

CITIZENS PLANNING ASSOCIATION PROPOSES NEW HOUSING POLICIES FOR THE CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

September 2007

BACKGROUND:

In late 2006, the Citizens Planning Association (CPA) Board formed a Housing Policy Task Force to formulate CPA's position on housing issues with particular focus on the City of Santa Barbara's current General Plan Update process ("Plan Santa Barbara").

The committee worked with its mission statement in mind: "To reconcile the community's need for diverse housing opportunities with other values advocated by Citizens Planning Association." Its efforts were guided by two core values: (1) living within our resources including land, water, air quality, transportation, waste treatment, and visual resources, and (2) promoting a diverse community. In the summer of 2007, CPA's SB General Plan Update Committee reviewed the policies drafted by the Task Force, the feedback received through comments on the draft, and the results of the recent CPA membership survey about housing issues. Based on that review, the committee formulated a set of housing policies and implementation strategies intended to become CPA's recommendations to the City of Santa Barbara. The proposed policies and implementation strategies were adopted by the CPA Board of Directors in September 2007 with the understanding that some modifications will be appropriate and necessary as the underlying principles are applied to other areas of Santa Barbara County.

CPA's three policy recommendations and related implementation strategies follow. In conjunction, they aim to reconcile our community's need for diverse housing opportunities with its long-standing commitment to preserve the established character of the city and to live within our limited resources.

We hope to elicit responses to info@citizensplanning.org from all who wish to engage in dialogue about the city's future.

PREAMBLE:

CPA urges the City of Santa Barbara to adopt the following policies and implementation strategies, designed to reconcile [1] the community's need for diverse housing opportunities with its long-standing commitment [2a] to preserve the established character of the city and [2b] to live within our resources (including land, water, air quality, transportation, waste management, and visual resources).

POLICY 1: CREATE EFFECTIVE INCENTIVES FOR NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT THAT FAVOR WELL-DESIGNED PROJECTS DIRECTED TO THE NEEDS OF THE WORKFORCE AND THEIR FAMILIES, SO AS TO REDUCE THE CURRENT JOBS/HOUSING IMBALANCE.

- Implementation Strategy 1.1: Preserve aging rental units through aggressive acquisition and rehabilitation or through low-interest loans to present owners for needed repairs.
- Implementation Strategy 1.2: Permit condo conversions and new residential developments only to benefit, by resale restrictions and rent controls, very-low, low, moderate, and middle-income members of the workforce or the needy and the disabled.
- Implementation Strategy 1.3: Strengthen the existing restrictions on commercial development and require projects to include employee housing.
- Implementation Strategy 1.4: Support employer-subsidized programs for both resale-restricted and rent-controlled housing affordable to members of the middle-income workforce.
- Implementation Strategy 1.5: Where site-specific circumstances permit, offer extraordinary bonus density to projects consisting entirely of a mix of resale-restricted or rent-controlled units affordable to very low, low, moderate, and middle income workforce.
- Implementation Strategy 1.6: Provide ample landscaped setbacks and areas of protected open space to minimize air pollution's impact, documented in recent research, on children and other sensitive receptors who reside near freeways and traffic corridors.
- Implementation Strategy 1.7: Persuade SBCC and other schools to limit out-of-town enrollment and to build dormitories in order to reduce competition for reasonable rentals between students and low-paid workers.
- Implementation Strategy 1.8: Consider overlay zones to implement Policy #1

POLICY 2a: PRESERVE SANTA BARBARA'S HISTORICALLY ESTABLISHED CHARACTER AS A RELATIVELY SMALL, EMINENTLY LIVABLE, AND WIDELY ADMIRER CITY.

- Implementation Strategy 2a.1: Continue to provide homeowners, renters, commuters, and tourists ample natural and cultural opportunities to enjoy the city and its surroundings.
- Implementation Strategy 2a.2: Strengthen zoning laws and architectural design guidelines that limit new buildings to human scale, protect significant public views, and favor pedestrian-friendly streetscapes through generous sidewalks, landscaped setbacks, and other open spaces.
- Implementation Strategy 2a.3: Find ways to decrease traffic congestion with increased support for alternative modes of transportation rather than undue limitations on commercial or residential parking.

POLICY 2b: ASSURE THAT THE CITY'S GROWTH IS CAREFULLY PLANNED AND MEANINGFULLY CONTROLLED SO THAT SANTA BARBARA REMAINS WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF ITS NATURAL AND INFRASTRUCTURAL RESOURCES.

- Implementation Strategy 2b.1: Inventory our major resources (clean air and water, infrastructure for sewage and solid waste disposal, road capacity, public ocean and mountain views, etc) and determine whether they have increased, decreased, or have remained stable since the city estimated in 1985 that its resources can sustain roughly 40,000 units of housing.
- Implementation Strategy 2b.2: Determine the number and condition of illegal and often substandard living units so that their impact on our resources, as well as on the residents' health and safety, can be realistically assessed.
- Implementation Strategy 2b.3: Forecast the traffic impact of proposed developments with the realistic baseline of actually existing traffic rather than on the theoretical basis of nationwide "average daily trips" that have little to do with site-specific circumstances.
- Implementation Strategy 2b.4: Amend the zoning ordinance to require calculating the residential density of a mixed-use project after the square footage of the proposed commercial component has been deducted from the total square footage allowable by zoning.
- Implementation Strategy 2b.5: Promote environmental sustainability through enforceable standards for green building techniques and for reasonable limits on building, unit, and room sizes in new developments.