

Newly-Filed Lawsuit Challenges City of San Diego's Massive, Irresponsible Upzoning of Single-Family Neighborhoods

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San Diegans promoting sensible growth and responsible residential density are suing the City over its decision to encourage multi-unit construction in large areas of the city, without proper planning, realistic access to transit, wildfire risk assessment, or adequate funding for sufficient parks, schools, streets and sidewalks, and other basic infrastructure.

The lawsuit – filed Friday, April 7 – challenges the San Diego City Council's recent approval of so-called "Sustainable Development Areas" (SDAs). These new boundaries would incentivize construction of multi-unit backyard apartments on more than 4,600 additional acres in predominantly single-family neighborhoods. Additional acreage includes areas in designated "Specific Plans" that were ignored by the Planning Department's staff report.

These newly-designated SDAs encompass more than 50 percent of the acreage zoned for single-family homes. This vast area includes high-threat fire hazard zones. SDAs would incentivize high-density development up to one mile from an existing or planned bus stop or trolley station. The city's claim that residents will walk a mile to transit is contradicted by numerous federal, state, and local studies that show a steep decline in transit use when buses and trolley stops are located more than a half-mile from homes or apartments.

Four city council members opposed the city's zoning changes, citing concerns about increased traffic and air pollution, the lack of funding for infrastructure (aggravated by a \$5.17 Billion infrastructure deficit), and the need for environmental review of the real-world impacts of this huge density increase.

"These so-called 'Sustainable Development Areas' would in fact push high-density development farther from transit, worsening traffic congestion, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions," said Tom Mullaney of Livable San Diego.

Neighbors For A Better San Diego (NFABSD), a grass-roots community organization with more than three thousand members, strongly supports this legal challenge. Said NFABSD chair Geoff Hueter, "This isn't about whether we should be building more housing, but whether that housing should be added near transit, or a mile away. NFABSD's analysis confirms that the adopted SDA can support more than two million new homes, or 20 times San Diego's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (108,026).

"These figures contradict the narrative that including unfunded future transit stops and expanding the SDA to one mile walking distance is the only way to address San Diego's housing needs. Instead, the City needs to take a hard look at why existing density bonuses have failed to spur enough development on our commercial and transit corridors, where it makes the most sense from the standpoint of climate action and transit equity," Hueter said. ■