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**Valley Industrial Association Letter to the City of Santa Clarita;  
dated February 6, 2009**



## **VALLEY INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATION OF SANTA CLARITA**

A California Non-Profit Corporation

(I.R.C. §501(c)(6)) • Tax Identification No. 95-3996296

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February 6, 2009

Paul Brotzman

Director of Community Development

City of Santa Clarita

23920 Valencia Blvd., #300

Santa Clarita, CA 91355

Subject: VIA input to the City draft Housing Element and Circulation Element

Dear Mr. Brotzman,

Thank you to you and your City Staff members for calling the meeting with me and VIA board member Andy Pattantyus on January 15, 2009, to review the City's plans for complying with SB-2 requirements in the revision of the Housing Element, which currently exists in draft versions. Please send us a copy of the next draft as soon as it becomes available. In this letter, we first summarize the meeting, then we will get into the specific things that the business community (represented by VIA) would like to see included in the Housing Element and Circulation Element.

### **Summary of Meeting on Jan 15, 2009.**

Attendees from VIA: Kathy Norris and Andy Pattantyus

Attendees from the City: Paul Brotzman, Tina Haddad, Jason Killebrew, Lisa Webber

Purpose of the meeting: Review SB-2 Affect on Business Parks

**Summary.** SB-2 requires each City and County in California to designate at least one zoning code where Homeless Shelters and Transitional Living Centers can exist "by-right", which means that Use Permits are not required to set-up an operation. The city of Santa Clarita has decided to handle the requirement by creating an "overlay" onto the zoning code "Business Park". The boundaries of the overlay encompass most of the area of the Centre Point Business Park and the Valencia Business Park. The Centre Pointe overlay area encompasses the current location of the Winter Shelter on Golden Valley Road. The City can still contractually apply constraints to any homeless shelter operation, regulating such parameters as the number of beds, operating hours, parking, etc.

**Other.** While we had everybody in the room, VIA made its interests known to the City re: Housing and Transportation



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**Housing.** First we talked about the Housing Element. The City says that it will make available sufficient land to build 4,000 low and very low income housing by 2014 at a density of 30 units per acre. The City cautioned that the City is required only to make the land available, but not to assure that the units get built. That is a "free market" issue. The City said the main problem is the lack of rentals. While nationally, the ownership to rental ratio is 65 / 35, in Santa Clarita Valley it is 80 / 20. The community shows a strong bias against rentals, because of the public's perception that crime and trouble is associated with rental developments.

**Transportation.** Next we talked about the Circulation Element. VIA talked about the need for more trains and more buses that start earlier in the day and leave later at night. The City responded by saying the issue is money. Trains and buses are subsidized, meaning that the fare does not cover the cost of operation. Thus, funding is needed. Santa Clarita is a part of the North LA Transportation Corridor. Thus, on every transportation project, we compete with the City of LA. We need to more actively lobby and more actively measure the needs. The City mentioned that lobbyist Arthur Sohikian is actively lobbying on behalf of the North LA County Transportation Corridor.

VIA indicated to the City that VIA expects the City to take a leadership position in solving these problems, which means doing more than the minimum required by law.

### **Housing Element Compliance with SB-2**

As stated in the summary of the meeting, the primary purpose of the meeting was for the City to review with VIA the method of compliance to the state law SB-2, which requires that the City designate at least one zoning code where homeless shelters and transitional living centers can locate "by-right", without any use permits. As we understand it, the City intends to comply with the requirements by designating an "overlay" onto the zoning code Business Park (BP) which encompasses most of the Centre Pointe business park and the Valencia Industrial Park on the Northwest part of town. Impact on the community will be mitigated by City processes for review and community comment, as with any other development. We also understand that transitional housing and permanent supportive housing will be allowed in the zoning code "Residential".

The Valley Industrial Association supports this proposal.



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### **Housing Element and Workforce Housing**

The Valley Industrial Association is a business organization, and, as such, it is our mission to support business and industry in the Santa Clarita Valley. VIA believes that in order for a city to be vibrant and successful, we not only need a variety of workers at all levels, but we need varied housing availability to support those workers and their families. This must be incorporated as a part of the City's general plan and housing element.

The Valley Industrial Association has been researching and advocating the subject of Workforce Housing for several years. We have conducted several forums, including a symposium and a panel discussion. We have also surveyed many of our member companies to identify the issues. We believe the issue can be best summarized as follows: ***A large number of hourly and salaried workers, such as factory workers, teachers, EMT, firemen, policemen and other essential service workers, who work in Santa Clarita cannot afford to live in Santa Clarita.*** We are talking about workers who earn between \$30K and \$60K per year. This results in a reliance on a non-local workforce that creates a number of challenges for our employers, including: high worker turnover, loss of workdays during a disaster (when freeways are shut-down), long and costly commutes for the lower tier of wage earners, and an inadequate labor pool to draw from when trying to fill job openings.

In this context, VIA has reviewed the November 20, 2008 draft of the Housing element. VIA understands that there is a newer draft that will be available in January or February, but we worked with the version available to us.

VIA's assessment is that the November 20, 2008 draft of the City of Santa Clarita housing element is minimally compliant with the state requirements, and on many issues does not meet the needs of the businesses represented by VIA.

The biggest deficiency is in the area of Work Force housing, which encompasses Low Income and Very Low Income. The current draft of the Housing Element lumps Low Income and Very Low Income housing together into one category. These categories are very distinctly different, and should be kept in two separated categories. The draft Housing Element says that against a need of 1,256 units of Very Low Income housing, only 20 were constructed? Why? How will the City assure that this same pattern does not repeat in the next 7 years? VIA understands that sufficient zoning will be designated to meet the need. But what if the free market does not fill the need? What pro-active steps will the City take to assure that the much needed housing gets built?



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### **Circulation Element and Transportation**

VIA commends the City of Santa Clarita for doing an excellent job with Santa Clarita Transit, with MetroLink, with the Cross Valley connector, with Traffic Flow upgrades, and with repaving of major arteries within the industrial parks (ex: Rye Canyon Rd. repaving.). In spite of this excellence, there are some transportation needs that are not being met, and VIA would like to call the City's attention to these matters.

Ultimately, the business community in Santa Clarita needs easy access to a large and stable labor pool. Ideally, the workers should be able to live in the same community where they work, without long and expensive commutes. The members of VIA understand that any solution based on development and construction of housing will be at least a decade away, considering the pace of development and community input. Thus, VIA sees improved transportation as the interim method of assuring a stable and readily available workforce.

More could be done in the Section "Travel Demand Management". This section is vague and lacking in specific measures that the City could initiate, with co-operation and support from manufacturing employers and members of VIA. For example, one of the VIA manufacturing employers offered an incentive for workers to take the train from Palmdale and Lancaster to Santa Clarita. Only 4 out of hundreds of eligible workers took advantage of the incentive? Why? The City should investigate and find out. VIA has conducted some informal inquiries to learn about the issue. The trains do not leave early enough and late enough between Palmdale/Lancaster and Santa Clarita to even support a single shift with overtime (a ten or 11 hour workday). Thus, workers would have to sacrifice available working hours in order to take the train (using the incentive). Thus, they do not take the train.

VIA has responded to gaps in available public transportation by educating its members about the availability of van pools, and has promoted the use of several available services. The van pools can be contracted either by the employers, or by the workers directly independently of the employers. Through discussions with its members, VIA has found out that van pools and transportation incentives are extremely price sensitive, with as little as \$5 to \$10 per week being the difference between participation and non-participation. How many van pools are in operation to support Santa Clarita businesses? The City should know this, and should see van pools as an indicator of gaps in public transportation.

Transit Corridors. Missing in the Circulation Element is any discussion about the establishment of high density transportation corridors in the master plan that are specifically located in proximity to the zones and parcels designated as "high density" to encourage the development of transit oriented housing that is specifically well suited to the needs of the Santa Clarita hourly workforce.



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Hours of Operation. Section O. Summary of Circulation Needs. This section does not address the needs of the membership of VIA to get hourly workers from Palmdale / Lancaster / Pacoima / Santa Paula to Santa Clarita in the morning, and back at night. Also, the element does not support the transportation needs of manufacturers that would like to expand the use of their capitally intensive facilities to a two shift operation. Two shift operations would require trains and buses that leave outlying areas between 4:00 and 5:30 in the morning, and between noon and two in the afternoon, and returning in the late afternoon (after first shift) and returning after mid-night (after second shift).

### **Compliance with SB-375 “Anti-Sprawl” Bill**

The current drafts of the Housing Element and Circulation Element do not address the requirements of SB-375. VIA strongly advocates that the drafts of these elements be

upgraded to address the requirements of SB-375 in the current revisions. Otherwise, both elements will have to be reviewed and upgraded again within 2 years to comply with SB-375. The basic principle of “anti-sprawl” is that workers should live in the same community where they work, resulting in a short reasonable commute that is energy efficient and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

Both the Housing Element and the Circulation Element do not address the following question: ***How many hourly workers in Santa Clarita do not live in Santa Clarita?*** Is it 10,000? 20,000? How do the people who work in Santa Clarita, but live far away (Palmdale, Lancaster, Santa Paula, Frazier Park, Pacoima), get to work? When fully built out, the Industrial Parks in Santa Clarita will employ about 80,000 people. Will half of these workers face a 40 mile each way commute every day?

The Housing Element is completely devoid of any study or survey that quantifies the number of people who work in Santa Clarita, but do not live in Santa Clarita. During the public review and community input session in August of 2008 at the Newhall Community Center, VIA requested that the City take steps to quantify the number of people who work in Santa Clarita, but cannot afford to live in Santa Clarita. So far, there is no evidence that the City has attempted to quantify this very important number. As one example, Princess Cruises employs 2,000 people in Santa Clarita. Of these workers, 1,200 live in Santa Clarita, and 800 do not.

The Circulation Element does not address the subject of making provision for low income workers to live close to their workplaces, along high density transportation corridors such as trains, trolleys, and major bus routes. How long does it take for an hourly worker to get to work by bus and/or train? How many bus transfers are required? How much does it cost per month? How does that cost compare to car pooling and van pooling?



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### **Leadership**

VIA would like the City of Santa Clarita to join VIA in taking a leadership position in the Housing Element and Circulation Element, by planning for the community's real needs, rather than what is minimally required by state law. The Industrial Community in Santa Clarita, represented by VIA, has real needs that are currently not being met in the planning and development processes. These needs are approximately summarized in this letter.

VIA would like to challenge the City of Santa Clarita to do the following:

1. While VIA admires the City's plan to comply with SB 2, we feel merely complying with minimum requirements isn't enough for such a forward thinking city like ours. We're so much better than that! Let's improve on the basics.
2. Help draft Housing and Circulation Elements that meet the needs of the business community and the hourly workers that work in Santa Clarita.
3. We need a more granular approach to housing. We need to make sure diverse housing across many spectrums of need is included. Each level must be clearly defined (low income and very low income should not be combined into a single level). A more granular approach is needed. The plan must be very specific. Where are single starting teachers going to live? Where are other public service employees like EMT, firemen, policemen going to live? Where is a newly graduated engineer going to live? How will the City assure that 4,000 units of low income and very low income housing are built? Simply stating that "the free market will take care of it" is not an answer. As well, we (the City and the business community) have the social responsibility to educate people about purchasing, the lending processes, and how to succeed financially.
4. The planning (for assuring that workers are available) needs to go beyond housing and should incorporate transportation and mobility (circulation elements). Currently, the Housing and Circulation Elements try to answer the question: "Where do the residents of Santa Clarita work, and how do they get to work?" Now, in the new revisions, we must also answer the question: "***Where do the workers of Santa Clarita live, and how will they get to work?***"
5. Where will the high density housing be built? Special consideration should be given to locating the housing near transportation hubs, or locating transportation hubs near the housing. Residents will need effective and reasonable transportation choices to get to the workplace.
6. The plan should be very specific about how properties/projects will be acquired and how the housing will be offered. Who will build it? Who will interview the applicants? If the free market does not respond (perhaps because they view the environment as "hostile") then what action will the City take to assure that there are bidders for the desired projects?
7. Will the City of Santa Clarita commit funds and/or land to Work Force housing? If so, how much?



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VIA will be happy to work with the City to assure that the needs of the industrial business community are met.

Please note that the content of this letter is approved by the board of VIA, and thus represents the needs of the industrial business community represented by VIA.

Sincerely,

*Kathy Norris*

Kathy Norris  
President and CEO

cc: Tina Haddad  
Jason Killebrew  
Lisa Webber  
Andy Pattantyus  
Randy Moberg