



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of the Los Altos-Mountain View Area
97 Hillview Avenue, Los Altos, CA 94022

November 15, 2015

Mayor McAlister and Members of the City Council
City of Mountain View
500 Castro Street
Mountain View, CA 94041

Re: Study Session, November 17th – Potential Study of Areas for Additional Residential Units

Dear Mayor McAlister and Members of the City Council:

The LWV supports actions that cope with the jobs/housing imbalance, including such strategies as rezoning commercial uses to residential or mixed use. We applaud the staff report for clearly outlining a number of strategies to increase the number of housing units in the City.

We have been supportive of the existing policies, plans and studies listed by staff that should gradually increase the number of housing units, including minimum density policy, no net loss of housing units policy, considering a large number of residential units in North Bayshore, loosening the companion unit standards, and updating the East Whisman Precise Plan to study residential uses.

In regard to the potential new strategies discussed in the staff report, we are concerned about encouraging increased densities in existing multi-family zones as we think this would typically result in existing/occupied naturally affordable (older) housing units being torn down and tenant displacement would be a major issue. Because tenant displacement is currently such a problem in Mountain View, we would be very cautious about implementation of this policy.

Should the Council opt to go in this direction, we hope that relocation benefits offered to tenants would be increased over current levels, that developers would be able to take advantage of the increased density (FAR) **only** if they provide a minimum of 10% below-market-rate units (BMR's). We recommend a sliding scale regarding BMR units. The higher the percentage of units and the more affordable the units, the greater the FAR the developer receives. We also propose that Council give preference in any new BMRs to displaced tenants. We recommend using FAR rather than densities as we believe this encourages smaller units, which tend to be more naturally affordable and fill an important need. In particular, there are more and more seniors in the community who would like to remain in Mountain View and who would like smaller units in walkable areas.

Because of the displacement issue, we prefer the strategy of converting industrial areas to residential uses. As the staff report points out, this is already happening to some extent in North Bayshore, East Whisman, the Evelyn Corridor, and Villa. We think all of the areas mentioned as part of Strategy No. 2 are worth studying.

In terms of Strategy No. 4, we have previously stated that we hope the City will consider City-owned sites for housing, particularly affordable housing, as it is so difficult and costly for affordable housing developers to find appropriate sites in Mountain View. Combined with a NOFA, this is a way for the City to promote quick action for building affordable housing. The “no net loss” policy mentioned earlier means that the City should minimize (or eliminate) redevelopment proposals that replace existing naturally affordable housing with *fewer*, generally more expensive, units.

Another strategy the Council should consider is including R1 and R2 districts as potential areas for increase of housing units. This is an EXCELLENT opportunity to encourage “Missing Middle Housing” forms (duplexes, fourplexes, bungalow courts, mansion apartments, live-work units); such housing types are medium density, very much in demand, and, if well-designed, compatible with existing neighborhood character.

Regarding workload, the Council should prioritize this study over the gatekeeper at 777 Middlefield that will displace a large number of residents.

Finally, we recommend that Council consider updating the condo conversion ordinance. The initiative ordinance is no longer effective because the number of rental units in the City has finally far exceeded the 15,373 minimum specified in the 1979 ordinance. We suggest that Council consider a new ordinance that ties condo conversions to the vacancy rate. Otherwise, we are concerned that many rentals may be converted to condos, causing more displacement in the process, while also creating more high-end residential units.

Thank you for considering our input.

Donna Yobs
Co-Chair, Housing Committee
LWV of the Los Altos-Mountain View Area

Cc: Dan Rich
Randy Tsuda
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