

From: [Lenny's Sonic](#)
To: [Ramirez, Lucas](#); [Hicks, Alison](#); [Lieber, Sally](#); [Showalter, Pat](#); [Kamei, Ellen](#); [Matichak, Lisa](#); [Abe-Koga, Margaret](#)
Cc: [City Council FORWARD](#)
Subject: Housing Element Study Session
Date: Monday, March 7, 2022 12:02:22 PM

CAUTION: EXTERNAL EMAIL - Ensure you trust this email before clicking on any links or attachments.

The following message builds upon a similar letter that I sent the Environmental Planning Commission last month.

There are many good ideas in the Housing Element Staff Report. However, the emphasis is too much on satisfying the California Department of Housing and Community Development's requirements and not enough on going beyond those requirements to address the imbalances in Mountain View's recent development.

The first imbalance is the presence of tens of thousands more jobs in Mountain View than employed residents. As the COVID-19 pandemic recedes, we can expect more employees to return to on-site work or at least to hybrid schedules.

The second imbalance is gentrification. When I moved to Mountain View in 1972, it was still regarded as a working-class community. Today, unless one bought a home decades ago, Mountain View is a challenging place for people without professional incomes to afford to live.

The third imbalance is geographical. Most of the multi-family buildings and all of the subsidized housing in Mountain View are near or north of El Camino Real. The housing element is supposed to promote the equitable distribution of new housing, especially affordable housing, throughout the city, but that goal appears to be an after-thought. The statement, at the bottom of page 6 of the staff report, that Precise Plan areas are well distributed, is patently false.

I acknowledge that Mountain View is doing a better job than most of our neighbors in planning for housing growth and affordable housing. When I was on Council, I worked hard to make that happen. But performing better than Palo Alto, Los Altos, and Cupertino is not enough. I recommend the following:

1. Consider more rezoning. At several sites where commercial property could be made available for housing or mixed use, the market and public interest coincide. Yet I recall the reluctance of some Council members to consider otherwise viable projects because they would require rezoning.

To overcome this obstacle, Mountain View should expand the Sites Inventory to include underutilized properties where redevelopment under current zoning would allow the substantial expansion of employment. Placing housing on such properties would (and I hate the figure of speech) "kill two birds with one stone." It would limit the jobs-housing imbalance by reducing potential job totals *and* by provide housing where people could walk, bike, or take local shuttles to work.

We must recognize that the decline of “brick-and-mortar” retail is a permanent trend. To me, that trend is unfortunate, but it creates opportunities for housing development on properties that previously seemed unavailable.

One such property is Charleston Plaza, where REI, Best Buy, and Bed Bath & Beyond have all shut down. It is currently zoned MM, so the new owner could build tech offices, aggravating the jobs-housing imbalance. However, if the city plans the property for dense mixed-use (housing and retail), the owner would have the opportunity to build substantial housing, a share of which would be affordable, near employment and services. It might avoid the opposition we have seen in other parts of town because it is in nobody’s “back yard.”

2. Focus on sites south of El Camino. The Staff Report identifies the Blossom Valley shopping center, and there is also the Cuesta Park Annex, which is essentially surplus city-owned land. Both these sites are suitable for housing development. If they are added to the Inventory, I would expect opposition from some of the neighbors, but building multi-family housing in that area may be our best chance to include fair housing goals in the Site Inventory.

3. Increase off-street parking for vehicle residents. Vehicle residency is a market-based solution to the high cost of housing in the Bay Area. Many of our vehicle residents have jobs here or have retired here, but they cannot otherwise afford to remain. The Staff Report mentions Safe Parking. That should clearly be expanded, with amenities, including waste management and electrical service, that serve the residents. But the city should also encourage the creation of one or more RV parks for vehicle residents who can afford to pay a low rent and who do not need case management. And we should stop calling them “homeless.”

There should be an additional component of the Site Inventory that identifies potential off-street sites for oversized vehicle parking. Even before the pandemic, Mountain View had numerous underutilized surface-parking lots. Once such location is the Cisco Systems facility on Ferguson Drive.

4. Discourage the further demolition of rent-controlled or other naturally affordable housing, even where high vacancy rates minimize direct displacement. The high cost of building new affordable housing places a burden on government and charitable funding. New affordable units are now sometimes costing a million dollars or more, each, to build. Every time we approve the demolition of older, naturally affordable apartments, we are increasing the need for subsidized housing, but current funding streams are insufficient to meet that need.

Updating our Housing Element gives Mountain View an opportunity to plan for a more balanced community, in which the housing needs of people who work within the city and low-income residents are addressed. We must do more than the minimum necessary to satisfy the state.

Lenny Siegel

—

Lenny Siegel



Author: *DISTURBING THE WAR: The Inside Story of the Movement to Get Stanford University out of Southeast Asia - 1965–1975* (See <http://a3mreunion.org>)