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Planning Commission, County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

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County of Santa Cruz

To the Commission:

On Monday, April 29, a "first-ever" community outreach meeting was held at the Congregational Church on Soquel Ave. hosted by the Anton Development Company (I believe of Delaware) with offices at 1610 R Street, Suite 250 in Sacramento, CA 95811. The meeting was not in a sanctuary with seating but in a large multi-purpose room and was attended by 40-50 residents. The company had prepared no presentation and offered no seating. What was on offer was a small group of company representatives that people could approach in ones and twos, an array of easels displaying "elevations" and a table of untouched cookies. Here is my comment to the company near the end of this gathering: "You are here to take questions and comments—mostly critical—and you are doing it with fortitude and good manners. But if you have found this unpleasant, you have created your own scenario because this meeting is an insult and a joke. You have provided no presentation (which could have forestalled many questions), no seating and no microphone so that we, the affected residents, could hear each other—and that is by design." The response was that this was just the first informal information-gathering session, but when pressed, they admitted that their proposal would go before you "in about two weeks." This is not a responsible corporate or governmental process.

Your May 8 Agenda has a long list of properties to be rezoned. One has only to look to San Jose to see how the overly dense projects that result are impacting traffic, schools, understaffed police and fire services, adjacent neighborhoods that are forced to absorb the overflow parking and aesthetics in general. Many views of the hills are now obliterated and most of the projects are beyond ugly. Just visit the Bascom, Winchester, and Almaden Corridors, as well as the plan for the coming urban villages at Camden and Union and Maple Leaf Plaza. The ethos is to utilize every inch of space, go as high as possible, put in a few pathetic sticks of greenery and call it landscaping. There are no set-backs and sometimes not even any sidewalks. Parking is ALWAYS inadequate by a large margin. In San Jose, the General Plan calls for these so-called urban villages to be situated along transit corridors which is laughable as the only transit consists of limited and unreliable bus service in the areas cited.

Anton Inc. is not even proposing an urban village. There is no "mixed-use" in their plan for the tract at the intersection of Thurber and Soquel Avenue. The design is overblown and industrial in appearance. Like the projects described above, the drawings show no enjoyable green space for the future residents and units that will literally loom over the narrow entrance to Thurber Lane. Development is one thing; squeezing the most out of every square inch simply creates eyesores that are going to be next years' slums. Go visit the North Forty development on the edge of Los Gatos to see what is probably the most egregious example of that anywhere in the state. It cannot be argued that putting the largest possible number of units on a site is done out of a desire to provide affordable housing for as many residents as possible. This is not altruism; it is pure corporate greed. It probably also plays into the County's need to

comply with state mandates and its assigned Regional Housing Needs Allocation which calls for 4,634 dwelling units, including 2,468 affordable to lower-income household over an eight year period. But it is not reasonable and it is not humane. It usually plays out that the rents are still too high for most people. Do you want to **attract** people to Santa Cruz so we can become San Jose? Actually, it is more likely that highway 17 will become even more congested because the jobs that would enable people to live in these units simply are not here.

In the case of this particular parcel, Thurber Lane is the only entrance and egress from the Santa Cruz Gardens neighborhood. It is a two lane street that T's into Soquel Ave., and I'm sure anyone who lives in Santa Cruz is keenly aware of the traffic on Soquel at peak hours. This intersection will become a complete chokepoint.

Further, the plan calls for 173 units of 2-3 bedrooms, but only 273 parking spaces. Two spaces per unit would be 346 spaces, a shortfall of a minimum of 73 spaces and that does not take into consideration teenage children and guests. Residents on adjacent streets like Bobwhite Lane, Sequoia Drive, Twin Hills Drive, Prather Lane and Winkle Ave will be choked with project vehicles.

During the meeting, I heard no consideration given to lack of existing infrastructure. Where will children go to school? Will traffic up and down Thurber Lane to Santa Cruz Gardens Elementary be impacted with the speeding that often is seen when stressed parents are trying to drop off and still get to work on time? What transit exists to the nearest middle and high schools? What services are nearby—grocery stores, day care, etc.? Day care alone is an issue as all facilities in Santa Cruz have waiting lists.

The proposed development backs up to a riparian corridor. It would be impossible to build there, so no points given for preserving it. But the nearby land may be subject to flooding or liquefaction of the soil and riparian corridors do not exist in a vacuum. They need breathing room and adjacent grazing areas away from dense housing. As far as is known, at present there is no Environmental Impact Report.

Who is funding this project? The developer admitted that they have applied to the County for funding. They stated that this is not a "builder's remedy" project but an "entitlement" project which must be approved by local government. They further stated that they have not yet purchased the property.

Your staff report entitled "Study Session on the Proposed Ministerial Combining District" contains an alarming and anti-democratic proposal. Page 2 states that "projects meeting all the standards (?) would NOT be subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and WOULD NOT REQUIRE PUBLIC HEARINGS." That is an outrageous end-run around the public because you well know that people won't show up en masse to attend a meeting on a proposed Ministerial Combining District. A what? Precisely.

You can do better by the community. Please let us know what we may do to stop or mitigate the proposed development at Thurber Lane and Soquel Ave.

Yours truly,

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