



June 7, 2021

TO: Das Williams, First District
Gregg Hart, Second District
Joan Hartmann, Third District
Bob Nelson, Fourth District
Steve Lavagnino, Fifth District

RE: Community Services and Planning—Housing Study

Dear Chair Nelson and Supervisors:

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization. We encourage informed and active participation in government, work to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League supports equal opportunity in housing and we support measures to increase the supply of safe, decent, and adequate housing for all.

The League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara (LWVSB) strongly supports the addition of \$245,000 to the County's Budget for a Workforce Housing study. The lack of affordable housing has continued to worsen for all income levels in our area. A graph at the end of the budget document illustrates our rising median house price which jumped from \$625,000 in 2019 to \$1,174,000 in 2020—a 87% increase. The South County's problem is especially dire because of high rents resulting from a low vacancy rate which is likely to get worse as college students return in the fall.

According to the County Snapshot in the CEO's report, there has been a huge regional investment to assist the homeless (\$91 million in 2020-2021 countywide, \$48.1 million funded by the County) but we need an even larger effort to provide housing stability for vulnerable renters who may be forced to move, through no fault of their own, and who cannot find a replacement property. If more units are produced, especially at the low and very low income level, that will also help to reduce the homeless population. We hope this proposed study will help educate the community about the roots of housing unaffordability and identify initiatives to address the problem while considering the following questions:

- 1) How do we prioritize new housing units for current local residents and local workers?
- 2) If our region accepts the RHNA mandate to find another 24,000 units in the County and its cities before 2031 (more than twice the current target), can the County bring all stakeholders

together to ensure that the Above Moderate income target of more than 10,000 units doesn't get filled first and use the most available land?

- 3) How do we FUND the significant increase of affordable low and moderate income units given the increasing building costs and need for below current market rents? Can we leverage publicly owned assets and repurpose vacant commercial and office buildings?
- 4) Will we be ready to take advantage of new grant opportunities that may be provided by state and federal initiatives to address the housing shortage that can also serve equity, economic and sustainability goals of the County?

The Santa Barbara School District is looking at how to prioritize local employees for the Tatum property that is now planned as a rental development (for all age groups) within the unincorporated County. Perhaps the County can help research what other communities have done to remove legal and financing hurdles.

The County's leadership, perhaps partnering with the County's Housing Authority, can explore housing community models that would be helpful for all income levels and provide long term affordability. One of the tools that could ensure long term affordability is the use of community land trusts (preferred over inclusionary requirements by our State Assembly member, Steve Bennett who saw what worked and didn't work in Ventura County).

There is a lot of support for housing for the 'missing middle' or Moderate Income residents. But to reverse trends like the loss of younger workers and families and increasing greenhouse gas emissions caused by commutes, the production of 'Low Income' units must also be prioritized. The definitions for each income category are very different here than most other parts of the country. For instance, a single person making less than \$70,000 (or a family of 4 making less than \$100,000) in Santa Barbara County can still be considered Low Income for development incentives and government subsidy purposes.

As Supervisors noted recently, part of the complete solution for affordable housing should include opportunities for home ownership, especially for younger residents impacted by the Recession and residents who never had a history of home ownership in their family trees because of systemic racism. A 'limited equity' structure and community land trust can guarantee long term affordability. Partners like the Housing Trust Fund of Santa Barbara County could explore new financing options that could also help improve housing stability.

Thank you for your hard work and respectful discourse during these challenging times. Please contact our Housing Committee at housing@lwvsantabarbara.org, if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Vijaya Jammalamadaka, President
League of Women Voters Santa Barbara