

From: [Jonathan Previtali](#)
To: [Planning Public Comment](#)
Cc: [Leslie Mendez](#)
Subject: Re: Letter to Planning Commission regarding Housing Element
Date: Thursday, November 10, 2022 3:07:49 AM

Please see typo fixed below and use this version instead.

Thanks,
Jon

On Thu, Nov 10, 2022 at 2:51 AM Jonathan Previtali <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Hello Fellow Commissioners,

Please forgive me for not being able to attend the upcoming Planning Commission meeting and instead, please accept this note regarding the Housing Element you will discuss Tuesday. As you may recall, I was the Planning Commission liaison on the Housing Element Working Group.

First off, I want to tell you the Housing Element Working Group effort was very well orchestrated. Barry Miller and Alex Captanian were excellent leaders, we had strong support from a number of other city staff, particularly Community Development Director Ali Giudice, and we had a very engaged citizen group representing a wide range of stakeholders. Thoughtful agendas were set, we had an incredible reading list, experts were brought in and ample space was created to share experiences and ideas. Indeed, people were highly participatory and candid about the many complex and sensitive topics surrounding housing.

Much of my contribution focused on aspects of the Housing Element that could lead to better racial and socioeconomic integration of our single-family home (SFH) neighborhoods. As you probably know, in San Rafael and across the state, the fact that large SFH neighborhoods are missing less expensive multi-unit dwellings like condos and apartments makes it hard for people without high incomes or intergenerational wealth to live in these communities. Instead, many newcomers and people with lower incomes live in areas that were historically designated by city planners for multi-unit dwellings in separate communities like the Canal. This has led to the type of racial and socioeconomic segregation we see in San Rafael. SFH neighborhoods typically have better schools and that is indeed the case here. To me, this seems unfair. Why shouldn't every child in San Rafael have the same access to education, the same chance to achieve? There are many approaches to solving this problem, but within the framework of housing, a proven path is to add more affordable multi-family housing to SFH neighborhoods. This works by increasing the odds of children staying in school, going to college, and effectively breaking the cycle of poverty for themselves, their families, and generations to come. How great is that!

The challenge is that SFH neighborhoods here are already very well built out, the small, multi-family housing developments that might fit here or there aren't profitable to developers and there's concern that new buildings won't fit in. The Housing Element mentions a possible solution I like, and which had traction with a below market rate (BMR) housing developer on the working group. It's called an overlay plan and it's set to be considered by 2024. My understanding of an

overlay plan is that it would provide special incentives for the development of affordable housing in some areas, but it could also include elements akin to a Downtown Precise Plan, but for the neighborhoods. For instance, it could front-load design requirements in collaboration with neighbors to ensure aesthetic consistency and high-quality construction, thus reducing (but not totally eliminating) two major barriers to new affordable housing: community concern and permitting delays.

Another approach to promoting integration I'm sure you'll hear a lot about on Tuesday involves the use of Housing Opportunity Sites. [Here's](#) a link to some great maps produced for the Housing Element. These are locations, most commercial/office, where the city will encourage the addition of multi-unit housing. While the built-out nature of the SFH neighborhoods made it hard to include a lot of Housing Opportunity Sites in the neighborhoods, the list has a good number in my neighborhood of Terra Linda. This is partly due to projects already underway like Northgate Walk and the Northgate Town Square, but also by proposing condos to be added to places like the Terra Linda shopping center where our cherished Scotty's Market is located. In speaking with neighbors, I think it's fair to say Terra Linda is ready to embrace new members of the community. In fact, the formerly named Terra Linda Homeowners Association recently changed its name to the Terra Linda Neighborhood Association to acknowledge the fact we have a vibrant and growing community of people, not just homeowners. I should also mention there was a feeling among the planners and the Working Group that the opportunity to convert single-family homes to multi-unit dwellings per SB 9 and the City's allowance of ADU's will also lead to more affordable housing in the SFH neighborhoods.

A newer and expanding threat to housing is the rising cost of housing and gentrification, and this was a major focus of the Working Group. Many studies have shown that rising housing values lead to higher rents, evictions of lower income people, crowding and homelessness. There's a direct correlation. Needless to say, this is a very serious problem that affects the most susceptible people in our city. We all saw the homeless area under the freeway, but I also now notice seniors living in their cars when I go to Whole Foods. As you can see from [this article in the Marin IJ](#), displacement is starting to happen in the Canal District now. AB-1482 that caps rent increases to 5% per year will help, but I feel if we don't act swiftly and strongly, we're going to see gentrification lead to many more evictions and homelessness. The City already does a lot to ensure evictions are just cause, but I think paying tenants to leave like we're seeing in the Canal and uneven legal representation between landlords and tenants, e.g., during mediation, will act to dampen those efforts.

This is a complex problem with so many variables, there's no way I could begin to address it adequately here. I encourage you to focus on sections 6.4.1 Programs to End and Prevent Homelessness in San Rafael and 6.4.2 Programs to Combat Housing Discrimination, Eliminate Racial Bias, Undo Historic Patterns of Segregation in the [Housing Action Plan](#) chapter of the Draft Housing Element. Please pay special attention to Program 2: Relocation Assistance and Program 12: Tenant Protection Measures that I feel lay the foundation for possible solutions.

Finally, I'll close by mentioning that the idea of adding housing to light-industrial areas like around Anderson in the south and Paul in the north was debated several times during the Working Group

sessions. The city allows housing in commercial/office zones, but not light-industrial. The Chamber of Commerce is justifiably concerned that adding residents to light-industrial zones would cause business to be edged out through complaints of noise, industrial fumes, and simply the profitability of housing conversions. Several of us thought otherwise and suggested measures could be taken to prevent those conflicts and protect businesses. I lived in a light-industrial area in San Francisco for about 10 years next to an auto shop and never had an issue. In fact, having a small group of friendly Asian mechanics as neighbors was super fun, helped create a bridge over a cultural divide I probably would not have otherwise experienced, and of course was tremendously helpful when I needed a repair. My roommates and I were friends with those guys and the shop is still there going on 20 years later. I feel that adding housing to our light-industrial areas in a smart way would be great for everyone, particularly with the addition of a couple new parks. There's a lot of room for new housing in those areas and great precedent in other cities.

All the best,
Jon Previtali
San Rafael Planning Commission