

2022 City Council Candidate Questions

HOUSING

Four proposed developments along El Camino will create about 1100 new housing units, with only 15-20% of these being below-market-rate housing.

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**
- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

PAT BURT

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

We will not meet our HCD only through "inclusionary zoning. As we have done historically, we will need to provide much of our low income housing through 100% affordable projects in collaboration with nonprofits, and through ADUs.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

We need to continue to support market rate and affordable housing proposals that provide a range of sizes. However, those projects work against our compliance with RHNA mandates.

KATIE CAUSEY

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

By supporting additional reforms that limit the number of public hearings and set firm deadlines for approval or denial of applications for housing projects, which makes it less expensive to build below market rate projects.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

The council sets the tone for the types of developments we attract and we can make apparent that having a range of bedrooms is important to our community.

ANNE CRIBBS

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

We should provide incentives for building the housing we need and want. The city's adopted housing element identifies sites to meet our low and moderate income housing goals. Assuming

we meet our goal for market-rate housing, that includes 15-20% BMR units. I understand that we cannot meet our goals if housing does not make economic sense for applicants and I do not support raising the BMR% unless we add additional incentives for applicants.

I am also aware that failure to meet our housing goals by adopting barriers to housing will lead to penalties and loss of local control as well as potential lawsuits. I believe we can meet our housing goals through aggressive implementation of the programs included in our adopted housing element.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

The best chance for a variety of housing sizes is collaborative negotiation with applicants to make sure that the proposed housing actually happens. Let's listen to our residents and our potential residents to find out their preferences and then balance these desires with feasibility. We must build in flexibility as needs will change over time.

HENRY ETZKOWITZ

Did not respond.

GEORGE LU

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

Firstly, there's strong evidence that mixed-income housing improves social outcomes for families and children who live in these communities. We should embrace a spectrum of affordability levels in new developments, though push (and potentially subsidize) to maximize affordability.

That said, we need to pursue 100% affordable developments as aggressively as we can with investments of land, such as city owned parking lots and increased funding, complemented by accelerated permitting.

I'm proud to be supported by non-profit housing leaders, and I live directly next to a Midpen complex for adults with developmental disabilities. We need to clear waitlists and get more affordable housing across the entire city.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

Family housing is critical for our school enrollment, and overall sense of vitality as a city. We need to roll out incentives, such as streamlining or zoning flexibility, to make sure there are strong incentives to build 3+ bedroom homes.

Townhomes are an important opportunity for family housing. We need to modernize zoning, so that townhomes are more feasible in our multifamily and transition zones (from 20 to 40 units per acre).

In some part, we see a focus on large developments in Palo Alto because it takes so much risk, cost, and expertise to build housing here, that it doesn't make sense to prioritize smaller townhome or apartment projects. We need to prioritize and enable community-scale housing throughout the city.

KEITH RECKDAHL

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

We cannot meet our Housing and Community Development (HCD) goals through inclusionary zoning alone. As we've done historically, much of our low-income housing will need to come from 100% affordable projects in partnership with nonprofit developers and through Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). The City must develop additional revenue sources to fund this affordable housing.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

Both developer profitability and the RHNA unit allocation encourage the development of small units. The Housing Element identified the lack of family-sized units as a shortcoming of Palo Alto's housing production and thus included a program to research and implement incentives to encourage larger units, including Floor Area Ratio exemptions for units with three or more bedrooms. A more blunt approach would be to explicitly mandate that new housing developments include a variety of unit sizes, although the state may interpret that as impeding housing development.

When the City helps fund affordable developments, we have more control over the distribution of unit sizes. We should encourage affordable housing providers to offer a variety of unit sizes to better accommodate the diverse needs of families seeking affordable housing.

GREER STONE

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

Meeting the California Department of Housing and Community Development's (HCD) low-income housing requirement requires more than just increasing our inclusionary zoning percentages in housing developments. The current approach, with BMR requirements ranging from 15-20%, reflects a balance between encouraging development while ensuring inclusion of lower income units. However, this approach alone will not be sufficient to meet our city's quota of producing over 3,000 new below market rate housing units.

To address this, we must focus on increasing the overall supply of affordable housing by incentivizing developers to include a higher percentage of Below Market Rate (BMR) units, particularly those targeting lower income brackets (60-80% AMI). I've championed this by advocating for special zoning districts where developers receive variances in height and density in exchange for more affordable units at lower AMI. Additionally, we can explore alternative funding models and partnerships with nonprofit affordable housing providers, Santa Clara County, and the state. I'm currently exploring various funding strategies to help us reach our goals, one example is a housing vacancy tax (also known as a "ghost house" tax). Approximately 2,000 housing units are vacant in Palo Alto, which is a 7.5% vacancy, which is double a healthy vacancy rate. By passing a housing vacancy tax we can both disincentivize the practice of purchasing homes to be used as an investment tool and raise much needed funding for new affordable housing construction.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

Ensuring that new affordable housing developments include a range of unit sizes suitable for families is crucial to meeting the needs of our community. However, the deluge of state housing mandates has encouraged micro units at the expense of family units because cities' housing quotas are based on number of units and not number of bedrooms. In passing our recent Housing Element, I advocated for ensuring we were not only passing policies that would promote micro

units, but also creating a diverse range of different sized units, but more work is necessary. To achieve this, we must continue to implement policies that require developers to build a mix of bedroom types, including two- and three-bedroom units. This can be done by:

1. **Incentives for Family-Sized Units:** Offering density bonuses or other incentives to developers who include a significant percentage of family-sized units, ensuring developments meet the needs of larger households.
2. **Zoning Updates:** Revisiting zoning regulations to mandate a portion of units in new developments be reserved for family housing. This can be especially important in BMR (Below Market Rate) units where family-sized homes are often lacking.

By focusing on a balanced approach and ensuring that incentives align with the development of family-friendly housing, we can ensure that the affordable housing created is not only sufficient in quantity but also appropriate for the diverse needs of our population.

DORIA SUMMA

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

It is going to be difficult or impossible to meet HCD's requirements at all income levels. Our inclusionary zoning is at high income levels. We need to partner with affordable housing providers to build deed-restricted housing at lower income levels. We also need to count the ADUs to the extent that the state will allow us to do so.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

This is largely out of our hands due to state laws. To the extent possible, we should encourage projects that provide a range of such options.

CARI TEMPLETON

- **How are we to meet HCD's requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

The only way for Palo Alto to meet our below market rate (BMR) housing requirements is to make it easier for developers and/or the City to create more below market rate housing. Currently it is not financially feasible for developers to include more BMR housing in their projects, and that's why we are not seeing a larger number of projects with more BMR housing being proposed in Palo Alto. Requiring up to 20% of homes to be BMR in order for a project to go forward will reduce the number of projects that are brought to the City without addressing our urgent need for more affordable housing.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

If the Council desired to do so, it could enforce these range requirements by updating the building and zoning policies to require greater variety of home size and bedroom quantities in development projects. That said, Palo Alto also has requirements about the size of bedrooms and about the floor to area ratio (FAR) which might complicate factors for builders