

Albany Planning And Zoning Commission
January 7, 2015 Meeting Summary

Public Hearing to Recommend Adoption of the 2015-2023 Housing Element

Barry Miller delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the 2015-2023 Housing Element. Miller provided an overview of Housing Element requirements, a summary of the Draft Element, and highlights of the major programs. He explained that the document had been revised from the version reviewed by the Commission in December to incorporate a “second addendum” with edits responding to comments from the Diverse Housing Working Group. The Commission was presented with two resolutions, one covering the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration, and a second covering the Element itself.

Chair Donaldson suggested that the Commission first consider the matter of the IS/MND and then take feedback on the Element itself. Anne Hersch noted that the City had received one letter on the ID/MND, from EBMUD. It identified basic concerns regarding future water services. Staff was anticipating a possible second letter from the County Transportation Commission.

The Chair offered the following recommendations:

- Sign page 2
- Make edits to the “Aesthetics” section (annotated in writing in a separate attachment) to clarify the setting and impacts
- Note that mitigation measure 5 (Biotic) is awkwardly written (although it is from the 1992 Plan, and was not changed)
- On P 26, delete the reference to a “new” EOC, since it has been built
- On P 34, second line of first full para, delete “increased”

The Chair asked if there were any public comments on the IS/MND.

Alexa Hauser asked the Chair to clarify if his edits were proposed because he felt that projects on San Pablo Avenue would “degrade” the visual environment—although not substantially. The Chair clarified his earlier remarks.

The Chair then introduced the Housing Element for discussion, and asked for public comment.

- Katherine Sutton said she was concerned that the City placed a higher priority on the waterfront transition plan than it did on providing housing for the residents it had displaced. She noted that there were still recommendations from the Diverse Housing Working Group that had not been included. She asked that the zoning be changed to allow multiple mobile homes on a single lot, that the City allow building with natural materials such as straw and mud, and that tiny homes be added as second unit possibilities. She also asked why the vacant lot at 514-518 Adams was not in the inventory. David Arkin noted that the Building Code does allow the use of alternative materials, such as strawbale homes.
- Alexa Hauser asked that the Commission consider the additional comments from the DHWG.

- Julie Winklestein stated that the City needed to do more public outreach and engagement. She also urged the City to expedite the nexus study. People who are experiencing homelessness cannot afford to wait three years. She felt the City needed to do a better job of letting homeless persons know about the services available.

Commissioner comments were then provided. Susan Friedland indicated the document was excellent. She concurred with the speakers that the nexus study should be a top priority and done in 2015 if possible. She thought it should be added to the work plan for 2015. She noted that it was gratifying to see such support for affordable housing, when the participants in many planning processes argued against such housing. She agreed that parking and the lack of financing options were big obstacles. She also noted that the housing sites listed were not necessarily for sale, and further, that housing could still be located on other sites, even if they had not been included in the inventory.

Chris Kent asked for clarification on how the 20 sites were selected. He suggested that on P 4-4, the criteria for selecting sites should include transit access. He wondered if there was a disconnect between long-range policies to encourage permanent housing over 8 years, and the immediate needs of a sub-population that needed housing immediately because they were homeless.

David Arkin thanked staff and the consultant for their work, and said this was an excellent participatory process. He noted that the public had not disagreed with the need for more housing—the question was who was going to develop the housing, and what were the barriers. Parking is still the biggest barrier. He noted that “tiny homes” are not really dwelling units—they are on wheels, and as such are vehicles. They are not disallowed by the code, but they could not be considered “second units” under the Building Code.

Erik Geisen-Fields felt the document was moving the City in the right direction. He noted that Impact Fees could be a positive and not a negative in terms of their effects on housing.

Chair Donaldson identified a number of corrections:

On P. 2-14 and 2-15, the reference to “second reading” being December 1, 2014 should be removed

On P 3-46 there are a few typos (delete stray word “indicate”, use a “zero” instead of “0,” 1457)

On P 4-3, delete the footnote, since it is on the prior page

On P 4-5, add a space after 2015-2023

On P 5-4, should say “could *not* be achieved”