

Whitney Berry, Planner, City of San Jose
200 E. Santa Clara St.
San Jose, CA 95113
via email: Whitney.Berry@sanjoseca.gov, Oct. 10, 2014

re: Heritage Oaks Memorial Park, PDC13-016

Dear Ms. Berry,

Writing on my own behalf, I'd like to offer the following comments regarding plans for the Heritage Oaks Memorial Park at the corner of McKean and Bailey Roads. (My apologies if some of the concerns may have been addressed already in the documentation – I didn't find time to read the full document before the deadline for comments....)

I am very concerned about the impact this project will have on the surrounding area. The plan calls for over a hundred acres of cemetery – landscaped, irrigated green lawns on leveled and filled hillsides, at the remote edge of San Jose and adjacent to rustic County Parks and Open Space Preserves. Besides my concerns about the impact to these publicly owned lands, I have concerns about the environment:

- How is the grass to be irrigated? The document mentions that “water [can be] obtained from the SCVWD’s Cross Valley Pipeline”. It’s nice that a water-pipe runs past the property, but that does not mean that it is appropriate for them to use it. There is now a shortage of water in the San Jose area, and the shortage is likely to get worse over the coming years and decades, climate change or not, simply because of the increased demand from the anticipated increase in population. Just because the site happens to be at the head of the pipe does not mean that they should be at the head of the line for water: the dead should not have priority over the living.
- These are plans for a quite large cemetery: it may be growth-inducing. Soon there may be a need to develop facilities for florists, caterers, stone-carvers, all wanting to be in the greenbelt. This is a very rural setting: the residents of the City and the County have been paying taxes for years to acquire these respites from the urban cacophony, and the quiet would be disturbed by the regular parade of funeral processions.
- The document states that project will require 850,000 cubic yds of cut and fill: that’s a lot of dirt! I can’t help but think that that will generate a lot of noise and dust in the vicinity, as well as exhaust from the grading equipment, further impacting the nearby rural and natural parks and open spaces.

For the record:

- I am concerned about the impacts to the adjacent Calero County Park: noise from the initial grading and construction and also from events, plus increased traffic on the adjacent roads, and the visual impacts – the bright green areas and white structures in what should be a natural golden brown hillside with a scattering of oak trees.
- I am concerned about the impacts to the adjacent Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve: again, the noise, traffic, visual impacts.
- I am concerned about impacts to the water supply for Santa Clara Valley.

I attended nearly all of the public meetings for the Envision 2040 General Plan Update. I do recall there was some discussion about whether rural lands could be used for cemeteries. (I think it was rushed thru towards the end of the process, when the taskforce members were tired and ready to be finished.) As I recall, the thought was that the cemeteries would be “natural” (i.e., no grading or filling, with dry golden grass). Additionally, I think that there were limits on what fraction of the land could be developed with structures, and it seems like an end-run around the regulations to just buy extra undevelopable hillsides just to “up” the basis area used in the calculations.

I quite am familiar with the setting: for decades, my wife and I have bicycled these hills, enjoying our short getaways from the stresses of urban living. It’s bad enough that the city granted permits some years ago for a golf-course out there: please do not double-down on that mistake and approve this proposal for a cemetery as well.

Thank you,

Larry Ames,
Committee for Green Foothills Boardmember and former County Parks Commissioner.

cc: Mayor Reed and San Jose Councilmembers
John Davidson, San Jose Planning
Environment: Citizens for a Livable San Jose; Shani Kleinhaus, Audubon Society
Open Space Authority: Andrea Mackenzie, Dorsey Moore, Sequoia Hall, Virginia Holtz
Robb Courtney, Santa Clara County Parks
Barbara Keegan, Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD)
Committee for Green Foothills: Jeff Segall (chair); Alice Kaufman (advocate)