

# Letter from equity and inclusion leaders re Coyote Valley

Megan Fluke <megan@greenfoothills.org>

Tue 10/27/2020 2:34 PM

To: GeneralPlanStaff <GeneralPlanStaff@sanjoseca.gov>

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📎 1 attachments (193 KB)

General Plan - Coyote Valley Oct 2020 - Equity and Inclusion.pdf;

[External Email]

Dear General Plan Task Force Co-chairs, Task Force Members, and City staff,

Attached is a letter from 27 local community leaders working to confront and address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and liberation in San Jose and throughout the Bay Area region. Please post to the public record and disseminate to the General Plan Task Force Co-chairs, Task Force Members, and City staff in anticipation of the Coyote Valley discussion this Thursday.

Thank you,  
Megan



**Megan Fluke (Pronouns: She/Her/Hers)**

Executive Director

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October 27, 2020

2040 General Plan Four-Year Review Task Force  
City of San Jose

**Re: Equity and Inclusion - Coyote Valley**

Dear General Plan Task Force Co-chairs, Task Force Members, and City staff,

We are 27 local community leaders working to confront and address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and liberation in San Jose and throughout the Bay Area region.

The health of people and our communities is inextricably tied to caring for our remaining working lands and wild places. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, low-income communities, and people with disabilities bear the brunt of climate crisis impacts. We have very little time to make big changes and over the next decade we need to build resilience into the physical environment of our communities. Protecting and restoring at-risk open space and shifting to entirely infill development is an important way to do this.

We support staff's recommendation for Coyote Valley. The highest and best use for Coyote Valley is as open space and agriculture. We ask that the San Jose General Plan Review Task Force members consider the following as they weigh recommendations from City staff.

**One of the first steps toward race equity is to acknowledge that unless we are descendants of the local Native American tribe, we reside on unceded land.** The United States began with the conquest and genocide of Indigenous People. In the San Jose region, we reside on the sacred land of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area. For thousands of years, ancestors of the Muwekma Tribe stewarded the Coyote Valley region. Native American people have an inherent stake in any environmental issue in their traditional territory and are uniquely impacted by environmental degradation. The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area and the Amah Mutsun Tribe are both members of the Protect Coyote Valley coalition and support the permanent protection of Coyote Valley. Their ancestors understood that if we do not take care of the environment, then we face extinction as a people because we have a codependent relationship with land, wildlife, plants, and the Earth itself.

**Affordable infill development within the current development footprint of the city is a more efficient use of resources.** Prioritizing the health and resilience of our community means making open space investments paired with affordable housing policies and strategies. The City should prioritize resources to develop infill housing. Developing in the Wildland Urban Interface and in rural areas that are prone to fires and floods will only further

deplete public resources that can be better spent in other parts of the city. Sprawl inequitably spreads city resources that could be better used on city services such as libraries, parks, affordable housing, and other community services. Infill is more cost-effective for cities and counties, since the infrastructure is already established.

**Building infill is better for the local economy and local workers** since this type of construction creates better-paying jobs for construction workers. The wage difference between infill and urban sprawl housing building projects is at least 60% and workers who build in downtown cores bring more money home to their families.

**Low-income residents stand to gain the most from climate action.** Extreme weather events have outsized and long-term impacts on vulnerable communities because they are much less able to recover from the destruction of property and the costs of relocation. There are residents along the Coyote Creek watershed who still have not recovered from the impacts of the 2017 flood in San Jose. The flood, which occurred on Feb. 21, 2017, following heavy storms, caused an estimated \$100 million in damage and forced the emergency evacuation of 14,000 residents of neighborhoods in and around downtown San Jose.

Since Coyote Valley filters residents' drinking water and air and limits the urban heat island effect, its protection is an act of environmental justice. A protected and restored Coyote Valley serves as San Jose's green infrastructure and helps to protect residents downstream from flooding. A developed Coyote Valley would have the opposite effect, increasing flood risk, reducing air quality, putting our water quality at risk, reducing a local water source, and increasing emissions and temperatures.

Furthermore, according to a recent study, *The Benefits of Saving San Jose's Coyote Valley: A Case Study in Climate Action Planning*, concentrating infill development in downtown San Jose instead of in Coyote Valley would reduce passenger vehicle greenhouse gas emissions by at least 14,000 metric tons per year. It would also double the percentage of residents (from 1.7% to 3.4%) who can access a quarter of San Jose's jobs within 30 minutes via public transit.

**Food security is a real issue for San Jose residents and protecting local farmland is a part of the solution.** One in four people in Silicon Valley are at risk of hunger. A new Second Harvest study suggests that 26.8% of the population – almost 720,000 people – qualify as “food insecure.” In the face of the climate crisis, access to locally-grown food matters now more than ever. Coyote Valley is prime farmland and can provide San Jose residents with local, fresh produce. The 7,400 acres of agricultural land could eventually generate \$35 million per year and benefit San Jose by providing access to fresh, sustainable produce. Furthermore, Coyote Valley is one of the last remaining locations in San Jose that is large enough to implement a local regenerative agriculture effort which

would include farming and grazing practices that, among other benefits, can help San Jose reach its climate goals by rebuilding soil organic matter – resulting in both carbon drawdown and improving the water cycle. Regenerative agriculture practices have roots in historic Indigenous knowledge of how to work with the land.

**Investment in open space is particularly critical** for people who are negatively impacted by economic disadvantage, systemic racism, trauma, opportunity gaps, and other challenges. Experiences in nature can help ameliorate high blood pressure, anxiety, sleeplessness and other harmful health conditions associated with environmental racism and the stressors that disproportionately affect communities of color and low income. Preserving ample open space is critical for providing city dwellers with a safe opportunity to exercise while social distancing.

Thank you very much for your consideration and all that you do to confront and address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and liberation in San Jose and throughout the Bay Area region.

Sincerely,

**Chairwoman Charlene Nijmeh**  
Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area

**Blanca Alvarado**  
Former Santa Clara County Supervisor

**Tamara Alvarado**  
Shortino Family Foundation Executive Director and Capulli Tonalehqueh Fire Keeper

**Milan R. Balinton**  
African American Community Service Agency Executive Director

**Leslye Corsiglia**  
SV@Home Executive Director

**Megan Fluke**  
Green Foothills Executive Director

**Chairman Valentin Lopez**  
Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

**Josué García**  
Saiasi Group CEO

**Veronica Goei**  
Grail Family Services Executive Director

**Darcie Green**  
Latinas Contra Cancer Executive Director

**Anjee Helstrup-Alvarez**  
MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana Executive Director

**Cayce Hill**  
Veggielution Executive Director

**Gregory R. Kepferle**  
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara  
County CEO

**Deb Kramer**  
Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful  
Executive Director

**Susan Butler-Graham**  
Mothers Out Front Silicon Valley  
Team Member

**Sibella Krause**  
Sustainable Agriculture Education  
(SAGE) Executive Director

**Michele Lew**  
The Health Trust CEO

**Camille Llanes-Fontanilla**  
SOMOS Mayfair Executive Director

**Dennis Lozano**  
Anti-racist San Jose Moderator

**Maritza Maldonado**  
Amigos de Guadalupe Center for  
Justice and Empowerment Executive  
Director

**Tom Myers**  
Community Services Agency  
Executive Director

**Jessica Paz Cedillos**  
School of Arts and Culture at the  
Mexican Heritage Plaza Executive  
Director

**Esther Peralez-Dieckmann**  
Next Door Solutions Executive  
Director

**James Reber**  
San Jose Parks Foundation Executive  
Director

**Jason Su**  
Guadalupe River Park Conservancy  
Executive Director

**Richard Tejada**  
Saved By Nature Founder/Executive  
Director

**Justin Wang**  
Greenbelt Alliance Advocacy Manager