

SafeSCC

Promoting Safe Neighborhoods

CITY OF SANTA CLARA
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
2023 APR 14 AM 11:41

April 14, 2023

Dear Council Members,

5,293

On April 25th, you will vote on the Homekey project in partnership with LifeMoves at Benton & Lawrence Expressway in Santa Clara. SafeSCC, a grassroots association of residents in Santa Clara, presented in City Hall today and submitted a petition on behalf of local residents who strongly **oppose the proposal**, with **5,271 signatures** collected since the proposal became public knowledge. In the 4th community public hearing, a live poll conducted by the county showed that over 80% of the community opposes the Benton project. In the other three meetings, the opposition is even higher.

We urge you to listen to the majority of residents and vote "No" to the Benton project, as numerous concerns must be addressed, including neighborhood impact, location justification, fiscal concerns, design and policy concerns, environmental issues, project justification, and the credibility and accountability of the county and LifeMoves.

Neighborhood impact:

1. According to county data, over half of Santa Clara's homeless population have criminal backgrounds, spent time in jail, suffer from serious mental illness, and over 80% have drug addictions. The low barrier design of the Benton project would allow individuals with criminal backgrounds, drug addicts, and those with mental illnesses to reside in the facility and stay in the neighborhood. These individuals will increase the likelihood of criminal activity and disturbances, disrupting the lives of nearby residents and students. This assumption is fully evidenced by the spike of crimes in Mountain View, Milpitas and our Kifer site, including violence, burglary, stolen vehicles, rape, and drug-related crimes.

2. The city of Santa Clara has not shown any signs of being prepared to handle an increase in crime rates associated with the project. Santa Clara's police force is already understaffed, and current California laws make it difficult to control or remove problematic or dangerous occupants. The increased demand on police resources could lead to slower response times and an overall increase in crime throughout the city.
3. The Benton project could negatively impact surrounding businesses, as evidenced by the recent closure of Whole Foods' flagship store in San Francisco due to public safety concerns, and the sale of the business park next to Milpitas' site by its owner. We do not want Santa Clara to become another city that loses its businesses.

Location justification:

1. Existing homeless shelters in Santa Clara County are primarily located in industrial or commercial areas, or separated from residential neighborhoods. This minimizes the impact of criminal activity and disturbances on nearby residents. However, the Benton project deviates from this pattern.
2. The county claims that building near El Camino Real will help homeless individuals find jobs, but there is no data to support this claim. In fact, many homeless individuals in Santa Clara lack the desire or ability to work or need addiction treatment and mental health care for the entire 4 months in interim housing. Those who do want to work are not limited to job opportunities on one street. For those without cars, proximity to public transportation is more important, yet the Benton site is nearly a mile from the nearest bus stop. In fact, there are more job opportunities in industrial and commercial zones than in residential areas.
3. Additionally, the county claims the Benton location is convenient for various amenities, but much of the provided information is inaccurate. Nearby Kaiser Hospital only serves patients with its own insurance, the closest station and supermarket are nearly a mile away, and there is a liquor store across from the site, posing a potential safety hazard for over 60% of the residents with addiction, alcoholism, and mental health issues.

4. The intersection of Benton and Lawrence Expressway is a bustling crossroads, with vehicles speeding by, posing a significant danger to individuals struggling with mental health, alcohol, and drug addiction. Moreover, the high noise levels are not suitable for residents living in the vicinity.

Fiscal implications:

- The construction cost of the project is not expected to be borne by the city. However, the cost of the Palo Alto LifeMoves' construction doubled from \$17 million to \$34.4 million in just one year, leaving the city of Palo Alto with a \$6 million funding gap. This calls into question the credibility of LifeMoves' and the county's budgeting and planning. The operational cost of the project is estimated at \$4.3 million, but it is unclear who will cover this expense.

Design and policy concerns:

- LifeMoves and the county have not provided complete design plans and management policies. The operation of LifeMoves' Mountain View site demonstrates that their policies are not being enforced. We believe the city should not consider the project until LifeMoves and the county can guarantee a reduction in the number of units, stricter screening criteria, effective security measures, appropriate doctor/nurse over patient ratio, and mandatory participation in on-site services and treatments.

Environmental concerns:

- The location near busy Lawrence Expressway poses safety hazards for individuals with mental health issues and disabilities. Moreover, the small, densely packed rooms can create a prison-like environment for those with mental and physical disabilities. The addition of 90-200 residents would also put tremendous pressure on traffic, parking, waste management, internet speed, power supply, water supply, and Bioretention Compliance. While the Homekey project can be exempt from CEQA, it needs documentation proving that it meets all exemption requirements. We hope the city is aware of this and submits a CEQA evaluation request for the site.

Project justifications:

1. There is already an interim housing facility within 0.5 miles, capable of accommodating over 100 people, cycling every 3-4 months,

serving 300-400 people annually. Data indicates that Santa Clara has fewer than 300 homeless individuals, so there is no evidence to suggest the need for a similar project in such close proximity. Blindly accepting the county's pressure for this project would be a waste and disrespect of taxpayers' money and a betrayal of voters and residents.

2. At the same time, neighboring cities of Saratoga, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, and Cupertino seem to be making no progress on projects under Homekey. It is evident that the taxpayers of the City of Santa Clara are effectively being asked to make significant expenditures to support solutions for other nearby cities.

Credibility and accountability of county and LifeMoves

- County and LifeMoves have consistently provided false or misleading information, such as incorrect school numbers, and have confused the community with shelter terminologies, and housing advocacies who don't live in the neighborhood were invited to speak in support at all four community meetings. This has greatly eroded the trust and confidence of local residents in both County and LifeMoves. It is imperative that County and LifeMoves take steps to demonstrate their reliability and accountability before proceeding with any further actions. Residents of the neighborhood need to see evidence that these organizations are trustworthy and can be held responsible for their actions.

We believe that these concerns - especially the environmental, neighborhood, and site-specific issues - should warrant proper consideration by the city to **reject the Benton project**. In fact, should the City insist on moving forward with this project, we will demand an environmental and social impact study. Our association is currently in the process of retaining counsel to ensure that both the City and Developer adhere to all applicable local and state ordinances for this project.

Sincerely,
SafeSCC

Excerpt from petition submitted (2 form letters)- See Below

Please sign, date with your address then return to NoHomeKeySantaClaraSunnyvale@gmail.com. Please note that signing on electronic devices (e.g. tablet, PC) is not considered a wet signature. If you do not have access to a printer, simply write "I strongly oppose the shelter at Benton Street and Lawrence Expressway" on a piece of paper then sign, date with address in the same way.

To Representatives of Santa Clara City and Santa Clara County:

As a local resident, I understand that people experiencing homelessness is a big issue that our community must solve. However, I am very concerned about the HomeKey project "Benton Street at Lawrence Expressway Shelter".

I oppose building another homeless shelter at Lawrence & Benton location because

- ☐ Bella Vista, only 0.5 miles away, is already being converted into a facility for the homeless.
- ☒ The characteristics of the Benton location & the method of modular construction (stacked-up container-style tiny houses) are identical to White Oak Lane project, **rejected in 2021** by the City of Santa Clara based on safety and other serious concerns.
- ☒ Forfeit of a playground, a seasonal pumpkin patch & Christmas tree shop for kids of all ages.
- ☒ No screening for shelter residents, admitting people released from jail, with criminal background, with history of or ongoing drug abuse. In all practicalities, they may pose risks to the high-density residential areas, to visitors of parks, to kids in many daycares, schools, playgrounds in this area.
- ☒ The project lacks transparency and outreach efforts.
- ☐ Additional comments:

I urge you to engage with us, hear out our genuine concerns and discuss/explore alternative locations. It is with that said that I request that you vote **NO** on this project: Benton Street at Lawrence Expressway Service Enriched Shelter

Name (Print): Shashini Reddy Signature: [Signature]
Address: Mountain View CA 94041
Date: 3/5 / 2023

Name (Print): Richi Reddy Signature: [Signature]
Address: "
Date: 3/5 / 2023

Name (Print): Indira Reddy Signature: [Signature]
Address: "
Date: 3/5 / 2023

To the Representatives of the city of Santa Clara and the county of Santa Clara,

As a local resident, I understand that people experiencing homelessness is a big issue that our community needs to solve. However, I am very concerned about the Homekey project site proposed for Benton Street at Lawrence Expressway.

I oppose the proposed Homekey site due to the following reasons:

- ☒ Losing a community playground, seasonal Pumpkin Patch and Christmas tree shopping for kids at all ages.
- ☒ Potential safety risks to the high-density residential areas and to parks, schools and child playgrounds.
- ☒ The proposed location is not fit for individuals in need of shelter.
- ☒ The project lacks transparency and outreach efforts.
- ☒ Additional justifications or explanations regarding the aforementioned points:

I urge you to engage with us and have more public hearings to discuss alternative location choices and answer public concerns.

It is with that said that I request you vote **NO** on this project:

Benton Street at Lawrence Expressway Service Enriched Shelter

Please sign below. Multiple people can use the same petition, and **thank you for letting the neighbors know about this!!**

Name (Print)	Signature	Address
Helen XAN		San Jose
Yunung Chiu		Same as above
Harry Chiu		Same as above

Date

Complete Petition Submitted on April 14, 2023

