

## Albany Planning and Zoning Commission September 24, 2014 Meeting Summary

### Housing Element Policy Discussion

Consultant Barry Miller delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed new Housing Element, with a focus on the policies and actions being added to the document (Chapter 6).

Chair Donaldson invited public comment. The following testimony was received:

- Reverend Kevin Omi indicated his church served a large immigrant population with significant unmet housing needs. He supported the changes articulated in the letter from Alexa Hauser and was grateful for the changes that had already been made. He requested that the language be further strengthened to eliminate conditional language. He also supported the need for more sites for extremely low income housing, as well as more funding. He noted his support for the idea of “scattered site” housing but also felt it was important to emphasize large mixed use sites and sites with a larger footprint (Policies 2.12 and 2.13). He supported the idea of increasing Section 8 vouchers and noted there was a developmentally disabled resident who could not find suitable housing in Albany—he wondered what the prospects were for more vouchers.
- Julie Wakelee Lynch of St/ Albans noted that Albany was becoming increasingly unaffordable. She felt the City should embrace its moniker as an urban village, noting that this meant economic and housing diversity. The next Housing Element should be clear that this diversity was a priority. Currently, people are struggling to live here due to costs. A homeless drop in center should be a priority—the City has a moral responsibility to provide affordable housing.
- Katherine Sutton noted that a policy was added to discourage AirBNB—she cautioned that a negative outcome of this could be that folks who wanted to rent a room would lose an income source that could make their own housing less affordable. She felt the Housing Element outreach efforts should be stronger, that the September 30 symposium should be more widely advertised, and that the City should publicize its new amnesty program for second units. The wording of Policy 3.7 worried her, as it appears disrespectful to homeless persons. It sounds imperious to say they are “being directed”. The language on the drop in center should be stronger. Is there a way the City can reduce rental housing costs for people who don’t have cars? Fee reductions for no-car housing?
- Alexa Hauser indicated she appreciated the changes in the latest draft, but felt it could still be stronger. Too many policies suggest “considering” an action rather than “implementing” it. She agreed with the need to advertise Housing Element meetings more widely and suggested again that the City hold an “Albany Housing Week” event to raise awareness of housing. On P. 6-18, she suggested the City pursue a program such as HIP housing in San Mateo County, which connects people in shared housing situations. Also, be careful with perjorative language relating to homelessness. The language should be collaborative instead of suggesting what homeless persons need.
- Caryl O’Keefe agreed with Alexa’s comments.

The Commission then provided guidance.

- Nick Pilch agreed with the proposed changes on Pages 6-14 and 6-18.
- Doug Donaldson indicated he was concerned about the City's ability to implement many programs without funding from redevelopment or other sources. He likes the idea of a "Housing Coordinator" but how far can the City go given funding limitations? The Commission is going in the right direction, but the state and economic situations are going against us. There is not much the City can do about high housing costs—the City is not seeing developers waiting to build in Albany.
- Nick Pilch wondered if direct mail could be used to do outreach on the Housing Element and some of the City's Housing Element proposed education and outreach programs. Can the City do flyers, such as those done by election candidates?
- Phil Moss asked for clarification on the proposed Affordable Housing Incentive Program
- David Arkin concurred with the changes to Program 2.A and supported an in-lieu fee for smaller (2-3 unit) buildings. He suggested changing Program 2G to "and" (not "or") and possibly allowing emergency shelters in additional zoning districts (with a CUP). He also expressed support for the HIP program and wondered if the city could also explore a program for emancipated youth from foster care—perhaps connecting them to empty nesters. He also liked the idea of an annual Housing Week, and suggested that stronger language be used in Programs 4A and 4B. He noted that language and phrasing could be used to express our highest priorities.
- Phil Moss suggested that the City share a housing coordinator position with another city (El Cerrito), since its resources are limited. He noted concerns about short term stays.
- Stacy Eisenmann asked for clarification over the term "scattered site" housing. Could it be defined in the Element? She concurred with other speakers that the City did not seem to be generating much interest among developers. She noted that second units were a realistic and reasonable way to create more affordable housing, and could be promoted by the City (like green building). Perhaps an annual "Second Unit Appreciation Day." Second units could become part of the City's culture and community. Seek other ways to incentivize them.
- Nick Pilch reminded staff to be mindful of school impacts as housing was added. He asked for a status report on proposed zoning changes which would allow ground floor residential along San Pablo Avenue. What is the current status? He noted that El Cerrito had just adopted a Specific Plan that allowed a large amount of housing on San Pablo Avenue, including on the ground floor. He felt we should remove all barriers to housing development on San Pablo Avenue, including the prohibition on ground floor residential.
- Phil Moss recalled going on a tour of housing sites in El Cerrito, and noted his concern about allowing housing on the corridors. It could create "dead zones" on San Pablo, which the City does not want.
- Commissioners noted that the City did allow housing on the ground floor on a few parcels, for example on the RCD project (which was affordable)
- Nick Pilch noted that he was OK with ground floor residential, and that it could be considered for market rate housing as well as affordable housing.
- David Arkin noted that he had an intern over the summer who was exploring ways to make it easier to build and finance second unit construction, and to use innovative building materials.