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17th November 2023

Heidi Vonblum

Director, City Planning Department
202 C St, 5th Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Ms Vonblum,

I am writing on behalf of Vibrant Uptown, a group of Uptown residents whose mission is to promote the Uptown neighborhood as a place to live, work, and play for all. We advocate for abundant housing policies, efficient & safe mobility, and public spaces where people and businesses can thrive.

We believe the discussion draft of the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment reflect the following benefits to the Hillcrest community and the greater San Diego community:

1. Increased housing density where it makes sense, along the main commercial corridors in Hillcrest. This provides the opportunities to build more homes in Hillcrest, including the opportunity to build more affordable housing, thereby easing our housing crisis.
2. Recognition of Hillcrest's critical place as a center of LGBTQ+ culture and entertainment in San Diego. The proposed LGBTQ+ cultural and entertainment district both provides the framework for the community to embed Hillcrest's LGBTQ+ culture into the physical landscape and provides practical protections like noise notices for LGBTQ+ bars and entertainment businesses that will help preserve the LGBTQ+ bars and entertainment businesses that make Hillcrest what it is.
3. Provides for a safe, complete multimodal transportation network that centers people over cars. A complete, stress-free bike network is a prerequisite for broad adoption of biking by our community, and this plan goes a long way towards creating that network. And the focus on pedestrian safety and traffic calming will reduce pedestrian injuries and deaths, as well as pedestrian comfort on our urban streets.
4. Contribution to the City Climate Action Plan goals by (i) allowing more people to live and work in Hillcrest, and be close to the Downtown job center, thereby reducing VMT, (ii) providing a safer, lower-stress bicycle network that will allow people of all ages and experience levels to move around Hillcrest and (ii) improving the pedestrian experience,

thereby encouraging more people to walk to their destination or walk to nearby transit. Each of these reduce VMT by San Diego residents by providing Hillcrest residents and visitors with improved transportation options outside private car travel.

In particular, we highlight the following details of the draft plan as providing important, necessary benefits to the community:

- Recognition of Hillcrest and Uptown as an urban community.
- Increased densities along 4th & 5th Avenues, Robinson Ave, University Ave, Washington Ave and Normal Street (particularly with the upcoming Normal Street Promenade).
- Center running transit along University, which will greatly improve the speed of transit.
- One-way vehicle circulator of University and Robinson between 1st and 10th, which will allow for the much needed pedestrian and bike infrastructure improvements on the bridges over the 163.

We request the Planning Department incorporate the following comments into the revised draft of the plan:

- A. Increased focus on pedestrian safety, including revising policies such as MO-1.3 to not only consider physical traffic calming measures along pedestrian districts and pedestrian corridors, but to require that such measures be implemented unless prohibited by law or other critical considerations (e.g., fire department access). The updated policies should state clearly and plainly that pedestrian safety must be prioritized over vehicle speeds and throughput. Such measures are necessary to eliminate pedestrian injuries and deaths, particularly as Hillcrest becomes more dense over time under the new plan.
- B. In all areas covered by the plan, and particularly in the core commercial corridors with higher pedestrian volumes restrict the use of right on red at all intersections, follow the policy to prioritize walk and roll by always assuming pedestrians are present and illuminating “walk” lights on every light cycle, and raise crosswalk height to match the sidewalk, providing more accessibility and traffic calming by acting as speed tables. These measures will both increase safety and improve the walkability of our neighborhood.
- C. Eliminate use of Class II and Class III bike facilities (in favor of Class IV bike facilities) on all major streets, including Robinson and Washington, as well as 6th Ave south of Upas, consistent with the City’s “Class IV first” approach. Such measures are necessary to prevent and reduce bicyclist injuries and deaths, particularly as Hillcrest becomes more dense over time under the new plan.

We also have concerns around gentrification of the Uptown community and the impacts that so much development under the updated Community Plan may have on the LGBTQ+ community that has long made the Uptown area (and Hillcrest in particular) their home. We appreciate the efforts the City has made in respect of inclusionary zoning and expedited permitting of affordable projects. However, we recognize that to build and retain the affordable housing stock Uptown needs, large amounts of public subsidies (including in the form of state tax credits and federal

and state grants) will be needed and we implore the City to, at minimum, (i) aggressively lobby the state to increase the scale of state tax credits and other affordable housing funds, (ii) prioritize and encourage the preservation of existing affordable housing and the development of new affordable housing, particularly in the Uptown community, and (iii) continue to refine and streamline all rules affecting the development of affordable housing to make the construction. Also, as new development increases density, we need to preserve the existing housing stock as affordable, so incentives are needed to prevent legacy housing stock rents from increasing to match new build housing and we request the City implement such incentives.

Thank you for your time and attention, and all the hard work the City staff has put into preparing the draft plan and engaging with the Uptown community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zach Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Zach Thompson
Vibrant Uptown Member
On behalf of Vibrant Uptown