

**Albany Planning and Zoning Commission
December 10, 2014 Meeting Summary**

Study Session on Draft 2015-2023 Housing Element, including HCD and DHWG Comments

Anne Hersch presented the staff report, noting that the Working Draft Housing Element had already been submitted to HCD, but Staff had scheduled an extra meeting to provide an opportunity for additional public comment. Chair Donaldson noted that comments had been received from the State Department of and Community Development, an Addendum had been prepared, and the City's Element had been "pre-certified".

Rania Ahmed, Community Development Department intern and member of the Diverse Housing Working Group presented the findings of a project done by a group of UC Berkeley graduate students on a hypothetical affordable housing development in Albany. The project focused on re-using the Mechanics Bank site on San Pablo and Washington as a three story mixed use project with two stories of affordable units above commercial and parking. She discussed site constraints and opportunities, the building proposal and various amenities, floor plans and elevation, financing structure, and housing type and affordability levels. The Commission expressed interest in the project and was pleased to see that such a project was feasible, although financing constraints were acknowledged.

Chair Donaldson moved the topic to public comment on the Working Draft Housing Element. He invited Alexa Hauser to the podium as a representative of the Diverse Housing Working Group. Ms. Hauser walked the Commission through a letter she had submitted laying out 16 points agreed upon by the DHWG and six additional points that had been discussed.

Hauser's topics of discussion included: community land trusts, the affordable housing nexus study, public information campaigns, the part of the Cleveland property that was not Pierce Street Park, explicit language saying that the City will be using the Housing First's approach, changing language from "homeless people" to "people experiencing homelessness", home-sharing networks, encouragement for community groups and businesses to open a shelter or drop-in center, including mobile homes as an innovative housing type or possibility for second unit, progress checks for affordable housing incentives every four years instead of eight, engaging local groups and individuals to do the lift and carrying out the actions of the Element, policies on displacement, increased availability of publicity related to fair housing to interested organizations (ex: churches), and regular report on housing implementation twice a year. Additional points not fully discussed by the Working Group that Hauser brought up included: a tool box for residents to help with the homelessness situation and support other residents on the verge of homelessness, adding language to suggest incentivizing housing for low income households in mixed use developments, just-cause eviction, fair housing training programs, and rent stabilization.

The Commission offered comments they had relating to each of Hauser's topics. The Commission agreed with items such as changing language from "homeless people" to "people experiencing homelessness", but had concerns with other items such as unintentional consequences that could result from just-cause eviction.

- On Point 1, the Commission asked for clarification on Community Land Trusts. Ms. Hauser explained this was a way of having a land ownership structure which benefitted the community. The Commission generally concurred with this addition.
- On Point 2, the Commission also concurred that the nexus study should be accelerated if possible.
- On Point 3, the Commission concurred with the idea of a committee. Commissioner Eisenmann wondered if the City should restart the Homeless Task Force. Phil Moss stated that the scope of the committee was to limited, and that it should be focused on attracting developers and not just doing outreach. Chair Donaldson noted that there were staff limitations, and perhaps a higher priority should be to have a housing coordinator. Phil Moss suggested that the term “public information” was misleading, and the committee’s focus should be to market the City of Albany.
- On Point 4, the Commission indicated support for the idea of leveraging the Cleveland Avenue property for housing, even if the site itself is not developed with housing.
- On Point 5, the Commission agreed with “Housing First.” Commissioner Moss suggested that a rent tax be considered.
- On Point 6, the Commission concurred with the language change regarding persons experiencing homelessness.
- On Point 7, the Commission concurred with pursuing a shared housing program. David Arkin suggested one target population could be youth emancipated from the foster care system. Chair Donaldson asked if DHWG could take the lead on this initiative.
- On Point 8, the Commission generally agreed with the idea of a drop in center promoted by the private sector and community.
- On Points 9 and 10, the Commission suggested the use of the term “Manufactured housing” rather than mobile homes. David Arkin also brought up the possibility of RVs. Stacy Eisenmann suggested that RVs were a way to provide a dwelling unit without triggering the parking requirement since the RVs themselves were a vehicle, and would occupy their own parking space. The Commission discussed the idea of developing container housing.
- On Point 11, Chair Donaldson indicated the idea was acceptable as long as it did not overburden staff. Phil Moss suggested the new marketing committee could do this.
- On Point 12, there was general agreement.
- On Point 13/14, there was a discussion of the idea of “first right of return” in the event a unit was removed and replaced. However, Chair Donaldson expressed concern about the wording of the proposed language, and suggested that requiring developers to mitigate displacement could have a chilling effect on development. Other Commissioners expressed concern about this as well.
- On Point 15, there was agreement
- On Point 16, there was general agreement, but some concern that staff did not have the resources to carry this out.
- On Point “A,” there was general agreement. Chair Donaldson asked what tools would be in the “toolbox.” Phil Moss suggested that a volunteer be placed at the library so persons seeking information on homelessness resources could go there.
- On Point “B,” there was general agreement.
- On Point “C,” Chair Donaldson felt a just cause ordinance could be very controversial and that he was opposed to including this in the document. He indicated this required further study and discussion, and the City needed a better understanding of the extent of the problem. David Arkin noted that one city had passed a law that all Air BNB units needed to be ADA accessible, which cuts down the incidence of persons using their second units and rentals for short-term stays.

Commissioners Moss and Kent indicated they did not support this addition. Chair Donaldson felt it could have unintended consequences.

- On Point “D,” there was agreement with the idea, since the laws change annually.
- On Point “E,” (rent stabilization), there was no support expressed for the concept, and it was agreed this would not be added.

The Chair entertained comments from additional speakers:

- **Julie Winklestein**- pointed out that the same sites are carried over from Housing Element to Housing Element with no development on those sites. She encouraged that there be an explanation added to the Housing Element about why these sites were not being developed. She also asked that specific deadlines and details for programs mentioned in the Housing Element be added and that a committee be in charge of changing negative language about homelessness used in the Element to more positive words. She suggested that the language affects how you interpret the issues.
- **Julie Wakelee Lynch**, St. Alban’s Episcopal Church- said she hears about the housing crisis every day in her role as a faith community member. She indicated her group could do more research and be a resource, but could not do it all. Perhaps they can work with the City to create space for a drop in center at the Library or the Senior Center. Or they can offer office space at the church for a home sharing program. Having the official encouragement of the City to have a program that promotes home-sharing could help speed up this process. Commissioner Moss suggested that the City could leverage the County Social worker staff, since Albany was not well served right now.
- **Andrew Franklin**, pastor at Solano Community Church and member of Diverse Housing Working Group- was excited that creative ideas to utilize underused resources were being entertained by the Commission. Albany can be cited as a role model someday.
- **Caryl O’Keefe**, member of Diverse Housing Working Group- reiterated her support of the sixteen points Alexa Houser detailed.
- **Catherine Sutton**- proposed adding ideas that the Commission liked from the Housing Group’s suggestions into the Code so that it would be there if they would like to use it. Her main suggestions included permanent parking for car sharing in all new construction, leasing out driveways for people who need parking, providing mobile second units, and expanding the PDA to Pierce Street for affordable housing.
- **Alan Riffer**, representative of Albany Chamber of Commerce- had similar concerns as Chair Donaldson had on just-cause eviction and urged the Commission to get data on a possible eviction problems and displacement around the community.
- **Loni Gray**, ZO dwellings- thought the City should develop a shared housing policy along with their developing secondary housing policy. The City can accommodate many more residents within the envelopes of existing homes--keep the commons and redesign interiors so homes can accommodate multiple households instead of one.

The Chair brought the item back to the Commission. There were no further comments.

Barry Miller, General Plan consultant- said the Element would return January 7th for a public hearing, at which time the Commission would be asked to pass a resolution to forward the Element to City Council. In the meantime, Miller noted he would be working on an addendum to the Element which incorporated the feedback from this evening’s meeting.