



ALAMEDA COUNTY HEALTH CARE SERVICES AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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RE: Central Estuary Specific Plan and Improving Public Health

Dear Council President Brunner,

The Alameda County Public Health Department has a history of working closely with the City of Oakland, particularly in the areas of violence prevention and human service provision. Over the last several years, our agencies expanded this partnership to include collaboration on land use planning efforts, some examples of which appear in the most recent edition of *Redeveloping Oakland*. As increasing evidence indicates the strong correlation between the risks and resources present in our immediate environments – including grocery stores, parks, side walks and bike lanes – and health outcomes, the need for closer partnership between ACPHD and the Community and Economic Development Agency (CEDA) is clear. The Community and Economic Development Agency's Strategic Planning Division demonstrated great leadership in moving our collaborative efforts forward by including consideration of the public health impacts as a central component of the Central Estuary Specific Plan planning process. **I write today to express the Alameda County Public Health Department's (ACPHD) support for the Central Estuary Specific Plan community preferred alternative, both because of the consideration of public health and because of the robust community engagement employed during the planning process.**

Public health has been considered during all aspects of the Central Estuary Specific Plan planning process thus far. At the beginning of this process, CEDA engaged ACPHD in identifying health indicators for assessment in the existing condition analysis. These indicators were also used to compare the potential public health benefits and trade-offs between the three proposed alternatives. CEDA contracted with a consultant with experience in the intersection of health and planning to complete these analyses.

The trade-offs – health and otherwise – required for each of the alternatives are very complex and we believe that the community preferred alternative represents a good balance of the competing priorities – residential, retail, and industrial development – while protecting public health. While the details of the Central Estuary Specific Plan will be spelled out in the next phase of this process, the overall framework includes the following public health protections (as described on page 16 of the staff report prepared January 26, 2010):

- buffers between residential uses and both freeways and industrial land uses, protecting residents from diesel pollution and other harmful toxins that cause respiratory disease and cancer
- increased public access to open space and increased sidewalk and bike lane connectivity, encouraging physical activity and potential reducing diet related disease such as obesity and diabetes
- clustered residential development that encourages transit use, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions
- walkable services, ensuring residents can access health protective goods and services, such as grocery stores, in their neighborhood

ACPHD encourages CEDA to continue to consider the public health implications of the Central Estuary Specific Plan as it moves from selecting the preferred alternative to creating the development standards. Specifically, in addition to the areas listed above, we encourage CEDA to consider the following:

- *Affordable Housing* – The City of Oakland lacks sufficient affordable housing to meet the needs of its current residents. A lack of affordable housing is associated with food insecurity and poor nutrition, especially among children, as well as cutting back on childcare, preventative healthcare, and prescription

drugs. Furthermore the stress due to a lack of affordable housing is associated with a greater likelihood of developing hypertension and lower levels of psychological well-being. Finally, a lack of safe, affordable housing can lead vulnerable residents to settle for substandard housing situations. Moldy walls, old carpets and pest infestation are all major contributors to the development of serious respiratory and skin infections. **We recommend that the development standards protect existing low- and moderate-income housing and require a certain percentage of new residential units be designated as affordable to help meet the need for affordable housing in Oakland.**

- *Air Quality Mitigations* – Numerous studies have concluded that populations exposed to diesel pollution and toxic air contaminants are at increased risk of developing respiratory diseases and even cancer. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) is considering implementing guidelines for reviewing proposed housing located within 1,000 feet of a freeway or other large pollution source. **In light of the mounting evidence and the pending BAAQMD guidelines, we recommend that the development standards require state of the art air filtration systems for all residential units built within 1,000 feet of the freeway, goods movement hubs, and other large pollution sources.**
- *Blue- and Green-Collar Jobs* – The populations suffering from the worst health outcomes in Alameda County also suffer from the highest un- and under-employment rates. These same populations also face barriers to employment, such as a lack of a high-school degree and/or a criminal record. Research clearly indicates that one of the best ways to improve health outcomes is to increase income levels or reduce poverty. However, as industrial and other blue-collar jobs historically available to those with a high-school degree or less leave of the area, the job prospects for those facing multiple barriers to employment are further reduced. **As the development standards are developed, we recommend that CEDA include provisions that protect as many low-skilled jobs as possible and encourage employers, especially in the emerging field of green industries, to hire from local workforce development training programs.**

ACPHD would also like to take this opportunity to commend CEDA for supporting a model community engagement process as part of the Central Estuary Specific Plan thus far. ACPHD's emphasis on community participation is rooted in research demonstrating that historical exclusion from decision-making venues has resulted in communities of color and low income communities that are disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards and deprived of social goods. As such, we are dedicated to increasing marginalized communities' meaningful participation in the planning processes that are inextricably linked to their health trajectory. CEDA did an excellent job ensuring that community members were prepared with the information they needed to give critical input on the Central Estuary Specific Plan. The meetings themselves were well facilitated with ample time for community input.

Again, ACPHD supports the community preferred alternative and commends CEDA's leadership in considering the public health implications of the Central Estuary Specific Plan and for designing a process so accessible to the community. Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations during the next phase of this project. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 510-267-8018 or Sandra.Witt@acgov.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Sandra Witt, DrPH
Deputy Director of Planning, Policy and Health Equity
Alameda County Public Health Department

Cc: Chairperson De La Fuente
Councilmember Reid
Councilmember Kernighan
Eric Angstadt, Strategic Planning Manager, City of Oakland
Alex Briscoe, Director, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency
