



May 11, 2020

City of Pasadena Planning Commission
Attn: Tess Varsh
Hale Building
175 N. Garfield Ave., 2nd Floor
Pasadena, CA 91101

Re: 2014-2021 Housing Element Study Session

Dear Members of the Planning Commission:

Pasadena Heritage is glad you will be commenting on the Housing Element, a critical planning document that will guide Pasadena moving forward. The high cost of housing is an issue that affects Californians and one of our greatest collective challenges. Despite this, Pasadena is in an enviable position – we continue to build a good number of units, many of which are affordable, while preserving neighborhoods and communities at a desirable scale. Many of our historic communities were built as streetcar suburbs and before the widespread adoption of HVAC systems, which make them even more walkable, sustainable, and resilient.

With such a strong building stock, we believe that preservation should be a primary tool used to create more housing. We also believe that infill should be contextual and look at historical examples of development in Pasadena. Some of Pasadena's most vibrant, granular districts are historic, while some of the worst offenses were made in the name of "progress" during phases of urban renewal or revitalization.

We have compiled a list of strategies and goals, and hope you can take some of them to heart. They are by no means comprehensive, but are designed to be preservation-appropriate and to bolster historic neighborhoods.

We look forward to hearing your input and suggestions on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Susan N. Mossman
Executive Director

Andrew Salimian
Preservation Director

Designing a Preservation Sensitive Housing Element

Adaptive Reuse of Office Space

Promote adaptive re-use of commercial offices or vacant older buildings and allow residential in most commercial zones. In a previous era, Pasadena Heritage supported the adaptive reuse of historic homes on S. Marengo Ave. as office space to reflect needs at the time, and still holds preservation easements on a number of those properties. As needs shift, adaptive reuse makes sense as a sustainable and cost-effective strategy. Today, Pasadena needs to address the high-cost of housing and opening up commercial zones for some housing is a good way to address this.

710 Corridor and Freeway Stub

The existing houses in the 710 corridor are historic homes that, we hope, will largely be returned to single family ownership and create neighborhood revitalization. However, there are some vacant lots and some large parcels that have more than one building that could become multiple housing units. Consider carefully where opportunities might be within the corridor and encourage the Housing Department to actively pursue these opportunities. The Freeway stub, if it can be acquired or put under the control of the City, will provide substantial space for new development. Consider a mix of housing opportunities that can be developed within this vacant land. It could provide the opportunity to meet a large part of the housing needed to meet the required goals.

PUSD Properties

Lease closed PUSD schools as potential homeless shelters or transitional housing. They have existing offices, bathrooms, libraries and cafeterias and could be converted easily. Classrooms could be partitioned into private spaces. The schools also have existing playgrounds, ballfields, and lawns that are currently closed to the public. Those should be opened for all Pasadenans to utilize as park space.

Save Homes from Demolition

Partner historic homes that are set for demolition with homeowners looking to add an ADU/second unit to their properties. Reduce or eliminate permit fees for these house relocations.

Give Long Term Tenants a Chance of Homeownership

Ensure Right of First Refusal for tenants, which allows them to purchase apartment buildings as condominiums/co-ops if building is to be sold. Many of Pasadena's older rental units have long term tenants who pay affordable rents. When those properties are sold to a new owner, rents are increased and tenants displaced. Giving them the option to buy would move more Pasadenans into homeownership and prevent the further corporatization of rental housing.

Build New Bungalow Courts

Create new bungalow court ordinance. Restrict height to one story in front portion and allow two-stories only in rear. Parking can be minimal and at grade. Another option along these lines are simple fourplexes, limited to two-stories, with front yard and rear yard setbacks that comply with existing single-family standards. These bungalow courts and

fourplexes would be more compatible and built at a lower cost than City of Gardens units. Both types are needed but serve different needs. Target areas where gentle upzoning from single-family may be needed or consider how to allow for inclusion in single family zones with certain conditions.

Encourage Neighborhood Serving Commercial

Allow some community commercial on corner lots. A lot has been said about mixed-use development and its role in reducing traffic, but it has rarely been done at the neighborhood level. In places like New Orleans, there are often grocery stores, cafes, or coffee shops on corner lots. These businesses are low impact, have limited hours of operation, but serve important community roles. It allows services to be dispersed closer to where people live. Businesses such as these were more common in early Pasadena, but have slowly diminished throughout time. Tie historic preservation goals with neighborhood-serving commercial by allowing these uses only through the adaptive-reuse.

Build Near Transit but Recognize the 210 Freeway

Continue to locate housing near transit, but recognize that half of Pasadena's L (Gold) Line stations are in the median of the 210 Freeway. Some reasonable buffer between the freeway and high-density housing should be determined. Locating some targeted commercial space directly adjacent to the freeway stations also makes sense, as commercial use generates more trips (and greater transit use) than residential. These commercial buildings help buffer residential uses from the noise and air pollution generated by the freeway.

Utilize Alleys as Critical Spaces

Create special zoning for alleyways. Many low-density zones have alleyways in the rear, some of which are developed with a mix of garages and informal units. These alleys are often underutilized, and could accommodate minimal apartments that front on the alley. The simplest way to accomplish this would be to allow units above the garage spaces. There was a commenter in the workshop who asked that ADUs be allowed as a second story addition to garages. We disagree, and believe ADUs should be limited to single-story structures in most cases. However, we could see this being appropriate along alleys, either as ADUs or as for sale units if the lot can be split.

Alleys might also become common open space if vehicular use was limited or, in some cases, not needed. Alleyway parks have been created in other communities and provide recreational space for neighborhoods that have little or no park space.