



UPTOWN PLANNERS

November 15, 2023

Heidi Vonblum
Director, Planning Department
City of San Diego

RE: **Position on Plan Hillcrest Draft Focused Plan Amendment to Uptown Community Plan**

This letter notifies you of the position that Uptown Planners took at its November 7th board meeting on the Planning Department's draft of its proposed amendment to the Uptown Community Plan, which the Planning Department has titled the "Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment."

Given the current timeline for approval now that we have finally been presented with a draft of the actual Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment, we must have more time to consider what its changes mean to our entire Uptown Community Plan. If we do not receive more time to do this, and this plan is moved forward anyway, then we have no choice but to reject it and the changes that it proposes.

Uptown Planners board members expressed strong views about this project being too consequential—for Hillcrest, Uptown, and our entire city—not to have sufficient informed public input and substantive official community group consideration about the specifics of what is a substantially altered community plan. In order to potentially affect the outcome, such reviews would need to take place before presentation to the Planning Commission and other agencies.

To provide some factual context for the Uptown Planners position: Over three years ago the Planning Department announced its self-generated "Plan Hillcrest" initiative to radically expand the area and nature of policies included in Uptown's approved 2016 Community Plan for the Hillcrest "core" and for recognition of Hillcrest's LGBTQ history.

What ensued were a series of Planning Department slide show presentations (most led by consultants), featuring what were described as options, and which options typically were outlined only superficially and without substantiating research. The Planning Department also engaged in sporadic collection of feedback by various methods, none of which took the form of reliable research and all of which Planning Department staff characterized to Uptown Planners as nondeterminative.

While Planning Department staff sometimes made its presentations at meetings of the Uptown Planners ad hoc Plan Hillcrest Committee, Planning Department staff always worked independently, never collaborating with the Plan Hillcrest Committee to determine whether or how to develop the various options proposed. Often the Planning Department did not even give notice to Uptown Planners of presumably public outreach events, which Planning Department staff stated were with staff-selected "smaller groups."

Then, on October 6th, the Planning Department publicly provided a comprehensive amendment of the entire Uptown Community Plan, setting its deadline for receiving comments as November 17th.

The draft that the public was given just six weeks to review included changes to every section of the approved 2016 Uptown Community Plan, expanding it in length from 224 to 280 pages (a 20% increase). Multiple detailed maps were replaced, each of which would be time-consuming to review. Strikingly, and without prior notice, despite the misleading term “focused” in the amendment title, a number of the changes proposed significantly alter aspects of the plan that affect all six of the neighborhoods in Uptown, not just Hillcrest, with potential effects even more far-reaching.

In addition, while the changes proposed to the plan supposedly all were flagged in a 24-page Summary of Changes, that document has proved to be incomplete, inaccurate, and inadequate as a guide. The draft also was provided to the public only in a PDF format that is not consecutively paginated and contains no internal links, making it difficult to navigate or to cross-reference to the Summary. Based upon multiple requests, the Planning Department recently promised a limited number of publicly available bound copies but has not yet provided them.

Importantly, the Planning Department was unavailable to brief the Plan Hillcrest Committee on the proposed plan until November 9th, which, as our CPG Liaison in the Planning Department is aware, is a date that fell after the regularly scheduled November meeting of Uptown Planners, giving the board no meaningful chance to respond.

When Uptown Planners requested an extension of the comment deadline, that request was refused. Being told that this is “just a first draft” is not reassuring because of the aggressive timeline the Planning Department has announced for moving the proposal forward early next year.

Please confirm your receipt of the Uptown Planners position statement provided in this letter. And please note this statement on the City of San Diego’s official website:

A community plan is developed through a partnership of the recognized Community Planning Group, the public, and City staff, working together to identify land use policies and recommendation[s] to guide future development of the community.

This letter is copied to the Chair of the Community Planners Committee, our District 3 Councilmember, and the Mayor to advise that no such partnership has taken place in developing the proposed massive and widely impactful amendment to the Uptown Community Plan.

Best regards,



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cc:
Todd Gloria, Mayor
Stephen Whitburn, Councilmember District 3
Shannon Corr, Senior Planner, Planning Department
Andrea Schlageter, Chair, Community Planners Committee