



October 31, 2019

Mayor Paula Perotte  
City Hall, City Council Chambers  
130 Cremona Drive, Suite B  
Goleta, California 93117

**Re: New Zoning Ordinance**

Dear Mayor Perotte and City Councilmembers,

The State Coastal Conservancy strongly supports a New Zoning Ordinance (“NZO”) that implements the City of Goleta’s General Policy Conservation Element (“CE”) 2.2 concerning streamside protection areas (“SPAs”) and policies protecting other natural resources. A standalone provision is needed in the NZO that effectively sets forth a process, the required findings, and evidentiary requirements applicable to any request to modify City zoning or policy requirements. This approach will benefit the entire community by providing clarity and transparency to the process, which is currently lacking in the existing ordinance.

Setbacks from creeks, riparian habitat, ESHA, and wetlands provide a variety of important benefits to water quality, plants and wildlife, and people. This is especially important in light of climate changes projected to involve more frequent and extreme local weather impacts. Natural stream corridors and floodplain areas provide an important nature-based climate adaptation strategy to buffer surrounding communities from the impacts of flooding. The wider the natural buffer the less vulnerable the surrounding community is to those impacts.

Studies, ordinances, and government publications indicate that a 100-foot creek setback is the minimum needed to protect water quality, creek and riparian habitats, and wildlife according to many scientific studies, policy and public agency guidance documents. The City’s Policy CE 2.2 establishes strong protections for SPAs, requiring a minimum SPA upland buffer of 100-feet on both sides of the creek but also allows reductions of the SPA buffer upon finding that the minimum 100-foot buffer is infeasible, and the project will not significantly impact riparian vegetation or stream habitat. This policy has led to the City approving projects with reduced setbacks without properly evaluating the feasibility of the minimum 100-foot setback. Adoption of an ordinance to establish a process for determining whether the 100-foot minimum setback is infeasible and therefore can be reduced, will close this problematic loophole and is a wise planning approach.

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The Coastal Commission's recommended standard language establishes a detailed and clear process for determining feasibility, and the County of Santa Barbara ("County") adopted the CCC's language as a general provision in its Coastal Zoning Ordinance and in the 2017 Eastern Goleta Valley Community Plan ("EGVCP"). The City could adopt this same language and be consistent with these other local plans. Additionally, adopting CCC recommended language in the City's NZO is strategic and could help speed the adoption process later when CCC begins the process to certify the City's proposed NZO.

We urge the City Council to consider the arguments above and include in the NZO a general provision based on the language recommended by the CCC, as described above. The NZO must include a clear and adequate process for determining feasibility with regards to SPA and ESHA buffer reductions in order to be effective at protecting Goleta's creeks and natural resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rachel Couch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel Couch, Project Manager  
Central Coast Program