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From: Cheriell Jensen <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2020 4:53 PM
To: Regional Housing Need Allocation
Subject: RHRN Numbers for Saratoga

External Email

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November 24, 2020

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Dear ABAG/MTC/RHNA Department:

The allocation of 2100 dwelling units to Saratoga is made by people who have not done the careful work of planning and siting homes in our city according to our environmental constraints. Fully half of Saratoga consists of steep hills with extreme fire danger, on-going soil creep, landslides, fault zones and faults. It has high rainfall compared to the valley floor. The other half of our land is in what is called the forebay meaning entry to the aquifer. Santa Clara County sits on a deep four level aquifer. This land we must leave open enough to percolate rainfall and recharge our aquifer. Unlike San Francisco and the East Bay which have taken command of substantial Sierra water supplies, we have not. Fifty percent of our Santa Clara County's water supply comes from local sources, basically our aquifer. Unlike the county in general, San Francisco, San Mateo and the East Bay, these agencies who own critical Sierra waters, most of the time 100% of Saratoga's water comes from this local aquifer system. Hence this forebay system is vital to our very life. As a planner by profession for San Jose and for the County of Santa Clara we experienced several multi-year droughts from early 70's, and learned the hard way what a fragile and critically important task is this aquifer recharge system.

We also learned the hard way the lessons of building homes on landslides, expansive soils and faults. A large number of homes were built on Boulder Creek in the San Jose Eastern hills in the 60s. As the hills were differentially weighted and lawns got watered, the land began to collapse. Houses began to collapse. Utilities had to be built above ground so when they failed it was visible and could be fixed right

away. Homes were rebuilt over and over. They continued collapsing about as fast as they were rebuilt. The roads were continually rebuilt by engineers who claimed they could conquer nature. Successive homeowners lost everything. The public paid and paid and paid for this mistake. Simoni Drive was next to fail in a similar manner.

Eventually the geotechnical work by USGS and private geologists, studying both sides of our Santa Clara valley, showed that our hillsides are not bedrock but pretty much unstable sands and expansive clay soils. If landsliding was not visible when development began, it soon would be. In addition, these hillsides are designated extreme high fire danger. Lesson learned, in the City of San Jose and then the County of Santa Clara we drew the urban limit lines at the 15 percent slope to keep development out of these risky areas. Saratoga came slightly later (1980) to lower densities in these highly unstable lands, and through a citizen initiative we lowered the allowable densities but we were already partly developed in these unstable lands. We continue to have major expenses rebuilding roads and legal liabilities for homes on unstable ground, but far less than it would be without our lower densities and restrictions. Contrary to the North Bay and Oakland Hills where development proceeded without the degree of caution warranted, we demonstrated our caution has markedly lowered the risk of massive loss and saved lives.

The flatter lands of Saratoga were designated by the SC Valley Water agency as forebay based on their role in percolating the rainfall into our aquifer. Some other cities in the county also have some forebay lands but Saratoga's gently sloping lands are almost entirely forebay. These forebay lands play a vital role in our restoring our aquifers so they can hold our water. Fifty percent of our county's water comes from this system, but almost 100% of Saratoga's water comes from pumping wells from the aquifer of this system. To accommodate this process, Saratoga has had a hardscape limit on development of 30% per parcel.

This proposal to somehow find land to build 2100 dwelling units would require building over much of the land that recharges the aquifer. Densifying development ignores this vital water process without handing us any water alternative. It was made by legislative fiat and ABAG/MTC without their examining the mapped hazards and resource maps and without understanding that our landscape is not just resource but also our critical support system.

Most important, it ignores the fact that our lands are now 99.95% developed in a pattern difficult to change and has been developed in that pattern with few exceptions for 40 years. In fact, this development has been in place, with few new developed lots since 1980 because our lands were already mostly built out by then. Saratoga population in 1980 was 29,261 and in 2020 was 30,311 (US Census).

Saratoga does not invite jobs. We have no industrial land to create jobs. We have almost no commercial land. We now have a single grocery store and hardware store for 30,311 people. Saratoga citizens have been the most responsible citizens anywhere with a very low birth rate, way below replacement. (Only 21% of our population was below the age of 18 in 2019, fewer than half the children in 1980 (then 44.2 percent below the age of 19).)

Saratoga does not create a local or regional housing demand. Saratoga population in 1980 was 4.6% Asian and in 2020 is 49.1 % Asian (US Census). Of our current population 30 % speak other than English. What this means is that the housing we have, has created housing for people coming from other countries to live here. Our housing now is not supporting either a general local need arising from our low birth rate, and even the even lower local Asian birth rate. Our housing as it is sold is primarily serving people from other counties driving up the prices so our own children and grandchildren must locate their lives elsewhere. This is an unsustainable demand and one that would put a broken strain on our resources. A third of the people of the world would probably like to live here. We love them and would welcome them all, but haven't the resources to serve such a demand.

We are being forced by others to destroy our water system and build on hazardous lands because others are not accountable for the demand they created? Now the whole of California has failed to control the housing demand they carelessly created without a thought of where all that water would be coming from, and where there is land available for building the housing for all those jobs?

The High-Rise Solution? Much of San Francisco has bedrock to support high rise buildings. But, in those areas of damp soils, liquefaction failure in even moderate earthquakes has been severe and failure even without earthquake activity is occurring in San Francisco due to not requiring high rises be actually supported on bedrock. Santa Clara County and Saratoga in particular have no bedrock. Saratoga has ridden out earthquakes fairly well as we had a low profile and have avoided developing on Faults. As we grow upwards the entire county will be extra susceptible to serious fault movement from the San Andreas extensive fault system and the Hayward/Calaveras fault systems. We know we sit beside and in places on those fault systems, but have chosen to locate much of the most vibrant parts of the U.S. economy right on these iffy liquefaction soils. This is a monumental mistake. As this industry builds higher it becomes more susceptible to earthquake losses.

We are being treated as if we have not done our homework. We have - extensively. Our decisions stem from years of effort to live within the limits of our resources, carefully avoid hazards, and welcome the people of the world, at the same time seeing that economic pressure from that welcome-matt send our children and grandchildren elsewhere to live. We cannot grow the way ABAG/MTC demands. We just don't have the land. MTC is not solving any transportation decisions that affect us, and should be disbanded. ABAG does nothing to help or improve our lives. And we do not see why we should try to do the impossible things ABAG/MTC have demanded. It solves nothing, just makes life more complicated and difficult We are told we live in a Democracy but this is not true. We have no voice in these ridiculous impossible decisions.

We cannot do what you have demanded of us.

Yours truly,

Cheriel Jensen