

## **Housing Element Response 6/19/03**

The Patterson Area Neighborhoods Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on the County of Santa Barbara's draft of its housing element update. These comments are provided from the perspective of its impacts on the Goleta area.

Before addressing the specific programs described in the update, PANA has three concerns about the plan and process.

### **Conflict of Interest?**

First, there is widespread concern about the integrity of the housing element update process.

The County, with an almost total lack of publicity, invited the public to "take part in planning the future of housing in Santa Barbara County." On the day of the June 16, 2003 meeting in Goleta that was to discuss, in part, the potential conversion of agriculturally zoned sites, the News-Press ran a front page article on the issue.

The article informed the public that Brett Hodges, the owner of San Marcos Growers and one of the "potential" housing opportunity sites, had already signed an agreement with local developer Michael Towbes to build housing on the agricultural parcel.

The introduction of the draft housing element clearly states that "staff met with the affordable housing advocates, special interest groups, and the development community to discuss." Is one to conclude that deals have been reached prior to public comment? The credibility of the entire process is at stake. **The very heart of the public process demands that all citizens have the opportunity to be heard, not just a selected few.**

PANA strongly encourages the County to disclose a complete list of those it consulted when preparing the draft housing element and rezoning recommendations. In an effort to restore credibility to the process, the minutes of the meetings should be made public. At the same time, participants could alleviate much public skepticism regarding the situation by preparing statements of economic interests as used by the Fair Political Practices Commission. The county must take every effort to ensure that the public process is just that: public.

### **A Philosophical Change?**

Second, there is no mention anywhere in the document that affordable housing should be planned in a way that is compatible with its surroundings. The recommended programs are explained, they are rationalized and they are elaborated upon but they seem completely detached from the practical issues that will ultimately determine their possibility of success. This is very much a departure from prior housing elements adopted by the County.

For instance, the March 28, 2000 interim housing element update stated “The Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission will support well-designed and creatively planned affordable housing projects that are compatible with surrounding communities.” And before that the 1993 Housing Element stated “[t]he County’s goals and policies attempt to balance communities’ needs for affordable housing with other important environmental, economic and social goals, in a manner which provides the greatest community benefit and the least damage to natural systems and overall quality of life.”

This philosophy should be fundamental to the County of Santa Barbara’s Housing Element and its omission is something that should be remedied. In its present form the document lacks balance.

### **Evaluate the Program**

Last, the observation is made that “[a]n important precursor to changing existing programs and developing new programs is to evaluate the effectiveness of Housing Element programs of the previous planning period.” No such evaluation is included. There is a conclusion that these programs “failed to produce the number of housing units projected in the 1993 Housing Element” but any sort of evaluation of the 1993 Housing Element is completely lacking.

This oversight is disturbing. The County of Santa Barbara’s original 1981 Housing Element stipulated that its effectiveness should be reviewed the following year. The 1993 Housing Element update reaffirmed the need for evaluation and included a specific policy that “the County shall annually prepare a report documenting residential development and the effectiveness of housing programs.” It’s clear what prior Housing Elements required, why does the current update not follow through and present a detailed evaluation?

The following are responses to individual sections of the document:

#### **1993 Housing Element Programs:**

- 1. Housing Element states: Affordable Housing as only 46 percent of the county’s objective was produced.**

Please explain. What was built and where?

- 2. HE states: The County did not see adequate production of Market Rate Housing built at densities and sizes that make them affordable to those households earning 200% of the area median income, a segment of the workforce that has become increasingly unable to afford to purchase a home in the county.**

There was no such goal in the previous Housing Element. Failure to produce this type of housing is not relevant when discussing the 1993 Housing Element.

**3. HE states: There are many factors that led to the low production of all housing types.**

Factors omitted should include:

- Federal tax policies that don't encourage the construction of multi-family housing
- Severe reduction in federal and state subsidies for building
- Extraordinarily cumbersome and wasteful State bureaucracy that oversees affordable housing programs
- Fiscal incentives for jurisdictions to approve high-end housing, which generates enough revenue to pay for the required services
- The flood of construction-defect lawsuits that have slowed the construction of condominiums
- Staff shortages and high turnover within the County of Santa Barbara's departments that are responsible for managing and evaluating the affordable housing program

**Proposed Density Bonus Program:**

**4. HE states: It will provide a density bonus of at least 25% to a developer.**

What is the maximum?

**5. HE states: It will provide a standard reduction of common open space requirements and automatically reduce parking requirements.**

There should be no automatic reductions. There are plenty of examples on the South Coast of reduced open space and parking requirements having been granted to developers and the results have been problematic. The Planning Department should be well-aware of the complaints these reductions create and will continue to create if adopted.

Discretionary adjustments to building height, and front and side set backs may be appropriate but only when compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.

**Proposed Affordable Housing Overlay Program**

**6. HE States: The program is proposed to remain essentially the same**

The draft gives no indication that the Affordable Housing Overlay Program has been in any way effective. If not, it should be eliminated.

**Proposed Inclusionary Program**

**7. HE States: In-lieu fees will be paid in replace of building very low, low units.**

How will in-lieu fees be calculated?

**8. HE States: Workforce units must be built.**

What defines workforce housing? Who will be eligible? How long would work force housing be kept at below market values?

**Proposed Service Worker Housing Policy**

**9. HE States: Would address the disproportionate demand for low wage services created by large houses (5,000+ sf).**

Explain how the 5,000 square foot threshold was determined? What is the basis for determining that this size is more likely to generate service jobs? As presently proposed, this policy seems arbitrary and needs to be better justified.

**Proposed Variable Density Program**

**10. HE States: Proposes to establish “density equivalents” to encourage the construction of greater numbers of studios, one- and two- bedroom units by counting such smaller units as less than one full unit when applying the maximum density limits.**

An interesting concept but one that should be dropped from consideration. It will cause great confusion and is misleading. The County will only further muddle the zoning process by zoning an area DR-10 but then allowing 15 studios or 13 one bedroom units to be built per acre. A unit, regardless of the number of bedrooms, should still equate to 1.0. This policy is deceptive and doesn't belong in the Housing Element.

**Proposed Mixed use, In-Fill and Adaptive Reuse Policy**

**11. HE States: Automatically provides reduced parking requirements.**

Residents of Goleta understand that current parking standards are inadequate and further reduction of the requirements should not be considered.

**Proposed Second Residential Units Program**

**12. HE States: Reduce minimum parcel size and alter maximum unit sizes. Provide 60% reduction in transportation fees as well as reductions in park fees.**

This should not be a part of the Housing Element. Standards to parcel size and maximum unit size should not be changed from those of the State because the County's standards may further erode the character of existing neighborhoods.

Why should there be reduction in fees for 2<sup>nd</sup> units? Taxpayers will be subsidizing the homeowners who will be receiving market-rate rent for these units.

### **Proposed Rental Housing Program**

#### **13. HE States: Reduced common open space, reduced parking requirements, and fee waivers.**

Reduced common open space and parking requirements will alter the character of new neighborhoods, impacting quality of life.

Fee waivers should not be allowed. As explained in the 1993 Housing Element “[a]lthough impact fees may be unpopular with developers and are often blamed for increasing the cost of new homes, the motivation for the use of fees is not based on a desire to impede development, but rather on a need to maintain adequate levels of service by improving existing infrastructure or constructing additional service facilities. Costs associated with public facilities and infrastructure will not go away if impact fees to developers are removed or reduced. Instead, the costs will be shifted primarily to existing residents.”

### **Proposed Farm Employee Housing Program**

#### **14. HE States: Current need to get conditional use permit may be reduced to a ministerial permit.**

PANA has no experience in this area and will not comment.

### **Proposed Special Needs Housing Program**

#### **15. HE States: Offers a variety of incentives to encourage special needs housing.**

Very little background on this topic is provided. It is prudent for the County to reduce the parking requirement only if it is appropriate for the particular disability the housing may be used for. A similar approach would be reasonable with regard to building heights.

### **Proposed Homeless Facilities Policy**

The County should provide more background on the assessed needs for such housing in its various regions.

### **Conclusion**

The Housing Element must be used as a tool to communicate to the State that, like in every other community in California, local land use policies are important to the residents of the County of Santa Barbara and that there are numerous issues beyond our control that inhibit the construction of affordable housing. Progress has been made and more must be done. The County should take credit for what has been accomplished and encourage it to continue. At the same time, we must balance the need for affordable housing with the carrying capacity of our resources and infrastructure. This draft of the housing element does not do that and in its present form is too rigid and in no way reflects the residents' vision for their community. Affordable housing is necessary, but placing densities of 20+ units per acre adjacent to 4 units per acre is not. Four story buildings in Goleta are not. Less parking is not. Reduced fees for developers are not.

The goal should be that the development that takes place in Goleta in the near future will both help address the current housing shortage and be viewed as great housing in 30 years, not an undesirable result of the housing numbers game.