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Safeguard Our San Diego Countryside Ballot Initiative Gives Voters a Voice

“Yes on SOS” would give voters power to prioritize sensible growth and affordable homes, increase transparency, reduce sprawl and stop back-room developer deals

SAN DIEGO – The grassroots “Yes on SOS” campaign has [launched its website](#) in support of the Safeguard Our San Diego Countryside ballot initiative, which will appear on the March 2020 ballot. The initiative requires voter approval of any San Diego County General Plan amendments that would allow sprawling housing developments in rural and semi-rural areas of the county. Currently this type of amendment can be approved simply by a majority vote of the Board of Supervisors, leaving the process open to undue influence by developers who contribute funds to Supervisors’ political campaigns.

The San Diego County General Plan directs future growth and development in the unincorporated areas of the county. The Plan was developed over 13 years with \$18 million in taxpayer funds and input from government agencies, the building industry, community groups, fire professionals and other stakeholders. It takes a sustainable approach to development, balancing the need for infrastructure, housing and economic vitality with the need to protect communities, agricultural areas and open space. The Plan accommodates a range of housing stock, including affordable housing, in areas with existing infrastructure and lower fire risk.

“San Diego County already has a good plan that identifies the most appropriate places to build up more housing throughout the backcountry. In fact, there are tens of thousands of units that could be built without making any changes to the General Plan,” said Susan Baldwin, president of San Diegans for Managed Growth, the group which is spearheading the initiative. “We need SOS to remind developers and our local elected officials to follow the plan instead of constantly looking for self-serving opportunities to go around it.”

Currently, the Board of Supervisors can grant a General Plan Amendment to allow developers to build large housing developments on land that is zoned for agriculture, open space or very low-density development. SOS would bring transparency and oversight into the approval process for large new rural developments by requiring developers to better justify those that are contrary to the goals of the General Plan.

The county’s General Plan already allows for more than 60,000 new homes to be built in areas that make the most sense: close to existing homes, jobs, schools, fire and police services and other

infrastructure. SOS encourages developers to follow the General Plan by focusing on building homes in these areas. Projects providing genuine low-income housing would be exempt from the initiative's restrictions. With SOS, voters get to decide if they want to approve far-flung developments of high cost homes that would require new, taxpayer-funded infrastructure.

In recent years, the Board of Supervisors has adopted a number of General Plan Amendments to allow sprawling housing developments in high fire-risk rural areas of the county. Once built, these developments will increase traffic and commute times, create bottlenecks during fire evacuations, degrade wildlife habitat, and drive up taxpayer costs to provide new infrastructure. These projects bring big profits to developers but harm communities.

“San Diego County desperately needs more housing in the right places. It’s time for the Board of Supervisors and developers to get serious about focusing on infill housing and development close to existing jobs and services,” added Phil Pryde, former chair of the San Diego County Planning Commission, who has also endorsed the initiative. “SOS sends a signal to the building industry that they need to follow the General Plan.”

The Yes on SOS initiative has been endorsed by Buena Vista Audubon, California Chaparral Institute, Citizens Coordinate for Century 3, Cleveland National Forest Foundation, Elfin Forest Harmony Grove Town Council, Endangered Habitats League, Escondido Chamber of Citizens, League of Women Voters, Preserve Calavera, San Diego 350, San Diego Audubon Society, San Diego County Democrats for Environmental Action, San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy, Sierra Club, Stay Cool and Volcan Mountain Foundation.

To learn more, go to saveourscountryside.org.

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