

Molinar, Tess

From: Amara Ononiwu <amarao@lakeave.org>
Sent: Monday, July 6, 2020 8:48 PM
To: Molinar, Tess
Subject: Public Comment - Special Meeting Planning Commission - July 8. Item 5A

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Dear Planning Commissioner,

My name is Amara Ononiwu and I am the Housing and Homelessness Outreach Coordinator for Lake Avenue Church located in District 5 under the representation of Councilmember Victor Gordo. We are located at 393 N. Lake Ave in Pasadena, CA.

I am writing to express my support for a zoning overlay to allow churches and communities of faith to build affordable housing on their congregational land.

First, I must convey that I truly appreciate the work of a planning commission to ensure the vision of the community is upheld comprehensively which includes aesthetically. As someone who serves the city in homelessness prevention, I see firsthand, far too often, how dire the need for affordable housing is as I have witnessed evictions, job losses, women fleeing domestic and familial violence, medical diagnosis, and simple aging on a fixed income that have priced residents out of a rental market that has not been as acknowledging to the middle and working class as often as it has to those with high-end affordability. People without long terms means or options, discretely moving into their cars, hoping for safety and praying they are not ticketed or towed (thereby incurring even greater expense) is heartbreaking. When those families have young children or when seniors who have lived here their whole lives find themselves in that situation, its even more devastating -- knowing that even the rental assistance we are able to provide is not going to be enough in a market where new development is renting for \$2-3K and above for 1 maybe 2 bedrooms and an approximately 100-200 unit complex may have 8 -10 or so affordable units.

We must move even faster than we have planned. That does not mean we have to do things out of order, or in a manner that is without long term vision. One does not negate the other if we do not allow it to. I realize how discerning a commission and council must be as you are held accountable by constituents with such diverse interests. Of those constituents I have to believe that every now and again comes a plan or idea that is worthy of exploring because of their pulse on the city. If the pandemic has proved anything to us is that government bodies and partners can move faster than we ever expected when the "will" is there, and we must continue that momentum. People in the community has stepped up to present a "way", an offering of a solution of which I support.

Allowing churches to build affordable housing on congregational land, can help move things more quickly and produce less expensively, thereby adding to a desperately needed housing stock. Respectfully, I plea with you to review the work that has been done and engage --work with the idea to ensure it checks the boxes if there are concerns or please explain publicly and plainly why it can not be. A delay, burial, or dismissal of this is a needlessly wasted opportunity on the backs of good working people who need hope and housing resources.

It is likely that you and I may be able to afford to let decisions be made at a more casual pace as we have homes to return to when the day is done, but I know that you understand that there are lives that cannot afford to wait. We must move for them and we must not be completely dismayed by the fears and concerns of "the comfortable", instead we must listen, cast vision, and build trust with all residents and stakeholders by making things plain.

I believe wholeheartedly that this can be done compatibly with the vision for Pasadena being diverse, architecturally strong, verdant and most importantly transparent, thoughtful, compassionate, and timely in its response to the looming needs before it. No one wants Pasadena to lose it beautiful character, become a piecemeal city catering to every zoning whim, however this is not that. Allowing churches, who desire to do this, to build on their own land can assist in the solving a big housing issue while keeping architectural integrity and honoring all people. We can not ignore the impending expectation of 45% in homelessness due to the pandemic. In our neighborhood center alone we are already seeing the initial affects with an over 120% increase in rental assistance requests which is a clear pandemic spike but over the years we've seen the trend tick up 20-35% year over year. We can do something now - strategically and in order -- and that is allow churches, who have long since contributed to the quality of life in this community, continue to do so in this much needed way. This is only one step but I believe it is a good one.

Thank you for your care for this city and for your consideration.

Kindest regards,
Amara



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