will continue to so after the crisis is past. Former Bay Area co-workers of mine have relocated to Hollister, Dublin, Folsom, and even Siberia. Rents on luxury apartments in Mountain View have dropped about 50%. The vacancy rate on apartments in general in Mountain View is about 10%, which is twice what most consider a healthy level. Many companies in the Bay Area have made the commitment to allow their employees to work remotely indefinitely if they so choose. This “sea change” in the way tech work is being done raises the issue of whether this is the right time to decide whether pursuing an even more aggressive housing policy in Mountain View is either necessary or wise.
2. **Impact on naturally affordable housing:** Most of the R3 areas that are being rezoned are now occupied by naturally affordable housing. SB-330 was passed to protect that housing but will sunset in 2025. At that time, the state will review the legislation with the benefit of knowing how COVID-19 has changed the Bay Area economy and may make changes in it or choose not to renew it. The zoning changes being proposed would be adopted immediately on passage of the ordinance change. Current California law makes it impossible to reverse them if they prove to be the wrong choice. By moving ahead with this ordinance change this way, we could damage our naturally affordable housing stock without any feasible remedy.
3. **Setbacks:** Setbacks proposed in the staff report are very aggressive. When as an EPC member, and we reviewed P-zone proposals in the area which would later become the El Camino Precise Plan, we provided that a P-zone proposal lie within the envelope of a 45 degree angle starting at the rear property line. In contrast, the proposed R3-A setbacks are only 10 feet. For my immediate neighbors and I, who have backyards extending only 20 feet from our homes, this would mean the total elimination of daylight in those backyards. For this reason, I consider this an inadequate setback.

As an alternative to the immediate re-zoning of the indicated properties, I recommend adopting provisional re-zoning of them. The provisional re-zoning would be recorded, and if some developer wanted to redevelop the property, they would have the provisional zoning as a guideline for a proposal. If at the time of the development proposal council felt the re-zoning was appropriate for the project, council could grant the zoning change at that time.

I also recommend adopting the 45-degree angle rule when setbacks are considered. Developers would need to respect it and any absolute setbacks in the proposed zoning for a site.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about what I have written and thank you for your consideration of my views.