

No Gridlock Committee

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Subject: Affordable Housing Options Report

The No Gridlock Committee has been a consistent advocate for affordable housing, and we believe it is critical to consider and analyze substantive alternatives to address the usual lack of affordable housing as well as lack of a full range of housing types and sizes typically provided in proposed development projects.

We believe including a range of housing types and sizes in a project can result in less traffic per unit, and in particular we believe having the opportunity to build second units (“granny flats”), either attached or detached, is essential to accommodate a changing population and demographic over time. Often CC&Rs restrict or prohibit second units. As part of the project review, potential CC&Rs should be closely scrutinized to determine their impact on the County’s ability to meet its range of housing needs.

Mixed densities should be supported actively, as well as mixed use. Mixed densities could include, for example, having corner lots zoned for a duplex or triplex configuration which remains consistent with the size range and architecture of surrounding units but has a different internal configuration. Mixed use (residential and commercial on the same lot) is generally well understood and supported, but the lack of developed guidelines inhibits planners’ ability to support or encourage such projects.

A similar lack of guidelines inhibits the ability to provide fee relief for smaller and more affordable units that don’t have the same impacts as larger units. While an apartment gets a break on TIM fees, small houses don’t. Similar issues exist for sewer and school fees. While some of these issues are outside the county’s authority, it is essential to describe potential solutions or alternative approaches so they can be brought to the attention of the appropriate authority. For issues within the county’s authority, such as TIM fees, it is essential to develop precise, easily accessible and understood guidelines for fee relief. Having a \$1,000,000 line item in a TIM fee CIP for affordable housing is pointless if it never gets used.

Transportation is an enormous cost in counties such as ours, which have developed to be almost entirely dependent on the automobile. To the extent a development can be designed and built to reduce the need for just one automobile in the household, by being within walking or biking range of a school, or by providing the opportunity for an in-home occupation, or by being close to a town center, there is instantly an additional \$35,000 to \$50,000 capital available from the annual savings in not paying the costs of that automobile. Two decades ago annual energy costs were not considered in the cost of housing – once they were, energy conservation was built into new homes and the savings more than covered any increase in mortgage payments. The time has come to similarly consider transportation costs, and cost avoidance, in the housing cost package.

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Many creative solutions exist that can move us beyond the fee and inclusionary debates, and should be considered and fully analyzed at the earliest stage of any county action.

We appreciate your consideration of our input.

Sincerely,

Bill Center
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