

Varsh, Tess

From: Bert Newton <bert@makinghousinghappen.org>
Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2021 10:01 PM
To: Varsh, Tess
Subject: Item #5 Affordable Housing on Religious Facilities Properties

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Dear Planning Commission,

I have lived in Pasadena for 29 years and am a member of Pasadena Mennonite Church. Our church does not own land, we rent from another church. If we did own land, we would want to build affordable housing on it. (We have asked our landlord to consider it, but our landlord is not willing at this time.)

I also live on a street where there is a church building. The church closed a couple of years ago. If that church building could be turned into affordable housing, I and many of my neighbors would welcome that.

I would welcome as much affordable housing as possible because I understand the need, and that need is more important than any concerns we might have about neighborhood character. Everyone should have a place to live, and the fact that we have people who don't have safe and decent places to live is a moral shame.

Not only is homelessness on the rise in LA County, but we know families in our neighborhood that are living with 1 or 2 other families in small 2 bedroom apartments. They do not show up in homeless counts by the city, but according to the McKinney-Vento Act, children in those households are considered homeless.

Furthermore, many families are moving out of Pasadena because they can no longer afford to live here, so now schools are closing, putting a strain on PUSD as it tries to figure out where to place the students that are still here and also has to lay off teachers and staff.

We cannot afford to pass up any opportunities for affordable housing.

The state has mandated through the Regional Housing Needs Assessment that we need to build 5900 units of affordable housing (for moderate, low, and very low income households) in the next 8 years. These numbers are based on real need. While some in the city are complaining about "state overreach," the state would not have to mandate these things if the cities would have addressed the issue.

So now churches across Pasadena are stepping up to offer their land (some churches already provide affordable housing, such as Community Bible Church, which is the largest affordable housing provider in Pasadena, providing affordable housing at Kings Villages and Community Arms). The churches can lease their land to affordable housing developers at a discount, so affordable housing developers will save a lot of money building on church land.

Also, please be assured that churches will not be allowed to discriminate regarding who lives in these homes. In fact, in most cases, the churches won't run or manage the affordable housing; that will be done by a nonprofit.

One church on N. Fair Oaks has already chosen a developer to partner with to build 52 units of affordable housing. I sat in on the interview when the church was interviewing the developer. During the interview, the developer suggested an amount that the church would get every month for the ground lease. Although this African American church has lost members due to gentrification (the African American community has been hit the worst in terms of displacement), the pastor did not talk about using the money to shore up the church finances or to boost her own salary (which I'm sure is small). She immediately began talking about how they could use that money to help families in the community who are struggling to pay their rent or mortgage.

So this church will build 52 units of affordable housing and use the income from it to help other families in the community stay in their homes.

But they won't be able to do that without a change in the zoning. We need zoning changed for church land across the city. We also need a guarantee that developers will be able to build and not have it shot down by neighbors. Yes, neighbors should be included in discussions about what it might look like, but we can't decide whether we are going to have affordable housing according to whether people want it in their neighborhood. (BTW, note that former president Donald Trump used the fear of affordable housing in middle class neighborhoods as a racist scare tactic to try to get re-elected.)

Affordable housing developers don't have the deep pockets of for-profit developers and can't spend the time and money pursuing a development that might easily be denied. We need affordable housing built by right.

Also, for affordable housing developments to be financially feasible, they need to have some density, a minimum of 30-40 units, so church land needs to be zoned to accommodate that.

Please don't recommend something to city council that does not have sufficient density or predictability to get the housing built. If we don't take advantage of this opportunity, we will see more people displaced, more schools closing, more families living on top of each other, and more people living on the streets.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Bert Newton
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