



Is There Affordable Housing in Mountain View?

"Affordable Housing Week"

Panel Discussion

Hosted by CSA

May 15, 2008



AFFORDABLE HOUSING WEEK



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Can the city create affordable housing?

LOCAL ADVOCATES SEE OPPORTUNITIES IN NOVEMBER ELECTION, GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

By Daniel DeBolt

Mountain View has experienced a net loss of affordable housing over the past 20 years, according to resident Roy Hayter of Advocates for Affordable housing.

Hayter and others interested in the subject took part in an "affordable housing week" discussion recently at Community Services Agency, whose clients are often in need of low-cost housing.

"A whole generation has seen no real net gain in affordable housing," Hayter said, referring to Mountain View. "That is a record I don't think anyone can be proud of."

He said the problem represents a "real shift in the quality of the character of Mountain View," especially as the city succeeds in building thousands of homes for those with higher income levels.

As defined by the federal government, "affordable housing" costs 30 percent of a person's income. For 2008, a household of two with \$42,450 in annual income is considered to be in the "very low" income bracket because it is at 50 percent of the median. It is possible for those in lower income brackets to receive lower rents through subsidized housing.

With the City Council election in November and the general plan update starting next month, the housing issue is on the front burner for some candidates, like Michael Kasperzak, who attended the discussion, and Alicia Crank, who has named it a top priority.

City staffer Adriana Garefalos acknowledged that housing needs "greatly exceed the supply, as it does all over the Bay Area." She provided a list of subsidized housing in Mountain View, all with long or closed waiting lists.

"For affordable housing there are small steps forward and no easy solutions," Garefalos said, adding that acquiring the federal funds means competing with projects in other cities. Often, by the time government funding is allocated, the property has already been sold, she said.

The good news, according

to Hayter, is that the city is committed to build 50 units of affordable family housing downtown at Evelyn and Franklin streets, and Habitat for Humanity is planning a project at the Wagon Wheel restaurant site at Whisman and Middlefield roads.

"There is some good news," he said, "but the city could do a lot better."

At the same time the city sees new affordable housing, it is allowing many older, affordable apartments to be demolished and replaced by pricier condos.

Until about 1998, the city had been focused on preserving affordable housing, and three large apartment complexes — Central Park apartments, Maryce Freelen Place and Shorebreeze apartments — were saved by affordable housing nonprofits. But then priorities changed at the council level, advocates say.

Garefalos said that land for new affordable housing projects is scarce, and that the city has "scoured every piece of land it owns." San Antonio Place, the only new affordable housing project done in the last 20 years, was built on an old roadway.

The city has been understaffed, Garefalos said, preventing the aggressive pursuit of affordable housing projects. But Hayter says it's a matter of "political will" to add more staff. He also said the city could consider putting affordable housing on two city-owned lots downtown, one near Bryant and California streets and another near Villa and Franklin streets.

"There is land, but it's a matter of focus, purpose and priority," he said.

Advocates say past city councils have also failed to get housing developers to include below market rate homes as part of their projects.

"Toll Brothers is going to have 500-plus units" at Mayfield, said resident Joan MacDonald. "None of them are going to be affordable. That's a crying shame." ■

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