



# DAVID CRABBE ARCHITECT

ARCHITECTURE • PLANNING • INTERIOR DESIGN

September 7, 2016

Mayor and Members of the Brisbane City Council  
C/O City Clerk

RE: Baylands Development

First, I want to acknowledge all the time the City has spent on this Plan. I know there have been many long and contentious Community and Planning Commission meetings.

However, I have some serious concerns about the results of all that work.

**1. Sustainability.** The current Plan is touted as being sustainable, but Brisbane has defined sustainability only through an environmental lens. Your Sustainability Guidelines address the 3Es of sustainability – the Environment, Economy, and Social Equity, but this Plan addresses only the Environment. It fails on social equity and it fails on the economy.

**2. Social equity.** It is clear that the greatest problem right now in San Mateo County is the glaring imbalance between jobs created and the provision of new housing for those new employees to live in. You see it everywhere. In every city up and down the Peninsula. This Plan can be expected to generate up to 6,700<sup>1</sup> or more new jobs which will require housing for about 4,500<sup>2</sup> families. Yet this Plan includes absolutely no housing. Instead it creates lots of jobs and foists the provision of housing onto adjacent communities who are struggling themselves to provide housing for their own citizens. This is not only selfish planning, but it is unsustainable planning. It is worth noting here that the Paragon plan is even more out of balance as they propose slightly less than 7M s.f. of commercial development and only 4,400 units of housing. 7M s.f. commercial can be expected to generate up to 23,000<sup>1</sup> new jobs requiring 15,500<sup>2</sup> new housing units. Without a more equitable balance between jobs and housing, this robust regional economy of ours is going to eventually implode returning Brisbane and the Region back to the economy of the great recession of 2008-11 leaving empty office and R&D buildings and underwater home mortgages. Without balance, there is instability. This Plan should include a enough housing to offset the number of jobs being created.

**3. The economy.** The March 22 Economic Feasibility memorandum said the cost to remediate, restore and develop infrastructure for future development could run anywhere from \$600K to \$1B. There is no way the limited development in the proposed Plan can support a cost of that scale. This Plan is economically unfeasible if you wish to create all the parkland and do all the environmental remediation work you propose. Either the scope of the development needs to be increased or the scope of environmental improvements needs to be reduced.

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**4. TOD.** This Plan is touted as transit-oriented, yet all the illustrative examples I have seen by the consultant show widely-spaced buildings and vast numbers of parking spaces. This leads me to the conclusion that staff and the consultants do not really believe that this Plan is really transit-oriented. The areas closest to the Caltrain station and Geneva Avenue which are the most suitable areas for TOD are instead set aside for developments with the least need for TOD. ie. 1) Recology which will have few employees, but generate lots of truck traffic, 2) the renewable energy farm which will require very few employees, 3) the lumberyard and tank farm which will need few employees, but generate lots of vehicle traffic, and 4) Caltrain parking which, by definition, will generate auto traffic. The R&D west of the train station will generate lots of employees, but may or may not be transit-oriented depending on how the campus is designed. Unless the campus includes a mix of service and restaurant uses within the R&D zoning, employees will choose to drive their cars off campus at lunch time to find food and do errands. The small retail & recreation area around the roundhouse may pull employees from the R&D, but in order to be economically viable, will need to serve more than just the adjacent R&D and most likely be designed as auto-oriented.

TOD means not just being near transit, but designed to encourage transit use. This site is close to several different transportation options - an ideal location for properly designed transit-oriented development, the kind of development that creates a real community with a balance of complementary uses including R&D as in the current Plan, but also housing and mixed-use as proposed in the Paragon Plan. It should not be planned only as a free-standing research campus.

The City of Brisbane already has many more jobs than employed residents. Saying yes to new jobs without new housing will further exacerbate the housing/jobs imbalance in the region, and add traffic to the Baylands, rather than reduce it. The DEIR backs up this point by recognizing that if housing is built in balance with commercial development, many of the new residents may choose to walk or bike to work rather than driving, thus mitigating potential traffic impacts.

#### **5. Political Considerations:**

It is my impression that one of the main objections to including housing in the Plan is the fear that adding a community of 4,400 or more housing units located some distance from existing houses in central Brisbane will dilute the political influence of the existing residents when considering future policy decisions. This is a reasonable concern which needs to be addressed.

One way this potential political imbalance could be resolved would be for Brisbane to consider splitting off the northern end of the Baylands through LAFCO so that San Francisco or San Mateo County could be given authority over that portion of the site to develop housing. I believe both entities would be interested in such a deal as both are very concerned about the lack of housing in the area and are desperately trying to come up with ways to resolve it.

Such a land swap could benefit Brisbane by separating the areas dedicated to housing from the areas dedicated to commercial and solar development. In other words, Brisbane could benefit from the taxes generated by commercial development and the energy generated by the solar farm, but the political balance in the city would not be changed. It would also reduce the area of the site where Brisbane would need to finance site remediation and development. This solution could also give Brisbane recognition for helping the region cope with the lack of housing, rather than be seen as adding to the problem. Please give this suggestion serious consideration.

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**6. Plan Opponents:** Bay area organizations opposed to the current Plan include both environmental, housing, and business interests. They include: The Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County, Bay Area Council, Greenbelt Alliance, SAMCEDA, and SPUR. Seldom does such a diverse mixture of interests find common cause over a development plan. Please give their concerns serious consideration.

**7. To conclude:**

- The Plan should address all 3Es of sustainability – Environment, Economy, and Social Equity, not just the Environment.
- The Plan should include a balance of jobs and housing.
- The Plan should be robust enough so that fees and taxes from development will cover the huge cost of environmental remediation and restoration for the entire site.
- The Plan should take full advantage of its transit-rich location to create a truly mixed-use community, especially towards Geneva Avenue and the Caltrain station to assure it is truly Transit-oriented.
- Consider using LAFCO to split off the northern portion of the site for housing development under another City’s jurisdiction.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Crabbe

<sup>1</sup> Rule of thumb = 300 sf per job in R&D. May be as little as 150 sf per job in office buildings.

<sup>2</sup> Rule of thumb = 1.5 jobs per dwelling unit

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