

Response to Notice of Public Hearing RE: Project Title “Menifee North Specific Plan Amendment No. 5, Tentative Tract Map NO. 38132 and Tentative Tract Map No. 38133- Addendum to the Menifee North Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (State Clearinghouse Number #1989100207

Dear City of Menifee, Planning Commission, Community Development Department and Developers,

I would like to enter my comments for this project which is the proposal of homes to be built in the agricultural fields surrounding my home, and the immediate surrounding blocks which occur along the roads that I drive daily and our part of our neighborhood. This area is historically agricultural and is one of the few preserved communities in the inland empire that represent the rich agricultural history of the area. I chose this area as my home ten years ago specifically because of the agricultural roots. In fact, we moved directly next to Heritage High School, which has the one of the largest and most beautiful Future Farmers of America (FFA) agricultural facilities in the state of California. As a former FFA student this was exciting. It saddens me that the City is not showing that they value what their constituents and residents do, but instead that the city wishes to fill every open green space with as many houses, people, gas stations, and car washes as it can without considering the immediate consequences, and negative impact on quality of life of existing residents. It is my opinion that to fill this area with anything less than similar houses on similar size lots directly impacts my community in a negative manner. It is to openly attack our agricultural lifestyle, and seal our fate; that the city means to push us out slowly but surely, eliminating all agricultural areas where livestock and farming are a proud way of life, eroding our rights to farm. The city is making moves that will lead to no more horses, no more chickens, no more sheep, no more pigs, no more goats, no more gardens, no more orchards, no more green spaces, and impermeable boiling hot asphalt and concrete everywhere. I believe the city will move these new people in, then curb our rights as property owners to cater to your new residents. It is not the purpose of a city council or planning department to be self-serving to generate taxes or more money specially ear-tagged for insidious projects like an obscenely expensive and useless amphitheater. You serve the CURRENT residents of Menifee, and WE don't want more houses or more people in OUR city.

Menifee has the opportunity to make meaningful decisions about the growth of our city, carefully shaping our identity without hacking off our arm to spite our face. The agricultural communities within the city (including those along Scott, near Garbani, and near Murrieta and Goetz roads) are a part of our heritage, our foundation, and we should not wipe them out callously to place cookie-cutter houses that look like every other new city in California. Menifee should strive to keep our unique diverse collection of neighborhoods. We should only embrace and encourage growth in our agricultural areas that invites like-minded people to join these already thriving communities. The houses now being built in multiple areas of town are unsightly and lacking character, but at least they were in town and not next door! I absolutely believe there is space for everyone in Menifee, but these proposed tracts are not the place for sad

average residential lots as small as 3,700 square feet (sq.ft.). One of these tract proposals asks for a decrease in square footage from 7,200 to 4,300 sq. ft. This is abysmal. We should not be condoning the building of square boxes with no yards, with two feet between from roof to roof. People belong outdoors, and it is proven that increases our quality of life. The new houses are so obnoxiously close together that one could jump from rooftop to rooftop safely without fear of falling; *who* decided this is what neighborhoods should look like?! The proposed lot sizes are postage stamps compared to the average .87 and 1.08 acre properties in the area. Some lots in our area encompass several acres each. I have grave concerns about any new housing being built that does not fit in with the existing community, and question what motivation the city has for this poor decision making that snubs current residents.

Our community, in what used to be rural Romoland, is a quiet one focused on enjoying the simple pleasures of life. We do not conform to the fast-paced life of town. We mind our business, tend our gardens, and tend our animals. We highly value our privacy. With houses on roughly an acre each, we are set far apart and able to achieve privacy that adds value and quality to our lives. If the city allows a developer to put the average string of ugly two story houses (which can be seen throughout Menifee currently being built along the 215), and butts them up to our neighborhood, those houses would peer down directly into our backyards. Our privacy will be gone, and additionally the new houses will block our own lovely views of the surrounding area- which is the reason some purchased homes here. Worse, you aim to invite a bunch of people who do not share the values of the existing community and will inevitably, and incessantly, complain about the animals and associated smells and sounds they chose to move next to.

Driving past my neighbor's cattle, sheep, horses, and goats fills me with a sense of peace and unabated admiration. I delight in the sound of crowing roosters, smells of manure, and the rustic charm of our dirt roads. Talk to many of my neighbors and they feel the same. We love it here, it's why we live here! When I chose to move here I felt this area uniquely fit into my ability to have a slower more simple life. These values and qualities of my community are shared by many others who are looking for a place in California to live, and I argue it is THESE qualities that should be at the forefront of your mind if you feel you absolutely MUST build residences in this area. I wanted to have my own chickens, grow my own food, and have a self-sufficient lifestyle while being conveniently removed just enough from town to avoid its drawbacks (drawbacks of town include: overly crowded spaces, poorly/dangerously designed roads and intersections, and high traffic volumes). I do not want to live in town, and I implore you to please not take this beautiful and unique agricultural corner of Menifee and make it look like the rest of the mess you have made in the name of growth. Not ALL growth is positive. Similar to how cancer metastasizes, so does it seem the amount of gas stations, car washes, and disgusting unhealthy fast food chains seep into every available space throughout Menifee. Our small family owned Chinese restaurant is gone and being replaced with a gas station off Palomar and the 74; for the love of Menifee, **WHY?!** Driving through our crowded and poorly planned city, with its redundant gas stations, and a fast food place on every corner I have to seriously question your idea of progress. All I see is uninspired and thoughtless greed. The modern half a million dollar

neighborhoods you are so proud of, do not hold a candle to mine. I would NEVER want to live in Audie Murphy, Heritage Lakes, or neighborhoods like these. I chose my neighborhood because it fit my family and I, and poor planning decisions like allowing these small lot residential homes to be built on top of us will destroy it. Menifee is a place of diversity, and having neighborhoods and communities that reflect that diversity of culture and lifestyle is crucial. You are not considering current residents in your plans. Ask yourselves, should you aim to invite new residents at the risk of chasing out long-settled existing residents? Is this truly progress? Who does this help? Do you care if we are all forced to sell because we can't use our properties for their intended purpose, or is that the real goal? How does this serve the city as a whole? Menifee needs to reign in this idea that we need to expand, and listen to the multiple criticisms and complaints it receives from residents. This accelerated growth is destroying the quality of life that attracted people here. There are too many people on the roads as it is, and I will tell you what- not a single one of the drivers in Menifee appears to know which right hand turn lane to be in when turning right (Eastbound) onto Newport from Haun- it's nearly a car accident every time and not worth shopping in Menifee at all.

My community does not wish to have a soulless cookie-cutter neighborhood built on top of ours with the intent to push us out, either directly or by slowly chipping away at our property rights through frivolous and uneducated zoning changes. It is clear to me in 10 years of living here that zoning laws are not written by people with any type of understanding or education of agriculture or livestock. Those fancy, supposedly modern, neighborhoods are for a different type of person than I, and there is nothing wrong with that- but don't bring those people here to complain about noisy or stinky livestock. The next step will surely be the further erosion of our rights to use our properties for the intent we purchased them for: AGRICULTURAL USE. My grandmother lives in the Heritage Lakes gated community, and she did back when there was still a dairy next door and they were still the only housing community in the area. Have you been here long enough to remember the smell of the dairy? You built homes next to cows, and then new residents complained of the smell. You are bringing in people who do not have any fondness, love, or understanding of agriculture. You want to put these city minded people next to an established agricultural community who value our rights as property owners to use our properties to grow crops or raise livestock. We appreciate our lives as they are, and would appreciate the city making an effort to protect our rights to use our properties for agricultural purposes as originally designed. We love our homesteads, our farm operations, and our freedom to have them. We purchased in this area for a reason, and faithfully pay our taxes on our homes. This residential plan put forth to build large houses on tiny bits of land directly threatens our way of life. If you build a community so vastly different from the one that currently exists, there will be friction between new and old residents and you will undoubtedly create problems. New residents will be unlikely to share or respect our values or love of animals. I admire my neighbor's gardens and their livestock, but the sight of houses stacked one on top of the other within spitting distance of neighbors, with a postage stamp for a yard, inspires in me a totally different and unrelated feeling- one of sadness and disgust.

I implore the city of Menifee to cancel this project in its entirety and re-evaluate the need for a special community in Menifee where our unique agricultural roots are heralded as something to celebrate and build on. Menifee has a duty to serve its current residents, and put our needs above the profit of a new development and people who will not be interested in truly integrating into our existing community, but will ensure its demise. Norco California didn't become famous as horse country by accident. The people who loved horses found their way there and built an amazing community which is both well-known, AND envied far and wide. Menifee should preserve the integrity of this agricultural area and expand on it. More than ever people across the United States are realizing that homesteading, gardening, and raising animals is both therapeutic, and a way to provide healthy food for their families. We should only allow development of homes that will encourage like-minded people to join our community. We should not settle for just any growth, when we can have purposeful, well-planned, well-received growth. Since I have lived here in the past 10 years our zoning has changed to limit our livestock numbers. We were A-1-1, then Rural Residential, and I wonder what we will be and how you will change our zoning and regulate us once you have pretty new houses next door? The city clearly does not respect our right to own property and use it as it was intended or as we see fit. I vehemently oppose any new residential construction that would further encourage the city to erode our rights as property owners, and/or lead to zoning changes that place further restrictions on what livestock we can and cannot have, in what numbers, or how we use our properties in any way, shape, or form.

As a gardener I have taken steps to improve the top soil on my property through substantial research and carefully thought out implementation. I have made significant strides to this effect by mulching, planting plants, and letting "weeds" grow. On my property, the water is absorbed into the ground, improving the soil, cooling the ground, supporting plant life, etc. I have achieved a vibrant and flourishing ecosystem that supports my animals, my collection of fruit trees (which are more likely to be raided and pillaged with the introduction of increased traffic), and native species of plants and wildlife. I chose not to move to a neighborhood with a Home Owners Association (HOA). If this residential neighborhood is built, will the City now act as our HOA, to enforce my farm community to align to residential rules designed for the average neighborhood, not an agricultural one? The city nor it's code enforcement officers understand the need to let weeds grow to support not only the natural environment through Winter, and biodiversity in our ecosystems, but they are crucial in prevention of flooding and erosion of our properties and roads. This section of Menifee experiences flooding that is not maintained AT ALL by the city. These open fields, referred to as tracts in your plan, currently absorb extraordinary amounts of water reducing our flooding.

The flooding concerns are a serious issue in our area each Winter and Spring. The condition of our streets anywhere on this side of Menifee are atrocious. All surrounding roads are riddled with cracks and potholes due to ill maintained roads and a lack of infrastructure to address flooding. The potholes are haphazardly filled once a year and immediately return to their pitiful state soon after. Daily I see drivers swerve onto the wrong side of two lane roads, even crossing double yellows, to avoid damage to their cars. My own road, and a few others North and South of

Watson Road are still dirt. In the 10 years I have lived at my address the city has had someone maintain our dirt road exactly ONCE, and quite recently in fact as it was only in the last year. I believe this was done to survey the road and that it was likely for this project, and not for the benefit of residents. I would also like to add that the City should do more research on how to maintain dirt roads, because they made the road worse. Scraping over the hard packed dirt and leaving fluffy dirt to wash or blow away is pointless and directly caused more erosion. The workers also exposed a sewer pipeline in the middle of the road and left it like that. Each rain exposes it more, creating a hazard for my neighbors. Will this residential project include updates to our dirt roads? Or, are we to sustain more damage due to more drivers on our road because of this project, and the city will just continue to neglect its responsibility to maintain it? Our area of Menifee floods so fervently that our streets literally wash away, leaving craters and ravines. What will happen to the water absorbed by these fields once they are paved over to make houses, when the water can no longer absorb into the open ground? How much additional rainfall will be on the streets and roads due to the vast acreage being paved over? I have had a Menifee police officer refuse to drive his cruiser out here. We do not have the infrastructure in this area for flood water, it is evident everywhere. By paving over the fields and making this area mostly a concrete jungle, you will increase the amount of water that pours down the street- all the way to Menifee Road- increasing the damage to roads in the vicinity, and dangers to residents who cannot, and should not, cross flooded roads.

Still, with these aforementioned issues the city has yet more to consider and account for with wanting to bring new residents to this area. I can say from experience as a parent of three children that the schools here are exceedingly bad. All of the schools in this area are already underperforming and overcrowded. This decreases quality of education for every student across the board, causing harm to existing students. It is important for the city to note that though we may have some larger properties here, the students who live in this area and attend these schools are comprised of many low income and English-Language- Learner students. Harvest Valley Elementary School has recently finished adding several trailer classrooms (built and installed over the past year) just to make room for the current load of students it has. And before you consider making an argument that tax revenue generated will help alleviate this, once you put a neighborhood in the location next to Harvest Valley Elementary you have consumed the only available land that would have let them expand to accommodate more students; a catch 22. Ethan A. Chase Middle School and Heritage High School are well known for violence and the poor quality education they bestow on students. The lack of administrative control and violence at these schools is absurd, and adding more students will only increase the woes they currently experience. Heritage High School is so overpopulated that in the beginning of one school year in recent memory, students did not actually have assigned classes or officially “start” their school year for a period of several weeks. High School Students went to school and sat in random classrooms while waiting weeks past the first day of school for their schedules to be worked out. The City of Menifee is deluded that two new neighborhoods and the increased volume of residents they would bring in our area would not directly and negatively impact current residents. Those who will suffer most because of this poor planning and decision making will be the most vulnerable amongst us, those who we have the utmost responsibility to protect: our children.

Does Menifee want to be known for quality schools? Or packing kids into bad schools like sardines regardless of the consequences to their education?

Harvest Valley Elementary, Ethan A. Chase Middle School, and Heritage High School have terrible grades, and these local schools were not designed or planned to accommodate the current number of students and correlated parent traffic, let alone more students and their correlated traffic. Overpopulation of schools impacts a quality education and traffic patterns, and both these factors increase the negatives endured by our residents. If the proposed neighborhood is built next to Harvest Valley, Menifee & Briggs Roads will be totally impassable mornings and afternoons (It certainly is already impassable in my opinion!). Menifee Road is mandatory to use to exit our neighborhood, because you certainly can't make it all the way down the dirt road most years- or at least you wouldn't want to put your car through that. In addition, it is very likely both new residents and commuters alike will use our street as a short cut to go around Watson traffic. This increases through traffic in residential areas endangering children at play. If you were to proceed with these proposed tracts, I would almost prefer Malone be closed on our end with a large brick wall to avoid any potential increased traffic and associated dangers for residents in my neighborhood. Any extra residents and their students translate to more wear on all of our roads, and in my opinion reduces privacy and safety for everyone in the area. Certainly, the newer 4-way stop at Menifee and Watson will not suffice because the additional neighborhood you hope to build along Palomar will bring even more residents coming from that direction to Harvest Valley and Heritage High. After a death at this intersection, your flashing stop signs have barely made a dent in safety at this location and rolling stops are still the norm. There is not enough room for a traffic light at Menifee/Watson, which is only one lane in each direction, and commuters in every direction will be affected. Everyone's transit times will increase considerably.

Foot traffic is another concern. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of high school students pour across Highway 74 on Briggs Road before and after school. Many high school students cross to be picked up or walk home, while many more stop at the Marion V. Ashley Community Center directly next to Harvest Valley. Parents line Briggs Road on both sides of the two lane highway to pick up students: parking illegally, making their own lanes, making dangerous maneuvers, nearly running down kids. This section of highway 74, beginning from Heritage High and continuing to the 215 freeway, is dangerous and is well known for pedestrian fatalities. The school traffic from Harvest Valley and Heritage Lakes compound on Briggs road with a school in both directions maybe a quarter mile apart, making it impassable for residents. Thousands of children and parents move through here within a short span of time. Cars weave in and out of walking teenagers who will not yield the 'right of way' if their lives depended on it. The kids do not respect the cars, and the cars seem to not care for the safety of the kids. Impatient children and drivers are inevitable. The more children and traffic you add, the more likely we are to have a fatality involving a child trying to get home from school. You are creating a dangerous situation trying to infuse so many people into such a small space. They are already completing a new neighborhood on the East side of Briggs which will add to these school-related problems tenfold.

I spent a great deal of time wondering whether I should submit comments on this project. It seems as if the City is not interested in truly taking into account opinions of residents on their full-steam-ahead, BUILD, BUILD, BUILD mentality. Your Facebook is full of harsh criticisms, but many residents don't have the time to attend in-person meetings. We fear our typed comments will not be considered or shared. I hope you will consider and share my valid concerns as a long-time, tax paying resident of Menifee. It is time for responsible, thoughtful, decision-making. It is time for those working for the City of Menifee to remember that the City and its employees are meant to serve the people. Your decisions, for better or worse, affect our everyday lives, and we expect you to take that responsibility seriously. It is your duty to weigh pros and cons of developmental projects, carefully considering the impact to quality of life of current residents, and/or the true usefulness of your proposals (like a multi-million dollar amphitheater at a park not big enough for two soccer teams to practice simultaneously). It is your responsibility to make sure that growth proposed serves the current residents. The state's "housing shortage" is not a Menifee problem. Menifee residents don't want to be the fastest growing city in California. This city's idea of growth as endless gas stations, fast food, and generic houses is clashing with the wishes of Menifee residents. Your insistence on prioritizing haphazard growth is really only leading to the accelerated destruction of a once great place to live, which should be the opposite of what you strive for.

Thank you for your consideration,

Amanda Valadao