

Published March 3rd, 2021

Housing 101 - opportunity to weigh in on the housing element update

By Pippa Fisher



Currently, higher density housing such as the Towne Center condos are focused in the downtown area. Photo courtesy Jeff Heyman, City of Lafayette

counties to have a current general plan.

The housing element must be updated by law every eight years, with Lafayette's next update due in 2023. It considers housing in relation to other general plan elements such as transportation, parks and open space.

Staff then went on to explain that by law local jurisdictions must ensure there is enough land zoned at appropriate densities to allow development of housing for all income levels, but they emphasized that thus far, it is not a mandate to build. Not having a certified housing element carries risks, including loss of local control over how and where housing is built, and heavy fines.

Each city is given a regional housing needs allocation number, arrived at through methodology approved by the state's Department of Housing and Community Development and distributed regionally through the Council of Governments. For Lafayette in this sixth cycle (2023-31) the allocation is currently 2,114 units, with 28% (or 599 units) for very low income. This compares with the previous cycle (2015-23) in which the total allocation was 400 units.

And this is why the city wants to hear from its residents, while it continues to examine zoning, currently and historically largely single family residential, with downtown density at 35 units per acre, as it looks to prioritize where and how much to upzone.

While no decisions are being made at any of these informational webinars, city staff were listening to residents. At the Burton Valley session several residents asked questions, including about infrastructure and schools.

And while concerns were expressed at the meeting, and have been expressed previously too by members of the city council questioning the methodology, some residents are embracing the chance for Lafayette to affirm inclusive housing, encouraging development near transit, and pushing for the up-zoning of certain areas outside the downtown.

In a letter to the city council, planning commission and the GPAC, local grass roots organization Inclusive Lafayette says that historic practices of housing discrimination and resistance to multi-family development have helped make Lafayette one of least diverse communities in the Bay Area:

"While current residents of Lafayette may not have had a direct role in the policies and practices that have resulted in our community's segregation, we have an opportunity to rectify the legacies of these exclusionary practices. Our community must allow more affordable housing development, and denser multi-family development typically hosts more affordable units."

Remaining webinars will be held virtually at 6 p.m. on March 3 (special session for community organizations), March 4 (special session for youth), March 11 (Acalanes Valley and Happy Valley district) and March 18 (Reliez Valley district). Registration is required.

Lafayette is on a mission; a mission to teach residents about the housing element - an overview of what it is, background on why it needs to be updated, how it affects the community and to provide an opportunity for residents to make their voices heard.

To that end the city is holding a series of six Zoom webinars, each focusing on a specific neighborhood or group with opportunities for residents to meet their representatives on the General Plan Advisory Committee.

The first of these virtual meetings was held Feb. 25 for the Burton Valley district and had an attendance of over 130.

City staff gave an overview, explaining that the General Plan is a blueprint of a community's vision for the next 20 years, consisting of "elements" such as the housing element, with goals, programs and policies that guide decision-making to ensure day-to-day decisions align with the vision. California state law requires all cities and

More information can be found at www.planlafayette.org/

Reach the reporter at: pippa@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA