

April 21, 2020

Re: Item 7a Plan Bay Area 2050 Projections and 12a Proposed ABAG MTC Committee Work Integration

Dear ABAG Executive Board,

I am the Vice Mayor if the City of Lafayette but am responding as a private resident.

Item 7a: Plan Bay Area 2050 Projections

Simply put, the Projections for jobs in PBA 2050 are erroneous. These projections are **higher** than the Department of Finance’s projections for the region, which were done **before the pandemic and shelter-in-place orders**. Not a single person, professional or not, is projecting substantial job growth in the near-term for our region. We will be lucky if we get anywhere close to where we were before the pandemic as we know our retail sector will likely collapse. And our hotel and restaurant industries will have a very slow comeback as well. **Approving this plan now without a proper way to update these projections in a year or longer is ludicrous and is a dereliction of duty.**

The process moves forward by first approving the Plan Bay Area 2050 now, then create the RHNA Draft and Final Methodology, and in 2021 create the Final Plan Document, Final EIR, and hear the RHNA Appeals. It finishes with the final RHNA numbers for our next cycle starting in 2024. These numbers are all driven by the jobs forecasting and the need to build housing for workers. This Plan Bay Area 2050 was created as if our economy was going to continue to grow. We are facing an unprecedented disruption of our lives and our economy – we must respond to this as well as we possibly can.

What do I suggest? The only way that you can pass this PBA 2050 is to pass it with an order to also update the projections next year and possibly the year following when the forecasting will be far better than now. By then the Department of Finance may have better projections as well for our region.

Why do I care? MTC staff says that the 2050 projections are still on target so we will be back to massive job growth by then. However, the RHNA numbers for this next session need to be based on realistic job projections for the next 5 years, not the next 30 years! There is a normal 4-year update, so our numbers need to be based on the near-term, not the long-term projections. If jobs do make a comeback, we can update at the 4-year interval.

By basing this next cycle of RHNA allotments based on pre-pandemic job growth is setting up every city in your region to fail and fail miserably. Since SB35 and SB330 established monetary fines on our cities for non-compliance based our RHNA numbers, it’s in everyone’s best interest to partner together during these unprecedented times and come up with better solutions than to just make up absurd allocations when there is no indication that we will have massive job growth in the near-term. And the fact that the inputs, assumptions and data used in the projections is not being openly distributed adds to mistrust in the projections. We are a public entity and every part of this process needs to be transparent and shown to local leaders as well as to the public. And now more than ever these assumptions need to be re-evaluated due to the massive downturn in our economy.

XXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXX

This PBA 2050 has only a single hammer – build more market-rate housing. That’s the only solution being presented by staff. I know that they are a group of very smart people, so why don’t they have any other solutions when this one is controversial for trickling-down to low-income solutions? I would like to challenge them as we challenge ourselves to learn from this pandemic and aim for the sky on real new solutions! If we don’t learn a great many things from this unprecedented time, we are failing as elected officials.

Want to tackle climate change? We have the experiment running right now! Our Earth is taking a breath of very fresh air right now. Why aren’t we pushing on solutions that force businesses to require telecommuting for a substantial portion of their workforces who can be effective at home? Why can’t we try to get our local colleges and universities to require less days that students must travel to school? Work on legislation and methodologies that take workers and students off the roadways! Clearly this works great, and then cheaper housing can be built farther away and VMT will still be down per week.

Want to solve homelessness? I know the Governor and some Mayors are buying and renting hotels and motels. Many of them will go bankrupt after this shelter-in-place – we should be able to buy many at likely discounted prices since traveling will take a very long time to recover.

Want more land for building housing? Many, many retailers are likely to close, as many were on life-support before the pandemic. It’s also likely that many shopping malls and strip malls will close. Encourage local officials to start rezoning those areas if they haven’t already, especially in the West and South Bay.

We know that WIMBY’s, Wall Street In My Back Yard, and the large investment firms are actively at work preparing for massive buys in our distressed market after the pandemic. A correct Plan Bay Area 2050 would be taking this into consideration in the near-term and use it to help drive strategy.

“A growing number of property investors are preparing for what they believe could be a once-in-a-generation opportunity to acquire distressed real estate assets of bargain prices.”¹

But none of these solutions are part of this PBA 2050 since it assumes a non-pandemic economy. You must allow some time for all of us to better understand where our economy is heading in a post-pandemic environment. If you simply wait for a year to update the job projections, maybe it will be very clear how to solve our homelessness crisis and tackle climate change in our new normal.

Please add an update to the Plan projections if you pass this PBA 2050 now and have an update at least next year before final RHNA allocations. We need to be working together on solutions not further alienating our leaders and our residents. Imposing nonsense RHNA allocations next year will just further alienate and divide everyone. It’s a time to come together and build a better future.

¹ **CityWatch LA**, The WIMBY’S (Wall Street in my Backyard) are Taking Advantage of the Covid-19 Pandemic to Enrich Themselves, DICK PLATKIN Dick Platkin, April 16, 2020

XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX

Item 12a Proposed ABAG MTC Committee Work Integration

Item 12a is a proposal to integrate Committees between ABAG and MTC. I absolutely oppose this concept. ABAG is a regional entity composed from elected officials. MTC is not, as it allows for non-electeds to be part of the process. You must stay independent and continue to function as a watchdog for MTC. Do not do any more merging, especially of committees.

Summary

The time is now to pass a **Leadership Test** during this pandemic. This test requires leaders to act in an honest, urgent and iterative fashion, recognizing that mistakes are inevitable and correcting course without assigning blame is the way to deal with them. I encourage each of you to rise to the occasion and provide for the iterative process in order to guarantee the validity of this effort. We only get one try, and it's now.

Thank you for your consideration on these two important topics.

-Susan Candell

XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX