

MORE HOUSING IN BERKELEY

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The presentations to the City Council at the workshop on housing on February 16 included a great deal of helpful data and many recommendations about how to achieve more housing to serve all income levels. In the Council discussion that followed, it was clear that all members agree there is a housing crisis that requires sustained effort and new approaches. The final comment by the Mayor in support of this needed effort included a statement that whatever is done must "protect the neighborhoods". Not a single member of the Council challenged the Mayor on this. It appears that any changes in housing policies will begin with protecting the status quo in our neighborhoods, assuring that change will be only at the margins.

The Council must decide what kind of City we want to be. If we want to achieve an equitable and diverse City with all kinds of new housing our neighborhoods will be affected. City leaders must face this directly if there is to be meaningful change. The reason we have a housing crisis is because we have made protecting neighborhoods the priority rather than pursuing housing policies in which all our neighborhoods are involved in creating new housing.

Discussions about housing should begin with a commitment to a core value - achieving and sustaining a diverse and equitable Berkeley. This over-riding principle should be the basis for new policies and new processes that will achieve lots of new housing in every area in our City. We must have a comprehensive City-wide plan for all kinds of housing throughout the City and must adopt the means to achieve the plan. This must go far beyond our regional fair share. To be successful, such a plan must include all areas of the City and affect all the people in Berkeley. We cannot continue the pattern of protecting many parts of the City from any new development

Since the 1970's, Berkeley has suppressed development of new housing to protect neighborhoods. Suppression has included: General Plan and Zoning policies, the approval process, the Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance, district elections, misuse of CEQA and of historic preservation tools, and the lack of any overall vision and corresponding plan to assure that all kinds of new housing would be built and all kinds of people would continue to be able to live here. While Berkeley prides itself on being a progressive City it has continually empowered those whose housing needs have already been met while making it extremely difficult and expensive to create any new housing, resulting in an increasingly less diverse and more privileged population.

A few examples of the power of neighborhood protection at the expense of housing include: the lengthy battles that long delayed the Downtown Plan; the down zoning of our major corridor, University Avenue; the failure to require the inclusion of housing in the rebuilding of the North Shattuck Safeway; rejection of the concept of dense development at the Ashby BART station; prolonged and repeated hearings on most housing proposals with resultant increased costs.

The suppression of housing and the primacy of neighborhood protection built upon an original sin of planning and development- the separation of different economic groups by land use controls. Not unlike the now-discredited racial covenants that assured that only white people could live east of what was then Grove St (now Martin Luther King Jr. Way), zoning restricted large areas of the City for single family use only- the most expensive kind of housing. Most of these areas are still protected with a few exceptions for accessory dwelling units. Some of the most ardent opponents of new housing live in these protected neighborhoods. They may not be gated, but many of these parts of Berkeley are car-dependent suburban enclaves of increasingly wealthy residents.

Two professors at UCLA recently completed a major study of 95 metropolitan areas of our country, identifying connections between land use restrictions and economic segregation. Key findings of this study are:

- Density restrictions increase segregation by exacerbating the concentration of affluence, enabling the wealthy to wall themselves off from other groups
- Segregation is positively associated with land use restrictions, such as local project approvals and zoning approvals
- Places that require multiple levels of approval to get housing built are more segregated
- Restrictions on density lead to higher housing prices and shape economic segregation across entire metros
- Efforts to force wealthier parts of the city to build housing for low income households or inclusionary housing are more effective at reducing segregation than bringing higher-income households into lower-income parts of the city.

The first political battle in which I was engaged in Berkeley was planning the desegregation of our public schools. The reason we had segregated schools was because our neighborhoods were segregated. We desegregated our schools by moving our children around but we did nothing to desegregate our neighborhoods. When I later was on the Planning Commission I proposed we rezone all neighborhoods to permit a mix of different uses and densities but that was not

adopted. We thus lost many opportunities to diversify our neighborhoods as vacant lots were filled with equally low density housing.

We will never begin to achieve the kinds and amount of new housing that Berkeley needs until all neighborhoods participate in our collective responsibility to help meet the housing needs of people of all incomes. We need the commitment and involvement of the entire community to achieve the many kinds of new housing that will make Berkeley a truly progressive, diverse city.

A plan for lots of housing based on the core principle of achieving and sustaining a diverse and equitable Berkeley should:

- Increase General Plan densities and corresponding zoning standards in all parts of the City
- Streamline the permit process and make the appeal process more difficult
- Focus first on new development in commercial districts, including neighborhood commercial areas, as these are located in most parts of Berkeley
- Rezone all major corridors for 2 block width commercial
- Rezone all commercial districts, including neighborhood commercial, to permit a minimum of 5 stories
- Prohibit new one story buildings in all areas zoned for commercial; require any new buildings in commercial districts to have a minimum of 4 stories of housing above the ground floor
- Prohibit new surface parking lots
- Permit at least one building with residential above the ground floor of up to 120 ft at major intersections/ nodes in commercial areas
- Require Accessory Dwelling Units be included in new single family dwellings
- Require an Accessory Dwelling Unit on the site if an addition of more than 400 sq ft is proposed to an existing residential building
- Develop Planned Unit Development plans for intensive development of major sites for housing, including:
 - City Corp yard

BART parking lots
Any underdeveloped site of at least ½ acre

- Identify all major undeveloped and underdeveloped parcels and surface parking lots throughout the City that have the potential for a significant amount of housing; work with owners on possible development for housing
- Work with the University for more student housing on University-owned lands, including hill areas
- Eliminate parking requirements for residential uses

There are lots more ideas to consider, but the first step is a City Council commitment to truly progressive policies that will bring all kinds of new housing and more diversity throughout the City, not just in a few neighborhoods. All people in Berkeley who consider themselves progressive and who value diversity and equity must come together to support new housing in every neighborhood.

In the 1960's Berkeley acted courageously on the moral issue of how to educate our children. It is past time for all of us to act courageously on the moral issue of how to live our daily lives in equitable and diverse neighborhoods.