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August 19, 2025

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Re: <u>Antioch Planning Commission Hearing, Agenda Item 6-2; Slatten</u> Ranch Townhomes Project (TM-01, AR-23-01)

Dear Chair Riley, Vice-Chair Webber, Commissioners, Mr. Scudero, and Ms. Merideth:

We are writing on behalf of Contra Costa Residents for Responsible Development ("Contra Costa Residents") to provide comments on Agenda Item 6-2, the Slatten Ranch Townhomes Project (TM-01, AR-23-01) ("Slatten Ranch Project" or "Project") proposed by DeNova Homes, Inc. ("Applicant"). The Project consists of a vesting tentative map to create 17 residential lots of 17 three-story buildings, containing 129 townhome-style condominium homes. The Project site is a 6.41 acre site located on the east side and northern end of Slatten Ranch Road, bounded by Wicklow Way on the south and Empire Avenue on the east in the City of Antioch

¹ City of Antioch, Slatten Ranch Townhomes Section 15183 Consistency Memorandum, p. 2.

("City").² The Staff Report claims that the Project is exempt from further CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 because it was adequately analyzed by the Antioch Housing, Environmental hazards, and Environmental Justice Elements Project Environmental Impact Report ("Housing Element EIR").³ As such, the Staff Report asks the Commission to recommend that the City Council approve the Project's Vesting Tentative Subdivision Map ("VTSM"), and Design Review ("DR").⁴

On July 15, 2025, Contra Costa Residents submitted comments, supported by expert evidence, explaining that the Project is likely to result in peculiar impacts that were not identified or analyzed in the Housing Element EIR or the 15183 Consistency Memorandum, thereby requiring preparation of a full EIR. Specifically, Contra Costa Residents' expert reports included evidence demonstrating that the Project may result in potentially significant and peculiar impacts on air quality, public health, transportation, and noise. Our transportation expert determined that the Project will likely cause significant vehicle miles traveled ("VMT") impacts, which were improperly screened from a full analysis. Additionally, the City failed to analyze noise impacts specific to the Project, while our noise expert identified significant construction noise and vibration impacts that are unique to the Project site and were not addressed in the Housing Element EIR. Finally, neither the Consistency Memorandum nor the Housing Element EIR included emissions modeling to assess Project-specific air quality and public health impacts.

The Commission's Staff Report includes responses to these comments ("Responses"). However, the City's responses fail to resolve the deficiencies in the Project's impact analysis. As discussed in detail below, the Project will result in significant, site-specific air quality, public health, transportation, and noise impacts that were not previously analyzed in the Housing Element EIR. In addition, the City has failed to provide substantial evidence demonstrating that Housing Element policies and/or standards will substantially mitigate these Project-specific impacts. These comments are supported by additional expert evidence. Contra Costa Residents' air quality and public health experts Matt Hagemann, P.G., C.Hg, and Paul Rosenfeld, Ph.D. of Soil Water Air Protection Enterprises ("SWAPE"),

 $^{^2}$ Id.

³ City of Antioch, Slatten Ranch Townhomes Staff Report to the Antioch Planning Commission Regular Meeting of August 2025 ("Slatten Staff Report"), p. 10, available at: https://www.antiochca.gov/fc/government/agendas/PC/staff-reports/082025-6-2.pdf.

⁴ Slatten Staff Report, p. 1.

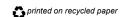
⁵ Slatten Staff Report, Attachment D p. D37.

provide substantial evidence demonstrating that the Project will have peculiar air quality and public health impacts from construction-related diesel particulate matter ("DPM") emissions that the Housing Element EIR did not address. 6 Contra Costa Residents' noise consultant, Jack Meighan, demonstrates that the City lacks substantial evidence to conclude that the Project's noise levels will not exceed General Plan policies or result in peculiar noise impacts because it failed to conduct a noise attenuation study. 7 Contra Costa Residents' transportation consultant, Norm Marshall, provides substantial evidence that the Project was improperly screened from a full VMT analysis and that the City lacks substantial evidence to conclude the Project will not result in site-specific VMT impacts that were not addressed in the Housing Element EIR. 8

The City has failed to provide substantial evidence demonstrating that the Project will not result in significant site-specific environmental impacts. Contra Costa Residents' expert consultants have also provided substantial evidence that the Project will result in significant impacts that neither the Housing Element EIR nor the 15183 Consistency Memorandum addressed. As a result, the Project is not exempt from further CEQA review and the City must prepare an EIR that analyzes all of the Project's potentially significant environmental impacts before the Commission may consider approving the Project or its entitlements.

I. STATEMENT OF INTEREST

Contra Costa Residents is an unincorporated association of individuals and labor organizations that may be adversely affected by the potential public and worker health and safety hazards, and the environmental and public service impacts of the Project. The coalition includes the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 302, Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 159, Sheet Metal Workers Local 104, Sprinkler Fitters Local 483, along with their members, their families, and other individuals who live and work in the City of Antioch and Contra Costa County.



⁶ See **Exhibit A,** SWAPE, Comments on Slatten Ranch 8.20 Planning Commission Hearing Staff Report (August 18, 2025) ("SWAPE Comments").

⁷ See **Exhibit B,** Jack Meighan, Comments on Slatten Ranch 8.20 Planning Commission Hearing Staff Report (August 18, 2025) ("Meighan Comments").

⁸ See **Exhibit C**, Norm Marshall, Comments on Slatten Ranch 8.20 Planning Commission Hearing Staff Report (August 18, 2025) ("Marshall Comments").

Contra Costa Residents' individual members live, work, recreate, and raise their families in the City of Antioch and surrounding communities. Accordingly, they would be directly affected by the Project's environmental, health, and safety impacts. Individual members may also work on the Project itself. They will be first in line to be exposed to any health and safety hazards that exist on site.

Contra Costa Residents also has an interest in enforcing environmental laws that encourage sustainable development and ensure a safe working environment for its members. Environmentally detrimental projects can jeopardize future jobs by making it more difficult and more expensive for businesses and industries to expand in the region, and by making the area less desirable for new businesses and new residents. Indeed, continued environmental degradation can, and has, caused construction moratoriums and other restrictions on growth that, in turn, reduce future employment opportunities.

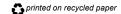
II. THE PROJECT INVOLVES POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT OR PECULIAR IMPACTS THAT PRECLUDE RELIANCE ON CEQA GUIDELINES SECTION 15183 EXEMPTION

CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 provides an exemption for projects which are consistent with the development density established by existing zoning, community plan or general plan policies for which an EIR was certified, except as necessary to evaluate whether there are project-specific significant impacts which are peculiar to the project or project site. In relying on section 15183 to approve a project, a lead agency may not forgo further analysis of potentially significant impacts unless it makes certain findings. An agency is required to perform further analysis as to impacts that (1) are peculiar to the proposed project or parcel, (2) were not analyzed as significant effects in a prior EIR for the zoning, community or general plan with which the project is consistent, (3) are potentially significant off-site or cumulative impacts that were not discussed in the prior EIR, or (4) are previously identified significant impacts which, due to substantial new information not known at the time the EIR was certified, are determined to have a more severe impact than discussed in the prior EIR. In the prior EIR the project is consistent to the project in the prior EIR. In the prior EIR the project is consistent to the project in the prior EIR the project in the project in

Under section 15183(f), an effect of a project on the environment is not considered peculiar to the project or project site if "uniformly applied development policies or standards have been previously adopted ...with a finding that the

¹⁰ 14 CCR § 15183(b)(1)-(4).





^{9 14} CCR § 15183(a).

development policies or standards will substantially mitigate the environmental effect when applied to future projects, unless substantial new information shows that the policies or standards will not substantially mitigate the environmental effect."¹¹

Agency determinations under Guidelines section 15183 are reviewed under the substantial evidence standard. ¹² In determining whether an agency's findings concerning the use of a statutory exemption from CEQA may be upheld, courts review the administrative record to see that substantial evidence supports each element of the exemption. ¹³ This includes the determination that "uniformly applied development policies or standards" will substantially mitigate the project's environmental effects. ¹⁴ Agency findings must specifically address the effect of uniform policies and standards on potential environmental impacts. ¹⁵

In addition, CEQA Guidelines section 15168's two-step inquiry of a program EIR's applicability to later activities holds that "if a later activity would have effects that were not examined in the program EIR, a new initial study would need to be prepared leading to either an EIR or a negative declaration." The City insists that, pursuant to sections 15162 and 15183, the Project is within the scope of the program EIR and no subsequent EIR is required. "Whether a later activity is within the scope of a program EIR is a factual question that the lead agency determines based on substantial evidence in the record." 16

Contra Costa Resident's previous comments explained that the 15183 Consistency Memo failed to examine several of the Project's significant impacts related to air quality, health risks, transportation, and noise that were not analyzed in the Housing Element EIR and are thus peculiar to the proposed Project. In response to these comments, the City revised its 15183 Consistency Memorandum and now reasserts that the Project would not result in any significant or peculiar environmental impacts that require the preparation of an EIR.

¹¹ 14 CCR § 15183(f).

¹² Lucas v. City of Pomona (2023) 92 Cal.App.5th 508, 538, citing Concerned Dublin Citizens v. City of Dublin (2103) 214 Cal.App.4th 1301, 1311; see also, Hilltop Group v. County of San Diego (2024) 99 Cal.App.5th 890, 909-10.

¹³ *Lucas*, 92 Cal.App.5th at 538.

¹⁴ 14 CCR § 15183(f).

¹⁵ Hilltop Group, 99 Cal.App.5th at 918.

¹⁶ CEQA Guidelines § 15168.

The City's response fails to address the concerns in Contra Costa Residents' comments, and its conclusion that the Project will not result in significant and peculiar impacts is not supported by substantial evidence. As the comments below demonstrate, there is substantial evidence that the Project will result in significant and peculiar impacts to air quality, public health, transportation, and noise that the Housing Element EIR, and the City's responses, and the revised Consistency Memorandum fail to address. This evidence precludes the City from relying on the CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 exemption to avoid further CEQA review. In order to comply with CEQA, the City must prepare an EIR that analyzes the Project's potentially significant and peculiar impacts.

A. The Project's Diesel Particulate Matter Emissions Will Have Significant, Unmitigated Air Quality and Public Health Impacts That are More Severe Than Analyzed in The Housing Element EIR

Contra Costa Residents' previous comments demonstrated that the City lacks substantial evidence to conclude that the Project would not result in significant air quality or public health impacts peculiar to the Project or Project site. The Housing Element EIR did not evaluate Project-specific emissions, and the City did not conduct any emissions modeling to assess the potential impacts from the Project's construction or operation.

The City's response continues to ignore potentially significant and site-specific air quality and health risks associated with DPM emissions during construction. In particular, the City failed to prepare a health risk analysis ("HRA"). Contra Costa Residents' air quality experts, SWAPE, conducted a screening-level HRA for the Project¹⁷ and found that the Project would emit approximately 125 pounds of DPM during its 453-day construction period and an additional 20 net pounds annually during operation. ¹⁸ Based on these emissions, SWAPE calculated lifetime cancer risks (30 years) of 46.4 in one million, with age-specific risks of 32.5, 10.1, and 15.6 in one million for infants, children, and adults, respectively. ¹⁹ These risks all exceed the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's ("BAAQMD") significance threshold of 10 in one million. ²⁰ These are significant and peculiar air quality and public health risks that were not addressed in the Housing Element

¹⁷ SWAPE Comments, pp. 1-7.

¹⁸ SWAPE Comments, p. 2.

¹⁹ SWAPE Comments, p. 7.

²⁰ SWAPE Comments, p. 7.

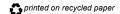
EIR or the City's 15183 Consistency Memo.²¹ Because of this, SWAPE explains that a refined HRA should be conducted to adequately and accurately evaluate the Project's potential health risks from DPM emissions.²²

The City also fails to provide substantial evidence demonstrating that the Project's DPM emissions will be reduced to less-than-significant levels. The City has not identified or committed to any Project-specific mitigation measures to address these emissions. Instead, the City asserts that general compliance with existing air quality regulations is sufficient to avoid significant impacts. As SWAPE explains, if the City's refined HRA finds that the Project would not result in significant health risk impacts, then mitigation measures should be incorporated to reduce DPM emissions to the greatest extent feasible, as required by CEQA. ²³ SWAPE goes on to identify several feasible, cost-effective mitigation measures that the City could implement to substantially reduce DPM emissions. ²⁴

There is substantial evidence that the Project will result in significant and site-specific air quality and health risk impacts. These impacts were not addressed in the Housing Element EIR or the City's 15183 Consistency Memorandum. The City has also failed to propose any DPM specific mitigation measures or provide any evidence to demonstrate that impacts from DPM emissions will be mitigated to the greatest extent feasible. Accordingly, the City cannot rely on the CEQA Section 15183 exemption. The City must prepare an EIR that evaluates the Project-specific, significant air quality and health risk impacts and proposes mitigation measures that will reduce impacts to the greatest extent feasible, as required by CEQA.

B. The Project Will Have Significant, Unmitigated Noise Impacts That are More Severe Than Analyzed in The Housing Element EIR

Contra Costa Residents' and its noise expert's previous comments demonstrated that the City lacks substantial evidence to conclude that the Project will not result in significant and peculiar noise impacts to existing sensitive receptors. The City failed to conduct any site-specific noise analysis to evaluate the Project's potential to generate excessive construction noise or vibration. Our noise expert also provided substantial evidence showing that the Project is likely to result



²¹ SWAPE Comments, p. 7.

 $^{^{22}}$ *Id*.

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²⁴ SWAPE Comments, p. 8.

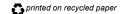
in significant construction and vibration impacts that are peculiar to the Projectsite.

In response, the City claims that the Project's noise impacts will not be peculiar because construction noise would be mitigated through compliance with the City of Antioch Code of Ordinance and General Plan policies. Specifically, the City asserts that compliance with General Plan Policy 11.8.2 ("Policy") will substantially mitigate impacts. But, the City also claims that the Project does not need to prepare a noise attenuation study—as required under subsection (f) of the Policy—because "the City has determined that the Project would not result in a significant increase in noise and because the project is not located in an area exceeding the General Plan noise standards.²⁵ This response is inadequate, unsupported, and misrepresents the housing Element EIR's own findings.

The Housing Element EIR explicitly states that "[i]ndividual housing developments proposed under the Project would result in a potentially significant impact if they cause a new exceedance of the General Plan noise objectives, or an audible (3.0 dBA) increase in noise in areas where the General Plan noise objectives are already exceeded as the result of existing development..." ²⁶ In such cases, "General Plan Policy 11.8.2(f) requires a detailed noise attenuation study to be prepared by a qualified acoustical engineer to determine appropriate mitigation and ways to incorporate such mitigation into project design and implementation." ²⁷ Yet the City has provided no analysis to determine whether either of these conditions apply to the Project. ²⁸ Instead, it simply asserts, without baseline noise measurements or supporting data, that the Project would not trigger these thresholds. ²⁹

As Mr. Meighan explains, site-specific baseline noise measurements are essential to determining whether the Project will exceed General Plan noise thresholds or cause a significant increase in ambient noise.³⁰ Site-specific noise levels vary significantly based on factors such as surrounding land uses, topography, traffic patterns, and building design.³¹ Absent this data, the City lacks the substantial evidence necessary to determine whether the Project will comply

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²⁵ Slatten Staff Report, Attachment D, p. D77.

²⁶ Housing Element EIR, p. IV.L-10.

²⁷ Housing Element EIR, p. IV.L-13.

²⁸ Meighan Comments, p. 1.

²⁹ Meighan Comments, p. 1.

³⁰ Meighan Comments, p. 1.

³¹ *Id*.

with General Plan noise standards, and therefore cannot justify its conclusion that a noise attenuation study is not necessary.³²

Moreover, Mr. Meighan's previous comments provided substantial evidence that the project may result in significant construction-related noise and vibration impacts. The City has failed to provide any evidence to rebut this analysis. Instead, it relies solely on the assertion that compliance with the City of Antioch Code of Ordinances and General Plan policies will be sufficient to reduce noise impacts to less-than-significant levels. While the Housing Element EIR generally found that compliance with these standards could mitigate impacts, the City has not demonstrated that it is complying with these policies. Specifically, it has failed to prepare the noise attenuation study required by Policy 11.8.2(f), nor has it provided any site-specific analysis or data to justify its conclusion that the study is unnecessary. Without this, the City lacks substantial evidence to support its determination that the Project's noise impacts will not be significant or peculiar to the site.

Because the City has failed to demonstrate—based on substantial evidence—that the Project will not result in significant and peculiar noise impacts, it cannot rely on CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 exemption. The City must prepare an EIR that includes an analysis of the Project-specific noise impacts.

C. The City Lacks Substantial Evidence to Conclude That the Project Will Not Result in Peculiar and Significant VMT Impacts

Contra Costa Residents' previous comments made clear that the City's failure to perform a quantitative Vehicle Miles Traveled ("VMT") analysis violates Mitigation Measure TRANS-1 ("TRANS-1") of the Housing Element EIR. Without this analysis, the City cannot determine the extent to which the Project exceeds VMT significance thresholds, nor can it identify the type or effectiveness of mitigation required to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level. The City's claim that a full VMT analysis is unnecessary was based on circular reasoning and lacked substantial evidence to demonstrate that the Project would not have impacts peculiar to the Project or Project site as required by CEQA Guidelines Section 15183.

In response to these comments, the City revised the 15183 Consistency Memorandum to acknowledge that TRANS-1 applies to the Project. However, the

³² *Id.* at pp. 1-2.

⁷²¹⁵⁻⁰⁰⁶acp

City fails to adequately address Contra Costa Residents' or Mr. Marshall's concerns. The City still fails to conduct the required quantitative VMT analysis, instead deferring it until after Project approval by including it as a Condition of Approval ("COA"). "By deferring environmental assessment to a future date, the conditions run counter to that policy of CEQA which requires environmental review at the earliest feasible stage in the planning process." This approach also directly contradicts TRANS-1, which clearly states that "[i]ndividual housing project development proposals that do not screen out from VMT impact analysis shall provide a quantitative VMT analysis." The City's justification—that TRANS-1 itself operates as a uniformly applicable development standard capable of substantially mitigating the Project's impacts—is a misreading of the Housing Element EIR. The Housing Element EIR explicitly acknowledges that it did not evaluate VMT impacts at the project level, stating:

"While Mitigation Measure TRANS-1 could reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level, the effectiveness of the above measures in reducing an individual project's VMT impact to a less-than-significant level cannot be determined in this analysis." ³⁶

The City specifically recognizes that the proposed Project does not screen out from VMT analysis.³⁷ Therefore, the City is required to conduct a full, Project-specific quantitative VMT analysis *before* Project approval. Deferring this analysis violates the clear terms of TRANS-1 and precludes the City from relying on the CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 exemption, as it lacks substantial evidence to conclude that the Project would not result in significant and peculiar impacts.

Further compounding the issue, the City's COA only requires that the Project reduce VMT "to the maximum extent feasible, in light of project objectives and the nature of the project, to the satisfaction of the Community Development Department." This unlawfully weakens the language of TRANS-1, which states that "Projects which result in a significant impact shall include travel demand management measures and physical measures to reduce VMT to a less-than-significant level." Also, this condition violates CEQA by precluding public review

³³ Marshall Comments, pp. 1-4.

³⁴ Sundstrom v. County of Mendocino (1998) 202 Cal.App.3d 296, 305.

³⁵ Housing Element EIR, p. IV.B-27; Marshall Comments, p. 2.

³⁶ Housing Element EIR, p. IV.B-30.

³⁷ Slatten Staff Report, Attachment D, p. D75.

³⁸ Slatten Staff Report, Attachment D, p. D75.

³⁹ Housing Element EIR, p. IV.B-27 (emphasis added); Marshall Comments, p. 3.

and prevents the Planning Commission from making a fully informed decision regarding the Project's impacts. Instead, it allows a post-approval determination of the Project's impacts and the efficacy of any mitigation measures by an unidentified person in the City's Community Development Department.⁴⁰

Moreover, by deferring the VMT analysis and mitigation to a post-approval phase, the City violates CEQA's requirements for tiered review and mitigation of previously identified significant and unavoidable impacts. In *Communities for a Better Env't v. California Resources Agency*, the court held that when a lead agency approves a subsequent project with significant unavoidable impacts, it cannot rely solely on a previously adopted statement of overriding considerations.⁴¹ Instead, it must adopt a new, Project-specific statement of overriding considerations at the time of approval.⁴² Accordingly, by failing to conduct the required VMT analysis, the City also sidesteps its obligation to adopt a new statement of overriding considerations for those potentially significant and unavoidable impacts.

Therefore, the City fails to adequately address Contra Costa Residents' previous comments or provide substantial evidence to demonstrate that the Project will not result in significant site-specific VMT impacts. Accordingly, the City cannot rely on the CEQA Guidelines Section 15185 exemption and must prepare an EIR.

III. THE CITY LACKS SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE TO MAKE THE REQUIRED FINDINGS TO APPROVE THE PROJECTS ENTITLEMENTS

The Project requires the City to approve a VTSM for condominium purposes that would subdivide the project site for the development of 17 townhome buildings, containing a total of 129 residential units. 43 However, as discussed above, the City has failed to adequately address Contra Costa Residents' previous comments and thus still fails to adequately analyze or mitigate several new Project-specific environmental impacts that were not addressed by the Housing Element EIR. As a result, the City cannot make the requisite findings to approve the Project's VTSM.

California's Subdivision Map Act precludes the approval of a tentative map where the design or improvement of the proposed subdivision is not consistent with

⁴³ Slatten Staff Report, p. 1.



⁴⁰ Slatten Staff Report, Attachment D, p. D75; Marshall Comments, p. 3.

⁴¹ Communities for a Better Env't v. California Resources Agency (2002) 103 CA4th 98, 124.

 $^{^{42}}$ *Id*.

the applicable general plan, is likely to cause substantial environmental damage, or is likely to cause serious public health problems. 44

Additionally, Antioch Municipal Code Section 9-4.323 states that a VTSM may be made conditional or denied if any of the following is determined:

- A failure to do so would place the residents of the subdivision or the immediate community, or both, in a condition dangerous to their health or safety, or both; or
- The condition or denial is required in order to comply with state or federal laws.

As detailed in our comments and those of our experts, there is substantial evidence that the Project may result in several potentially significant environmental impacts peculiar to the Project, including: (1) construction noise and vibration, (2) VMT, and (3) air quality and related health risks. These impacts remain unaddressed and could pose serious risks to public health and safety—both for future subdivision residents and the surrounding community. Therefore, the City cannot make the required findings under the Subdivision Map Act and Antioch's Municipal Code to approve the VTSM until all of the Project's potentially significant impacts are thoroughly analyzed and effectively mitigated.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

As discussed herein, the City lacks substantial evidence to rely on a CEQA Guidelines Section 15183 exemption for Project approval. The Project will result in potentially significant impacts which are peculiar to the Project and Project site and will require mitigation. Therefore, the Commission cannot approve the Project until the City complies with CEQA by preparing an EIR.

Sincerely,

Alaura McGuire

Attachments ARM:acp

⁴⁴ Government Code § 66474(b), (e) and (f).