

San Joaquin County Housing Element Update Stakeholder Workshop #1 Summary

Workshop Overview

On September 10, 2008, San Joaquin County Community Development Department held a workshop for key stakeholders and community members interested in housing issues in the County. Participants listened to a short introductory presentation about the Housing Element Update and then broke into groups for an interactive roundtable discussion. Participants were asked to identify key housing issues and barriers and opportunities for creating affordable housing in the County. The following summarizes the comments that were made by each group.

Workshop Participant Comments

Affordability

- Need to lower housing costs
- Working families can't afford housing
- If you can't afford rent, you can't afford to buy a house
- Affordability targets need to be adjusted to represent real conditions
- Need a better definition of affordable housing—who is it affordable for?
 - There is a difference between affordable *housing* vs. affordable *homeownership*
- What is the County going to do to meet the needs of the low/very low income population?
- Need to get people to a place economically where they can afford a home
- No mobile homes built in 25 years
- Group quarters
 - Need housing with roommates; or boarding house model
- Community perception of affordable housing
 - NIMBY(Not In My Backyard): BOS needs to step up; it's a political issue; needs to be an educational issue for the BOS and the public
 - Planning commission has caved in to pressure from NIMBYs
 - The community often objects to higher density because they feel it reduces property values
 - Safety issues
 - High crime rates
 - People are afraid of unknown
 - High density/low income housing needs to be well managed.

Insufficient Available Land for Affordable Housing

- Need to identify property to turn into affordable housing
 - Need enough vacant land that is properly zoned in order to build affordable housing
 - County needs more land zoned for high density housing
 - County needs to provide services such as water/sewer to sites zoned for higher densities?
 - High density needs to be in proximity to amenities and transportation
- Will schools be impacted by more children in high density housing?
- Zone "by right" so that you don't need to go in front of planning department

- Need to zone properties for different housing types

Inclusionary Housing/Development Regulation

- Why can't you mandate affordable housing component in every project?
- Require houses be built to different specifications to make them affordable
- There needs to be accountability to develop housing for every income level
- Develop program for inclusionary zoning ordinance
 - Review Ripon's inclusionary ordinance
- There needs to be incentives or eliminated/reduced fees to build affordable housing
- County has density bonuses programs that work to build affordable housing
- Downsides of inclusionary ordinances
 - They can be used as a tool to control growth
- Encourage green housing
 - Changes to zoning
 - Encourage technology
- Impact fees can be up to \$80,000 per house
- Need to decrease processing time for development—developers need predictability (see City of Sacramento Matrix program)

Impact from Foreclosures

- Foreclosure crisis that is plaguing the entire San Joaquin County area
 - Foreclosed properties are negatively effecting neighborhoods
- What is going to happen to people that were in foreclosed homes?
 - People are moving in with families, they are cashed out
 - Can't rent because of credit and debt problems
- Provide more funding to the Neighborhood Preservation Department to allow non-profits housing developers to have a stronger footing against investors vying for foreclosed properties
- Competitive market for foreclosure houses
- Slum lord investors are buying up foreclosures and continuing the substandard housing problem
- There is an unwillingness of foreclosure owners and agents to work with low income and working class families trying to buy foreclosures
- Current lending guidelines are making it more and more difficult for buyers to qualify for loans

Current Housing Market

- Owner-occupied housing
 - Doesn't make sense to build new housing when you can buy existing
 - There is still a need for more single family housing for low-income and working, class families
 - There are a few reasons that people don't qualify to purchase: credit, residency, jobs
 - People need to get themselves into a position to buy housing now while its affordable
 - Investors are buying housing stock
 - Lack of financial information and education for first-time homebuyers
 - Increase home loan counseling, down payment assistance funding so more low income and working class families can gain access to the home buying process
- Rental Housing
 - There is a 4 percent vacancy rate in rental markets and 25-35 percent vacancy rate in cities

- Rental applications are being screened differently, landlords are looking at foreclosures based on other credit
- Rents are increasing in places that are safer

Special Needs Housing

- Extremely low-income families and persons with disabilities and on fixed-income need subsidies
- Emergency shelters/transitional housing
 - Need resources/funding for preventing homeless
 - Not enough currently to prevent homelessness
 - County should consider allowing emergency shelters “by right”
 - There is a gulf between chronically homeless and everyone else. Chronically homeless can’t even get to a point where they can be helped. Can’t get sober on the street. Can’t get into good situation if you aren’t sober
 - Bill Brown from the Rescue Mission is an important contact
 - No shelter in unincorporated areas except Haven Peace
 - Existing shelters are very old
 - Battered women have no income, no where to go
 - County needs to provide transitional housing for youth coming out of foster homes
 - Mentally disabled need supportive housing with services
 - Developers could renovate existing housing for persons with mental health issues
- Seniors
 - Seniors need safe affordable housing
- Farmworkers
 - Need to create really basic housing and migrant worker camps for farmworkers
- Persons with disabilities
 - Persons with disabilities need to be in really safe communities, they are much more likely to be influenced by bad lives around them, and be victims of crime
 - With SSI/disabilities there is a long wait for services
 - There is a waiting process for submitting referrals

Funding

- Everything comes back to money
 - Availability of funding is biggest barrier
- Non-profits
 - Non-profits need to partner with the County
 - Non-profits can get money initially, but there is no money to maintain it, or administer programs
 - Need funding for programs that help homeless, transients, mental health populations
 - Need money for one time rental assistance; down-payment assistance
 - Non-profits can use Prop 46 to buy affordable housing. Easy process to do if you know the right people to work with on the grant
- GAP program
 - GAP program is really useful—provides 20 percent down payment and additional money for closing costs
 - GAP funding can get person on SSI into homeownership
 - Currently the County does have HOME funding to aid families with some GAP financing and down payment assistance

- Prop 63, 1 percent tax on income over \$1 million has a huge impact for funding services
- Need to combine/couple programs to make homeownership achievable
- Enough money is available, non-profits just need assistance for filling out grant applications
- Develop a housing trust fund
- Banks are willing to work with County to acquire properties
- Shelter Plus/CVCI housing corporation funding is very helpful and can be expanded
- Need more funding for first time homebuyers
- Easy to work with County on mortgage referrals
- All current housing funds need to be directed to addressing the problem of foreclosure properties located in county areas
- Big need for administrative help for non-profits/service organizations to get grant/government funding; also for citizens to connect with mortgage lenders/non-profits that can walk them through the process of buying a house
- Section 8 housing vouchers—need to get properties certified, not cost effective for owner

Housing Conditions/ Code Enforcement

- Substandard housing
 - Many units may be affordable, but they are not in decent living conditions
 - People in substandard housing are afraid to speak out
 - There are individual standards for what is good or clean.
 - It's difficult for people to change the way the live
- Neighborhood preservation
 - Government shouldn't have to solve all of the problems, especially enforcement. Neighborhoods can turn around by individual efforts.
 - Difficult to maintain good conditions without an HOA.
- Code enforcement
 - County needs to respond to complaints on substandard housing
 - Code enforcement on foreclosures needs to be increased to levels that will make lenders and investors more willing make deals on these properties.
 - Code enforcement/environmental health need more power to keep up with foreclosures
 - In some jurisdictions, a fee is assessed every time code enforcement arrives on a complaint
 - City of Stockton Code enforcement—if you don't fix it after a warning there are automatic fees up to \$1,000/day for rental only—not home buyer occupied.
 - Sheriff's department has stepped up enforcement in Thornton
- Crime enforcement
 - Need sheriff's department to patrol high density neighborhoods.
 - Broken window effect

Coordination between Public Agencies and Private Organizations

- Need a regional vision
 - Regional equity/quality of life Issues
 - Better schools
 - Access to fresh food
 - Access to health care
- Need more proactive County vs. developer-driven projects
- Need more communication among agencies and organizations.
 - Need to talk on a regular basis

- Regional/local alliance
 - Inter-jurisdictional coordination
 - Have partnership ready to go
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Businesses organizations
- Sacramento County and Mercy Housing are aggressively pursuing large revenue source
- Identify advocates for affordability
 - ACORN—affordable housing advocate

County Economic Conditions

- Lack of decent wages and employment opportunities
 - Need to increase minimum wages
 - A chicken/egg situation: how do you get the jobs without the people
 - Not enough jobs/economic opportunity to make money to buy houses.
- People lack basic life skills
 - Need to have qualified educated persons, 50 percent not graduating high school
 - Technical skills are lacking for agricultural processing facilities
 - Skilled workers are leaving the county
- County needs larger economic outlook
- Lack of economic infrastructure
- Housing boom—in-migrants (from Bay Area) make it less affordable

Role of County Government

- County needs to take on larger social services role
- Cities don't want to accommodate low income residents
- There is a mismatch between provision of infrastructure services (by cities) and social services (by the County) to meet affordable housing need
- County needs services agreement with Stockton
- Working with the County is easier than working with the City of Stockton
- Planning commission in County is better than in City of Stockton
- County fees are not adequate to cover affordable housing need (e.g., Mountain House)
- Non-profits and social service providers need to coordinate with County staff to take advantage of all programs