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March 25, 2025

**VIA EMAIL AND HAND DELIVERY**

Watsonville City Council  
275 Main Street  
Suite 400 (4th Floor)  
Watsonville, CA 95076

**Re: March 25, 2025, City Council Meeting; Agenda Item 8.b.;**  
**Zoning Exemption Agreement Between Pajaro Valley Unified School District**  
**(PVUSD), Ceiba Charter School (CEIBA) & the City of Watsonville**

Members of the Council:

In 2012, a PVUSD-CEIBA conflict existed regarding PVUSD's violation of Proposition 39.<sup>1</sup> Instead of shepherding CEIBA to a conforming, safe campus with adequate recreational areas, the City and PVUSD collaborated to move the school into the heart of the heavy industrial zone in clear violation of local and state law.

Leading up to the 2013 use permit approval for CEIBA, it appears there were at least three City Council Members who were operating as a City Council Committee tasked with establishing and maintaining political pressure on City Staff to abandon public safeguards and expedite approval of the CEIBA use permit. Public documents reveal that those City Council members were Eduardo Montesino, Lowell Hurst, and Nancy Bilicich. City Staff responding to this political pressure were City Manager Carlos

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<sup>1</sup> This controversy was detailed in the Santa Cruz Sentinel May 12, 2012 article, [In Watsonville, Ceiba College Preparatory Academy in, adult school out](#). Former PVUSD Chief Business Officer Brett McFadden described the outcome as, "All of our options were horrible, and this was the least horrible option that we had." This option appeared to be "least horrible" because it would thwart the possibility that Ceiba could "force the district to close a school and turn the campus over to the charter." Adult Education Administrator and City Council Member Nancy Bilicich related that Adult Education was adaptable and, as part of the district, was ready to assist as needed. She emphasized that the relocation would only last one year, stating she had received assurances from the district that Adult Education would be able to return to its original location.

Palacios, Interim Planning Director Marcela Tavantzis, and Principal Planner Keith Boyle. Public documents also reveal that Staff fast-tracked the process without fees or a formal application in a mere 15 days.<sup>2</sup> City Staff never required a complete traffic study. The nominal traffic study that was used was an unsigned draft that omitted any analysis of railroad and truck routes, even though the proposed CEIBA school was surrounded by such routes.

Not only that, also as a matter of context, it is notable that a blatant conflict of interest existed: Bilicich, a PVUSD Adult Education Administrator, pressured Tavantzis to expedite the process to reclaim the Adult Education Building, even questioning the need for a complete traffic study. Tavantzis promised her in writing: I will do everything I can to give Adult Education your building back!

Such reckless disregard for safety has already resulted in real consequences - students airlifted to trauma centers after being struck by vehicles in December 2019. Notably, these injuries occurred precisely in the areas where both the defective traffic report as well as the related Watsonville City Staff Report omitted any analysis. PVUSD, the City, and CEIBA are all aware of these dangerous railroad and truck route conditions, including students walking on railroad trestles, yet they continue to do nothing.

Considering this appalling and tawdry history of how CEIBA was situated as an incompatible use in the industry zone of the zone district of Watsonville, I request that the City Council not approve the zoning exemption agreement. CEIBA should be situated onto a compatible campus location that conforms to uniform standards for a children's school.

Respectfully,



Marta J Bulaich

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<sup>2</sup> In April 2021, former Community Development Director Merriam later wrote to City Manager Matt Huffaker, "Well, well, well. Keith and Marcela are killing us. The staff report literally said that a public charter school is the same as a trade school and there was no environmental review done.