

Letter to Mountain View City Council asking for better methods to comply with the condominium Conversion Limitation Ordinance. Dated March 9, 2006.

March 9, 2006

Nick Galiotto, Mayor Kevin Duggan, City Manager Michael Martello, City Attorney

I am writing on behalf of the Los Altos/Mountain View League of Women Voters. Our housing committee has been studying issues related to affordable housing in Los Altos and Mountain View for nearly two years. We are most concerned about the number of rental units that will be lost by condominium conversions and demolition.

After reviewing Section 28.92 of the Conversion Limitation Act, the initiative ordinance passed by voters in 1979, we find it provides that "...no application for conversion shall be filed nor shall any conversion be approved or allowed to occur unless it is publicly documented beforehand that the total number of apartments will not, at any time, be reduced by the proposed conversion to any number below the initial total number." ..."(declared... to be 15,373)." Nonetheless, conversions are being approved without public documentation.

Public documentation is essential to comply with the ordinance and update the City's housing element. The City and the public require information on the rental housing stock to determine housing needs and policies. Perhaps the city could collect specific fees for condo conversion applications sufficient to fund staff or a consultant to complete the required documentation.

In addition, we have been advised through informal discussions with City staff that an apartment teardown followed by condo development on the same site is not covered by the initiative ordinance. This position is inconsistent with the intent of the initiative, as is indicated by Section 28.90, the Statement of Purpose. It is also inconsistent with the Definitions of "Apartment", and "Conversion" included in Section 28.91 of the ordinance.

For all these reasons we urge the City to deliberate on better

methods to comply with this ordinance.

Sincerely yours,
Donna Yobs Co-chair, Housing Committee League of Women Voters
of Los Altos/Mountain View Area

The Affordable Housing Committee of the League of Women Voters of the Los Altos-Mountain View Area sent the following letter, dated February 26, 2006, to the Mountain View City Council:

February 26, 2006
Mountain View City Council City Hall, 500 Castro Street P.O. Box
7540 Mountain View, CA 94039-7540
Re: Affordable Housing Strategy

Honorable Mayor Nick Galiotto and Members of the City Council:

The Los Altos-Mountain View Area League of Women Voters has been focusing on affordable housing issues in the two cities for the last two years. We commend the efforts of staff and the Environmental Planning Commission for their careful and logical proposals for spending the valuable resource of affordable housing funds expected to be available to the City in the next five years.

We especially applaud the EPC recommendation that landbanking be the primary and most immediate use of these housing monies. Little land is available where affordable housing could potentially be built and land is constantly escalating in value. Therefore, a large percentage of the available funds should be spent to acquire feasible sites for affordable housing.

In order to facilitate landbanking, and, in addition, in order to facilitate the development of affordable housing in the City, we also recommend the hiring of an additional staff person who could spend time on landbanking and working with nonprofit developers and others to administer new housing projects and programs. We

understand that the present staff does not have enough time to spend on new and time-consuming projects. As a result, we are afraid that housing projects will be delayed because of insufficient staff time to manage them.

Although we strongly believe that landbanking is a better use of the in-lieu fees than just banking the fees, we also want to see projects actually built on any sites the City purchases, as well as the City-owned Evelyn Avenue site. Our highest priority for development projects continues to be a rental project targeted to very low income large families, as we see this as the greatest unmet need in the City. Smaller sites, not feasible for large rental projects, could perhaps be built on by groups such as Habitat for Humanity, which is able to deliver home ownership to low income families.

We would urge the Council to move slowly before trying other new home ownership initiatives, including those targeted to teachers and public employees. Although we recognize that the home ownership program for teachers has been successful in San Jose, the average cost of a home/condo in San Jose is significantly lower than that in Mountain View. We would hope that the City would not allocate a lot of money initially to the home ownership programs discussed in the staff report, but would first do more research into how such programs are working in surrounding communities and then allocate minimal funds until it is clear that any program will be successful in Mountain View. For the City to have the ability to do this research, we believe that additional staff is an appropriate use of the housing funds. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the City's Affordable Housing Strategy.

Sincerely yours,

Donna Yobs 1157 Karen Way Mountain View 94040 Co-Chair,
Housing Committee League of Women Voters of the Los Altos-
Mountain View Area
Cc: Kevin Duggan, City Manager