



January 12, 2022

Re: Housing Element Community Workshop #1

To Laura Simpson, Planning Department, and Lisa Wise Consulting:

One priority we'd like to highlight for the update to the Housing Element is how to streamline the development process. Spending more time increases costs and uses more resources, both for the city and the developer. Making the process faster and more efficient will be beneficial not only for the creation of these projects, but also by minimizing frustration from residents.

#1 Employ many staff for processing permits and paperwork

Developers have reported that the time to receive permits has been long. For example, to get a permit for an ADU, which is a small residential unit on a private property, contractors often wait more than 4 months. It is not uncommon for large projects to wait one or two years from the first study session to receive a permit. We hope that a fully staffed Planning Department can help to alleviate some of these processing times, or at the very least keep them as consistent as possible.

#2 Change zoning designations to make building housing (such as along El Camino) a permitted use and not a conditional use.

In certain areas, building housing should be an approved way to use the land. For example, the project at 330 Distel Circle needs a Conditional Use Permit (CUP), but zoning for housing as a permitted use there makes sense.

#3 Assign form-based coding for most areas of the city, including single family zones

Form-based coding should be sufficient to identify what can be built on a specific parcel. A building that adheres to a specific development envelope should be permitted without the need for excessive meetings or reviews. We propose form-based coding for most areas of the city, including single family zones.

#4 Encourage developers to use SB 35 and SB 330.

These laws speed up the process in a productive way. Projects that qualify should be encouraged to use these laws and not discouraged from using them.

#5 Exempt small housing projects (e.g. 5 or fewer) from Council review

Council reviews add much time to a project with little added value to what the Planning Commission provides. Small projects can be reviewed by the Planning Commission. Additionally, prevent other decisions from needing Council review such as lot splits, flag lots, and aesthetic concerns like landscaping, materials, and exterior color. These issues can also be reviewed and determined by the Planning Commission.

#6 Eliminate the story pole requirement

Requiring story poles for certain projects does not make sense. It's an onerous, expensive process, and more importantly, story poles can be dangerous. Four recent projects (5150 El Camino, 4856 El Camino, 389 First Street and 425 First Street) each went back to Council twice to get exemptions. 4350 El Camino is bogged down with this requirement right now. The costs (time and money) far outweigh the benefits of this requirement.

#7 Allow 100% residential in all zones that allow housing.

Currently CD, CN, CRS and CRS/OAD require mixed use development, which can be financially prohibitive.

Thank you for considering these suggestions as we update our Housing Element. More streamlined processes - for builders, developers, residents, and the city - will lead to a more efficient city government, and it will create an environment where we can build the housing that we need.

Respectfully,
The Los Altos Affordable Housing Alliance

*Committed to educating and inspiring the Los Altos community to build housing that is affordable for
those who live and work in Los Altos*
<https://losaltosaffordablehousing.org/>