



May 22, 2026

Planning Commission and City Council
City of East Palo Alto
2415 University Avenue
East Palo Alto, CA 94303

Re: Public Comment Process Shortfall for the Draft Safety Element Update

Dear Planning Commissioners and Councilmembers,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to express concern regarding the process used for Planning Commission consideration of the draft Safety Element update.

The City established an April 24 public comment deadline for submission of comments on the draft Safety Element. However, the Planning Commission hearing and vote were held on April 27, the following Monday. As a result, the Planning Commission agenda packet did not include all timely submitted public comment letters, and the accompanying staff report did not address many of the comments received.

This undermined transparency and limited the ability of Commissioners and the public to fully consider the range and substance of community input prior to the Commission's deliberations and recommendation.

The timely submitted comment letters included detailed input from East Palo Alto community-based organizations and advocates working directly on issues related to environmental justice, flooding, contamination, groundwater rise, housing, and public health.

These perspectives should be fully considered in a planning process that will shape East Palo Alto's long-term health, safety, and resilience.

Because the submitted comments were not reflected in the Planning Commission materials, community members and Commissioners alike lacked a meaningful opportunity to review and consider this input prior to the Commission's recommendation.

We recognize that staff are managing a substantial and technically complex planning effort. Nevertheless, when the City establishes a formal public comment deadline, community members should reasonably expect that comments submitted in compliance with that deadline will be included in the public record and substantively considered before recommendations are finalized.

To help ensure transparency, accountability, and informed public participation moving forward, we respectfully request that the City

- Publish all submitted comment letters on the Safety Element webpage as part of the publicly accessible project record,
- Notify the City's Safety Element stakeholder list when comment letters and updated draft materials are posted,
- Release an updated draft of the Safety Element sufficiently in advance of City Council consideration to allow thoughtful public review of revisions and submitted comments,
- Include in the City Council staff report a summary of major comments received, an explanation of how those comments informed revisions to the draft, and, where key recommendations were not incorporated, an explanation of why, and
- Ensure sufficient time between future public comment deadlines and hearings in order to allow staff, decision-makers, and the public to review and consider submitted comments.

The Safety Element will shape how East Palo Alto prepares for flooding, sea level rise, groundwater rise, contamination risks, and other long-term hazards for decades to come. Constructive public participation, particularly from local community-based organizations, is essential to developing a credible, equitable, and effective plan.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Adams
Environmental Justice Program Director
Nuestra Casa

Filiberto Zaragoza
Campaign Organizer, Co-Program Director
Youth United for Community Action

Pam D Jones
Program Manager
Belle Haven Empowered

Jennifer Chang Hetterly
Campaign Coordinator
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter Bay Alive Campaign

Alexandra Mendoza
Environmental Associate
Green Foothills

Sarah Atkinson
Sustainability & Resilience Policy Director
SPUR

Eileen McLaughlin
Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge

Victorina Arvelo Vásquez
Senior Resilience Manager
Greenbelt Alliance

cc:

Melvin E. Gaines, City Manager [cmoffice@cityofepa.org]
Elena Lee, Planning Division Manager [elee@cityofepa.org]