



Presentation to: Social Services Commission

Date: August 27, 2012

Following the presentation on the housing element process, challenges and emerging issues, commissioners provided the following feedback:

Monitoring Affordable Housing Units

Concern was expressed about having an auditing process for low-income housing residents whose income increases and makes them ineligible for the publicly subsidized housing. The Housing Department has a monitoring process, which has been improved in recent years.

Unit Size

Discussed the definition of a bedroom in a unit, and whether it is a bedroom when separated only by a half-wall. A unit should have a fully separated bedroom if it is called a one-unit.

Pipeline development is skewed towards 1-bedroom and studio units and trending against lower-income families, resulting in transient community with younger couples “moving up and moving out.”

Commissioners discussed the reasons behind this trend toward one-bedroom and studio units. Developers are proposing these units and finding the financing for them, and believe that there is a market. One possible scenario predicted was that housing in small units without parking near the Expo stations, combined with USC at other end, will result in USC college students living in Santa Monica and taking the Expo to the USC campus.

Many of these projects proposed by NMS consist are significantly weighted toward studio units; there are some units with two bedrooms, but not a lot, and these are generally small in size, as well. The city is trying to gather input from the community about these and other proposals to aid its evaluation of projects and staff’s recommendations, which will ultimately be presented to Council as projects move forward through the development agreement process.

Commissioners stated that they would like to see the City first come out with that the community wants and then find developers, instead of being reactionary to what developers are proposing, the City should be more proactive.

Commissioners stated that the City needs to close the loophole that NMS found that allowed it to build so many small units at moderate income level with waivers of standards.

Rent Control

Interested in rent control and whether there is any way for market-rate units, which are not subject to rent control, to be controlled as rent in these buildings can go up every year, which contributes to more transiency and less stability in the community. The City needs to look at promoting the longevity of residents and not encouraging housing for the transient community.



Parking

Commissioners expressed concern about whether residents in income-controlled units actually paid more for units with unbundled parking because, rather than reducing rent, unbundling parking just increases rent for those with cars (i.e., who is getting the savings – the tenant or the landlord?). The City has to be careful that unbundled parking is not an extra expense and ensure that benefits are given to the community and not the developer. If in fact, housing and parking costs together make up a higher proportion of income, what disposable income will people earning \$60,000 have to put into the local economy?

Moderate Income Housing

Commissioners stated that the workforce's median income was higher than the county's so that market rate level was hitting moderate level.

(Staff noted that that the City can consider revising the Code in terms of incentives for moderate-income housing, with the caveat that state law includes moderate-income housing as an affordable category that must receive density bonuses.)

Addressing Homelessness

Too often, the homeless population tends to be lumped into one category, instead of recognizing homeless with "mental health issues" versus "families with children." The City once had programs to help families from becoming homeless but ran out of funds. It is important to take care of families with minor children.

Amenities to Support Housing

In terms of services to complement housing, amenities like proper street lighting, parking, and general transportation are important.

In addition, open space and environmental features (i.e., solar panels, space to put a clothesline, community gardens, electric car share, electric charging stations and/or infrastructure capability, high level of building energy efficiency) are important amenities to try to get in projects.

There was support for designing small community spaces throughout a building, rather than spaces for specific active sports, like tennis or racquetball courts. The "simple things," such as places to sit and places for neighbors to gather, should be encouraged. The project located at 5th/Santa Monica does this well.

There was also support for courtyard spaces and architecturally significant design. The City should hold developer responsible for providing better design than has been seen in some recent multi-family projects. The project located at San Vicente/Ocean exhibits architecturally significant design.

Aging in Place

It was noted that there is a growing need to serve members of the aging community in their homes. One way to support aging in place is to provide accessible housing, with amenities, for seniors.