

April 12, 2005

Ms. Angela Shafer-Payne
Vice President, Strategic Planning
San Diego Regional Airport Authority
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FAX: 400-2458

SUBJECT: Little Italy Association Response to Draft San Diego County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan for Lindbergh Field Comprehensive

Dear Ms. Payne-Shafer:

We would like to thank you and your staff for attending our community meeting on April 1st in Little Italy, in which over 60 community members were in attendance. Your presentation, along with Mr. Tom Fat and Mr. Brad Richter of the Centre City Development Corporation, provided some of the clarity necessary to address the serious land use impacts on Little Italy arising from the Draft Land Use Compatibility Plan.

We would like to keep this letter brief. We propose to address *what we think of this plan*, and then *propose specific actions* to amend staff recommendations to the Airport Authority Board.

Background and What We Think:

Rarely, has the Little Italy Association been inundated with so many calls from property owners, as what we have received regarding your report. Contrary to your staff's conscientious efforts to follow the guidelines of the State of California, they neglected to include a critical element – how their recommendations impact the lives of people and families in Little Italy. A little background is useful here.

Two times in the 20th Century and now for the first time in the 21st Century, our community has nearly been destroyed by the recommendations and actions of governmental bodies seeking to “serve the public's interest”.

- 1) In the late 1950s, 3,000 families in Little Italy, not to mention thousands more in Barrio Logan and elsewhere in the City, were forcibly relocated so the state of California could comply with the mandates of the new National Defense

Interstate Highway Act passed by Congress. The federal funding for highway construction mandated a 400-foot swath in order to provide and accommodate future growth for the interstate transportation system. Great idea, until it was implemented.

Thousands of families were permanently relocated from their homes in Little Italy, paid their “market rate” and dispersed to the suburbs of San Diego. This gash in the heart of Little Italy was nearly irreparable – but we came back.

- 2) *In the 1970s, the Federal Government then declared that tuna had to be “porpoise and dolphin safe”.* Another great idea, but the figures used to determine the actual kill rates on dolphins and porpoises are still questioned today. What this federal legislation did was to force the removal of the largest concentration of tuna fishing boats in the world from San Diego’s Little Italy to the western Pacific, where tuna swim independent of porpoises and dolphins. This Federal legislation, while well intentioned and based upon questionable scientific evidence, devastated an economy that had taken generations to develop in Little Italy. Not only did the fishing industry and canneries have to follow where the tuna fleet went, but it permanently changed a way of life in Little Italy. This federal legislation was a stab in the heart of the economy of Little Italy and was nearly fatal – but we came back.**
- 3) *Little Italy has been a neighborhood dating back to the 1890s.* Along with Barrio Logan, the old Center City East, Middletown, Logan Heights, Shelltown, Sherman Heights, and Golden Hill - these neighborhoods constituted the original suburbs of San Diego. Little Italy always existed and thrived near the bay due to its connection to the fishing industry. The building of Little Italy preceded the creation of Lindbergh Field by almost 30 years.**

When Charles Lindbergh was living along 6th Avenue and running his tests flights in Dutch Flats in the Midway area in the late 1920s, Little Italy was a vibrant, ethnic immigrant community.

The point here is that we came first. Now as we enter our second century and have seen tremendous residential growth and a cultural renaissance in Little Italy in the last ten years, along comes another state mandated agency, the Airport Authority, again “serving the public good”. The pattern here is troubling to say the least.

What the Airport Authority staff cannot understand is that people have been living in the flight path before there was a flight path, in many instances in the same homes. If something should leave, it is that entity that came later – namely Lindbergh Field. For Airport Authority staff to come forward in the year 2005, and inform the community that the only acceptable land uses north of Hawthorn should be agricultural or mining extraction, are insensitive to say the least and

border on inverse condemnation in the extreme. Many of us are livid with these staff recommendations.

We are not certain if our community can bounce back from this radical declaration of mandated minimized land uses by this state agency.

- 4) *When the Metropolitan Transit Development Board sought to extend the Trolley northward in the late 1980's, their original plan called for elevating the Trolley adjacent to Pacific Highway, therefore bifurcating Little Italy and destroying our incredible view corridors. This time, the property owners in Little Italy were successful in convincing MTDB to trench the Trolley passage along the California Street corridor, thereby saving the east-west passage and views. Though many political leaders were adamantly opposed to this "pandering to the needs of the community", the end result was far superior to the original proposal. This was the one time that we were able to fight a governmental agency and get a positive result.*
- 5) *The Federal Government mandates that freight and passenger train whistles blow a decibel levels at railroad crossing reaching 110 decibels, however there are no restrictions on residential construction within feet of the train tracks.*

The State of California, through Cal Trans monitors freeway noise level, which acts as an ongoing drone approaching 50 – 70 decibel levels at various times of the day. However, this state agency does not restrict residential land uses adjacent to freeways.

Most conversations on India Street must stop when construction trucks or buses drive by, but there are no restrictions on residential uses along these heavily used corridors.

Now we have the Cruise Ships, which are docking at the foot of Ash Street. Though they have had a tremendous positive economic impact for Downtown, their horns are loud, but somewhat romantic. We have been able to coincide and continue to live with this newest high decibel noise level created by the Cruise Ships, and there have been no residential restrictions placed upon new condos along Pacific Highway as a result.

In other words, the Airport Authority mandates for land use conformance due to noise levels is unprecedented and has no equivalent among other stage agencies. The state's handbook for airport land use plans and the Draft ALUCP, acknowledges that the 70 CNEL level "may be regarded as an acceptable noise exposure in noisy urban residential communities". In light of this statement in your own documents, we find the restrictions of the Airport Authority in the update CLUP plan to be completely unreasonable and without justification. The Airport Authority Staff is proposing changing the rules of

development in Little Italy; even though we have lived with the Airport for over 50 years.

This is what we think. In light of the corner we feel boxed into, it is necessary for us to be constructive in our approach to the staff recommendations and comment on what we believe to be the maximum restrictions that should be placed upon land uses in the North side of Little Italy.

What we Propose:

We understand a “community vision” can impact the land uses deemed appropriate by the Airport Authority. We intend to work closely with Airport Authority Board and staff members, Deputy Mayor Zucchet, the CCDC Board and Staff and the CCAC members in ensuring that our community character and development will be protected in the future. Be that as it may, we put forward the following points to the Airport Authority in relationship to the proposed Land Use Plan:

- ❑ *Philosophically, we do not support any restrictions on residential densities in Little Italy, whose northern border is Laurel Street. While we understand that the 75 decibel level may restrict future residential land uses, we are opposed to such restrictions as they will dilute the ability for our community to provide the residential density necessary to drive the continuation of Washington Elementary School, existing and new retail development, as well as being inconsistent with the Trolley Stop and related Transit Oriented Development;*
- ❑ **If the Airport Authority Board does vote and determine that parcels in the North side of Little Italy are not compatible with new high density residential uses, under no circumstances will we support a ban on residential developments south of Hawthorn Street. While our preference is not to have any residential restrictions up to Laurel, parcels touching Hawthorn are the “line in the sand” for us. We will not accept any residential restrictions below a 5.5 to 1 FAR for any parcels touching the north side of Hawthorn. Regarding parcels south of Hawthorn, a minimum 6 to 1 FAR is the residential density we find to be acceptable and consistent with our recent development patterns**
- ❑ **Under no circumstances, should a person who currently has a given residential density on a parcel south of Laurel be restricted from redeveloping their parcel up to that residential density. The idea that the only way one can redevelop a multi unit-housing complex is if it burns down is ridiculous. Existing residential densities between Hawthorn and Laurel, with the exceptions listed above, should have the right to develop their properties with the current residential densities.**
- ❑ **If currently used non-residential parcels are restricted from building new residential uses north of Hawthorn, we believe that additional and maximum height limits should be allowable on those parcels, using the Laurel Parking Garage at Kettner and Laurel as a model. We believe that restrictions on residential uses**

could be offset by maximizing the height limits on the affected parcels in the event that non-residential development was to occur.

- ❑ If residential uses are restricted for certain parcels in the over 75-decibel noise level, we believe that *all other land uses* should be allowable. Such land uses would include hotels, visitor related industries, commercial, office, retail, etc. We believe that since the impact of noise is temporary with these uses, all uses outside of residential should be allowable.
- ❑ We are adamantly opposed to *any daytime or nighttime density restrictions* for new businesses north of Hawthorn. Declaring that densities cannot exceed a certain arbitrary formula based upon Airport Authority staff recommendations will condemn the parcels north of Hawthorn to a public storage wasteland.
- ❑ Under no circumstances will we support a height limit below the threshold set by the FAA approved Laurel Parking Garage (40 feet). It is foolish to think that heights outside of the direct flight path would hinder the approach any more than the Laurel Parking Garage did when it was built in the late 1980s.
- ❑ We hope to see the redevelop of Washington Elementary School over the next few years. In order to create the “world class Downtown Elementary School” that we all desire, servicing the needs of K – 8 children in Downtown, the Airport Authority will need to be flexible in accommodating the future growth needs of this dedicated school parcel. Remember, this school site also predates the existence of Lindbergh Field as commercial airport.

In conclusion, we are in favor of the land uses, height limits and densities allowable under the proposed updated Downtown Master Plan (2005). This plan will be submitted to the San Diego City Council by the Steering Committee at the end of this year.

Though we appreciate the sensitivity that certain Board members and staff have shown to the needs of Little Italy property owners, residents and businesses, we believe that a mutually beneficial compromise on future land uses must be reached.

We find the suggestions above to represent the *absolute minimum point of agreement* and encourage the Airport Authority staff to give our concerns their due consideration. Please feel free to call me at 233-3898 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Marco Li Mandri
President, Little Italy Association of San Diego



**Steve Galasso
Chairman of the Board
Little Italy Association of San Diego**

**Tom Fat
Land Use Committee
Little Italy Association of San Diego**

**Cc: Deputy Mayor Michael Zucchet
Hal Sadler, Chairman of CCDC
Peter Hall, CCDC
Chairman Joe Craver, San Diego Regional Airport Authority
Commissioner, Paul Nieto, San Diego Regional Airport Authority
Little Italy Association Board of Directors
Attendees at Little Italy Airport Special Meeting
Supervisor Ron Roberts
Supervisor Greg Cox
Assemblywoman Lori Saldana
State Senator Christine Kehoe
Congresswoman Susan Davis**