
WEST OF TWIN PEAKS CENTRAL COUNCIL – SF HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE

TO: WTPCC
FROM: MATT CHAMBERLAIN (MATT.CHAMBERLAIN@MICROSOFT.COM)
SUBJECT: NOTES FROM SF PLANNING DEPARTMENT, HOUSING ELEMENT CAB
STAKEHOLDER MEETING WITH NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS (2 OF 3)
DATE: 11/18/2008
CC: N/A

NOTES FROM HOUSING ELEMENT CAB:
STAKEHOLDER MEETING (NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS)

The SF Planning Department has been holding several small group sessions to collect feedback for the 2009 HE with various stakeholder groups including: 1) Neighborhood Groups, 2) For Profit Builders, 3) Non-Profit Builders, 4) Renters and Rent-Related organizations like the SF Rent Board, 5) Senior Housing Advocates and, 6) Other Special Needs Groups.

I attended the second (of three) evening sessions with Neighborhood Groups. During that session, Sarah Dennis, Sr. Planner with the City stressed that the planning department is still gathering feedback about what's important to include in the 2009 HE, and that they do not intend to reuse the 2004 HE and modify it to avoid a lawsuit like the one that was filed and against the 2004 Housing Element.

Key issues that were raised by attendees included:

- **What is affordable?** We hear 120% of AMI and lower being the qualification for needing affordable housing, but what does that really mean? Sarah Dennis replied that if someone earns up to 120% of AMI (Area Median Income) and they take a percentage of their income and put it toward housing (what is that number 35%?), you still can't afford to live in SF. This group of people needs below market rate housing (BMR).
- The question was raised as to whether that was even a realistic representation of the income levels that can actually affording housing in SF. **Should it be extended to 150% of AMI as still needing BMR housing?**
- The point was raised that it's part of the **American dream to own a house**, but at this point in time, it takes more than 200% of the AMI to even have a chance at owning anything in SF. The best that most families can hope for is to rent. That tends to make "families" transient. They stay here for work for a few years, then when they are ready to start a family (and buy a home) they leave.
 - Someone pointed out that there are a lot of other reasons that people leave SF when they want to start a family, and that while housing may be a big one it's probably not that much more important than the lack of decent education in the City. Private is very expensive and public doesn't provide a safe and educational environment. **The school system needs improvements too.**

- The current plans are to add **31,000 new units to San Francisco between now and 2014**, and the 2009 HE is supposed to outline how that will be achieved. Is it fair that SF carries a **disproportionately large percentage of the overall growth that ABAG** sees for the whole bay area?
 - **Why didn't SF file an appeal with ABAG** and have that number reduced? There are currently 19,000 new units in the pipeline. If we could have the total target reduced by 30%, we'd already have enough units in the pipeline to meet the goals. Even a 15% reduction would be mean a target of only 25,000 new units (of which nearly 20,000 would already be taken care of).
- There was strong concerns over placing new high-density apartments in existing low-density areas, then not building enough **parking to meet a 1:1** ratio for the new buildings. The belief by neighbors is that new residents will have cars and that they will be forced to park on the street. Parking is already a tough issue in the areas of the city on the west side that surround transit routes (like the N-Judah train line or the L-Taraval).
- The reason that people have traditionally chosen to move to the **West side of the city** is because of the lower density there: 1) Trees, 2) Open Space, 3) Parks. Increasing the density on the West side will reduce the appeal of it and drive families out of the City even faster than they are already leaving.
- **Transit is already overwhelmed.** Muni can't meet the demands that are placed on it today to move commuters into and out of downtown. How can we expect that adding another 31,000 units without significant improvements to the transit infrastructure?
- 6th Street is the gateway to the city, and the housing there already contains a very large number of elderly and poor. They are being overwhelmed by **pollution (both air and noise)**. Adding another 31,000 units will certainly have an impact on traffic since many of the residents will be working outside of the City (down the peninsula – as they do today).
- **One size doesn't fit all** – this was brought up and reinforced by Sarah Dennis from SF Planning. The last HE tried to apply one policy (a high density policy) to the entire City. This time around SF Planning has heard loud and clear that they need to address the HE in a way that allows different neighborhoods with different needs to meet them in different ways.
- How can we add 31,000 new units when the existing **water, sewer and power infrastructure** can't meet the needs of the existing residents. Water is incredibly expensive and residents are being asked to conserve even more or pay exorbitant fees. Will there even be enough fresh water to serve these new residents?
- Add to that **police, fire and ambulance (and hospital)** resources. Can we handle the demands that an additional 31,000 households will add to the City?
- What about setting priorities for existing city residents in that new housing? **Will 15% of it be set aside and guaranteed for workforce housing for teachers**, and other public servants?

- **Commuters?** Even with the new housing there will still be a huge number of workers driving into the City from outside. Is there something that could be done to encourage employers in the City to hire workers who already live in the City? Or to encourage their employees to move into the City rather than commuting in?
- DR's are costing the City a lot, and slowing down the construction of new units. If so, what are the statistics. How many DR's are filed against new construction vs. additions to existing homes that don't actually add new units?
- **Rent control only applies to buildings built before 1974.** Won't all new rental units bypass rent control and run at current market rates (i.e. too expensive for the average worker)?
- **Anecdotally there seem to be a lot of potential rental units that are being taken off the market entirely.** This doesn't seem like a good thing, but we've heard that lots of landlords would rather keep their property off the market than maintain it and get trapped with renters that they can't afford to keep long-term.
- **Historic neighborhoods** should not have to bear a large amount of new construction since it'll have an immediate impact on the historic nature of those neighborhoods.