

NANCY NADEL'S POLICY NEWSLETTER

Volume I, Issue I

Winter 2006

HOUSING POLICY ISSUES

Condo Conversion

If you received a piece of mail suggesting that you contact me to support the deceptively titled "Affordable Homes for Oaklanders Plan," please note that the literature is from an association of rental housing property owners and developers. They, in concert with councilmembers Brooks, De La Fuente and Chang proposed radical changes to the condo conversion law in Oakland. Currently, city law limits condo conversion in certain areas of the city called impact areas and requires that for those conversions, replacement rental units must be created. Adams Point is included in the impact area.

In Oakland, 60% of our residents are renters and the market for rental units is extremely tight. Nationally, urban areas have a similar ratio. As economic forecasters advise the council to create more rental units, not add to the glut of condos in the pipeline, I felt it unwise to further reduce the number of rental units available to the families and other adults already struggling to find housing in all price brackets. While increased opportunities for homeownership are desirable, the proposed policy only served to increase the ownership housing stock and layer on debt products with deferred payment to assist in purchasing. It didn't require owner occupancy or build the capacity of existing Oakland renters to enter the real estate market. It is incumbent upon housing policymakers to assure that they aren't destabilizing existing renters and forcing them into homelessness.

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Oakland's housing policies should be motivated by specific housing goals not special interest financial benefit. We can and must ensure that Oakland's housing policies are designed to equitably meet the needs of Oakland residents of all income-levels.

The 2000 census showed that Oakland had 88,301 renter households with an average median income of \$29,278 per year. An affordable unit for these households would be approximately \$175-185,000. The average sales price of a condo (from conversion) on the current market is between \$350,000 and \$400,000. Even with support from the City's first-time homebuyer program, a significant gap will remain. In addition the cost of condo association fees and property taxes must be added to the new owners' budget.

We can be creative problem solvers. As doctors strive to "first do no harm," we need a more holistic housing policy that uses all the tools and best practices available to us to increase stability without pushing out the most vulnerable.

The city council was closely split on the proposal. Because there were not five votes for the condo conversion proposal, the issue was lumped with inclusionary zoning to be analyzed by the soon to be formed Blue Ribbon Committee that was authorized after we were unsuccessful yet again in passing an inclusionary policy. Councilmembers are choosing their representatives on the Blue Ribbon Committee.

Inclusionary Zoning

For eight years, Councilmember Jane Brunner and I have been trying to pass an inclusionary zoning policy. Such a policy would require market rate housing developers with projects over a specified size, to include some affordable units in their project that they subsidize. Most other cities in the Bay Area have such a policy. A poll of Oakland voters showed that 70% favored such a policy. Sadly, the council was split on the policy before it last month. The opponents of the policy (Chang, Brooks, Reid, De La Fuente) introduced a substitute motion to study the issue by a "Blue Ribbon Commission" and the mayor broke the tie in favor of the study instead of enacting the policy.

The result is we are building many market rate developments with no affordable units. We continue to

separate our residents by income, a practice that has resulted in concentrated poverty, retail exodus from those neighborhoods (except for liquor stores), high levels of violence, and poor school performance. We hope that a policy will be passed next year, but with the housing market softening considerably, we sadly have missed our opportunity to create more mixed income communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Oil Independence for Oakland by 2020

In October, at my initiation, the City Council authorized the creation of a 6-month Task Force to devise a plan for oil independence for Oakland by the year 2020. Oil Independence doesn't mean we would be completely free of oil use but we would be less dependent on foreign oil because of significantly decreased use.

Although I and two other councilmembers have already chosen their representatives, there might still be openings on the Task Force. If you feel you are expert in this area, please contact your councilmember or the mayor to request appointment.

Zero Waste by 2020

The city council authorized the creation of a strategic plan to achieve zero waste by the year 2020. The city achieved its state mandated goals to decrease waste going to the landfill when it reached 50% decrease in the year 2005. Our next goal mark is 75% by the year 2010. It appears that we have reached a plateau and haven't gone much past 50%. The Public Works Committee heard the zero waste plan November 27, 2006, and the matter will next go to the full council. There are five main strategies:

1. More recycling and composting with an emphasis on the business sector and the construction and demolition debris.
2. Develop and adopt new rules and incentives considering disposal bans and green building requirements for all buildings, not just city buildings.
3. Preserve industrial land for sustainable development and green industry infrastructure.
4. Manufacturer responsibility for product waste – the city can limit purchasing to companies that take back their product waste. We can also educate the public as to which companies are taking responsibility for their waste. Recently, that was a key factor in my deciding which manufacturer I chose for a new computer.
5. Educate, promote and advocate a Zero Waste sustainability agenda.

Community Choice Aggregation

The Public Utilities Commission allows cities to consider alternatives to energy provided by PG&E. Oakland is exploring a Joint Powers Agreement with Berkeley and Emeryville to contract for renewable energy rather than oil-based sources that dominate PG&E's portfolio. Feasibility studies show that in the long term, considerable savings will be available for individuals and the city that could then be invested in more renewables being produced (e.g. solar panels, windfarms). This policy will be returning to council for consideration of next steps early in 2007.

OTHER NEWS AND PROJECTS

Employment for Previously Incarcerated Young Adults

Some of your Measure Y dollars are contracting with America Works to find employment for our young adults being released from prison. America Works is located at 1212 Broadway on the 11th Floor. They have been open for business in Oakland for 2 months and have already found jobs for 30 people. They say they have more jobs than applicants so if you know someone who needs their service, please be sure the potential clients are aware of America Works. In addition to employment they help applicants prepare for interviews, write resumes and practice filling out applications. I attended an Open House at their office on November 30, 2006 and heard testimonials from 5 very excited individuals recently employed who strongly praised the work of the organization.

If you have a neighbor, friend or relative who needs this service, sometimes going with them just for the first appointment, can make a real difference in the successful connection.

Restorative Justice

With US prison population reaching a high of 7 million people and 1 out of every 32 adults in the US either incarcerated, on probation or on parole, it is past time for us as a nation to look at alternatives to the way we address criminal justice. One of the most exciting and promising movements is Restorative Justice. With some other knowledgeable members of the community, I have begun a steering committee on this topic, especially focused on youth. The Restorative Justice process typically utilizes "peacemaking circles" to bring people together. Through group communication exercises, participants learn to know each other more deeply and empathize with each others' experiences towards healing any harm that has been done amongst participants.

Last year we trained about 40 people to develop the skills and become "circle keepers." That effort generated several new circles: Kathy Siegel from the Public Defenders Office has established a support circle for emancipated foster

youth; Rita Alfred has trained teachers at Cole School to use the skills in all the classrooms; we held one community circle at Lafayette School after the homicide in the children's garden; and we are developing the infrastructure for a circle to address some of the youth slipping through the cracks of the probation system.

A second training designed to help participants train others to start more circles in the various communities that are interested was just completed the first weekend in December. If you know of a group that would like to be trained, please contact my office. For more information, an excellent book to read is "Peacemaking Circles, from Crime to Community" by Kay Pranis, et al.

Campbell Village Teen Center

A new teen center has been established in the Prescott area of West Oakland, at my urging and the urging of McClymonds' staffmember Anthony (Sam) McNeil. The youth are very excited and would like to interact more with the community. If you have a career that might be of interest about which you can talk to teens, or if you have resources or equipment they can use at the center, please contact Shan Hirsch at 355-4627.

Schilling Gardens

Last year city staff had the opportunity to accept the free gift of Schilling Gardens near Lake Merritt. Because the donor didn't also contribute maintenance funding, city staff refused the donation and never brought it to council. As you can imagine, I was very displeased and am working on revising the city's policy on receiving gifts of land. Since the donation offer, another entity bought the land and wants to build a high rise at that location. I am working with the new owner, city staff and Naomi Schiff from the Oakland Heritage Alliance to find the money to buy them out and find funding to maintain the gardens. Anyone with ideas or donations is welcomed to help. Please call our office at 238-7003.

Zoning at the Lake

Related to the issue of the Schilling Gardens is the issue of the planned high rise proposed to replace the gardens. When the Essex was built on the lake the council informally promised not to ring the lake with high rises. Density is appropriate but not such that a pedestrian using the lake park will feel like they are walled off on one side. I envision stepping back from the lake with height, considering shadows and view corridors.

The zoning that should follow a general plan update hasn't happened timely in Oakland. Councilmembers have asked that the update be focused on particular areas in their districts that are controversial or transitioning. Public input is essential to this process.

I have asked city staff to prepare some technical information for us as a community to make recommendations to council on appropriate zoning at the lake. Currently the lake is part

of downtown which has NO HEIGHT LIMITS. Since it is near mass transit, I do support density; in fact we already have many high rises. However, I think it is important that we look at the various options e.g. tall buildings with small footprints to preserve the view corridors, buildings stepped up in height as you go away from the lake, etc.

If you are interested in participating in this workgroup, please contact Marisa Arrona on my staff arronam@oaklandnet.com.

Adult Literacy

While about 30% of Oakland's adults have graduate degrees, another 30% have trouble reading above 4th grade level. This serious skill gap suggests the need for new ways to help adults increase their education. I have established an adult literacy task force comprised of service providers from the Oakland Unified School District Adult Education Department, representatives from non-profits who provide the service, the city's library based program, the parole system program and others. Our goal is develop a consortium of service providers, improve outreach and add complementary services (e.g. childcare, computer technology training, convenient locations, etc.), and measure our success in reaching more adults.

If you would like to make a contribution to this effort, our fiscal sponsor is Literacy Works <http://www.literacyworks.org>. If you would like to get more involved in this project, please contact Marisa Arrona from my staff at 238-7031 or arronam@oaklandnet.com.

West Oakland Economic Development Working Group

To plan for a balanced city with housing, open space, industry, retail, and social services, it is necessary to assure that no one sector overpowers the others. In District 3 we have an industrial area that needs to transition to contemporary vision. For many years our West Oakland area was a hodge podge of low income housing and industry incompatibly located. We are slowly seeing investment in new market rate housing. We have created a mixed use area. Now it's time to revitalize our industrial area to be able to attract jobs and the new green industry like solar panel and windpower manufacturing, fuel cells, products made from recycled materials, etc. Some of these uses are not compatible with housing and making all of our industrial area mixed use I believe is mistake that cannot be fixed. Once land prices switch from industrial to housing, they don't return.

1. I have been hosting a working group on this topic for more than a year. We have a 3-pronged approach:
2. Marketing of existing businesses
3. Attracting new business by improving the environment for business.

Matching our economic development strategies with our residents' employment needs and entrepreneurial ideas

The issue of industrial land preservation is a controversial one. Some housing developers have purchased many parcels of industrial land and are pressuring the council to convert them to housing, and promising community members their wish list if they support the project. Only about 5% of Oakland's privately owned land is zoned industrial. It is important to have a balance of housing and a variety of sources of jobs to be a sustainable city. There are some uses that require large parcels. There is a success synergy that comes with the ability of certain businesses to co-locate. Industrial land preservation has been accomplished in Chicago and other cities are considering it. I have asked that council consider preserving our remaining West Oakland industrial land but some of my colleagues seem to be succumbing to the housing developers' pressures. One project in particular will have a serious impact on our ability to attract industry.

At Mandela Parkway and West Grand there are two large parcels that have been purchased by a housing developer who is proposing three thirty-story residential condominium towers and family housing over some small industrial spaces. They are proposing that none of the units be affordable. After spending 25 years trying to undo the zoning mess of industry and housing in West Oakland, I am strongly opposed to this project. It puts residential units (30-story towers) which are totally out of character with West Oakland, in the middle of the industrial area. This has already had the affect of encouraging all the owners of the rest of the industrial area wanting to convert to housing to make more money at the expense of having a balance of uses in our community. The Environmental Impact Report for this project (Mandela Grand) is coming to the Planning Commission in January. I am interested in hearing your views on this issue.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER, SUGGESTIONS FOR ARTICLES, OR WOULD LIKE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT DISTRICT 3, PLEASE CONTACT CARLETTA L. STARKS, CLSTARKS@OAKLANDNET.COM.