

June 24, 2026

Chair Rosario and Members of the Envision San José 2040 General Plan Task Force:

200 East Santa Clara Street
San José, CA 95113

Re: Missing Middle Housing Framework: General Plan Four-Year Review

Dear Chair Rosario and Members of the Envision San José 2040 General Plan Task Force:

The Housing Action Coalition (HAC), SPUR, and Catalyze SV write to urge the San José City Council to adopt an ambitious, workable missing-middle housing framework as part of the General Plan Four-Year Review. We write today because the decisions before this Council, on density, setbacks, and floor area ratio, will determine whether San José's missing-middle program delivers real homes or remains largely aspirational.

Density: The Framework Needs a Higher Floor

We acknowledge that the staff's proposal of 32 dwelling units per acre aligns with Housing Element Strategy Policy P-35, and we appreciate that it reflects a genuine attempt to move the needle. But 32 du/acre is not enough to make most missing-middle projects financially viable, particularly given land costs, labor costs, and the financing environment in the South Bay. The Turner Center's Housing Policy Simulator makes clear that allowing at least six units per parcel, including in high-opportunity neighborhoods, is the threshold at which policy begins to meaningfully shift housing supply.

We were encouraged to hear Task Force members repeatedly call for a 40 du/acre minimum, and we urge the Council to adopt that floor or go further. A program that looks strong on paper but fails to generate viable projects will not address the affordability crisis driving residents and workers out of San José. Density must be high enough to make the math work.

Setbacks, Stepbacks, and Other Development Standards: Flexibility Over Uniformity

We support staff's recommendation to look to Berkeley as a model for flexible setback standards, and we encourage the Council to adopt that approach. Rigid rear-yard setbacks, applied uniformly regardless of site conditions, adjacency, or actual impact, unnecessarily constrain buildable area on infill lots. Where impacts are genuinely limited or site-specific, the framework should give developers and designers the flexibility to respond accordingly. Well-intentioned but overly uniform standards produce programs that appear strong on paper but deliver minimal housing in practice.

Floor Area Ratio: Adopt 1.25 and Keep It Simple

State law (Government Code section 65913.11) already requires cities to allow qualifying projects to achieve a FAR of at least 1.0 for projects with 3 to 7 units, and 1.25 for projects with

8 to 10 units. If San José chooses to regulate through FAR, the simplest and most effective approach is to adopt a uniform standard of 1.25 across missing-middle projects. Complex exemption structures and tiered standards create compliance burdens, discourage smaller builders, and open the door to uneven application. Clarity serves everyone: the city, developers, and the residents who ultimately benefit from new housing. We encourage the city to continue to prioritize density, as townhomes alone cannot be the only typology built because they are often low density and car-centric.

San José has a genuine opportunity here. A missing-middle framework with sufficient density,, flexible setbacks, and a clear FAR standard can close the affordability gap between deeply subsidized housing and a \$2 million home and expand access to the high-opportunity neighborhoods where this city's future growth should be concentrated. We urge the Council to be bold.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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