

Petaluma Housing Element

Dear Petaluma Planning Team,

My name is Collin Thoma and I am the Systems Change Advocate with Disability Services and Legal Center (DSLCL). The following comments are to address the many needs and challenges that people with disabilities face related to housing. The goal of my comments is to highlight these challenges so the city can work on resolving them.

The severe housing widely felt for people with disabilities due to the lack of very and extremely low-income housing. This is because many rely on Social Security Insurance (SSI) and/or other public benefits as their source of income. All of these benefits pay a few hundred or up to over a thousand dollars less than the average rent in both the city and county. Thus, they fall into the very and extremely low-income. Furthermore, the recipient may receive the money from their benefits after rent is due resulting in late fees. This can further reduce one's budget for the month as they may not have the luxury of getting bi weekly. In addition to everyday items extra costs may include medical, support services, or assistive technology to help them with their disability(s). Given the severe economic challenges that they face it's important that the city builds a majority if not all of the 499 extremely low/very low-income housing. The city should also define just how many of the 499 units will be extremely low and how many will be very low. While these two income categories are similar they are different enough they shouldn't be combined together. It would be good to see extremely low have a few more units as there is more of a need for extremely low.

The policies under goal one are all pretty good in particular policy 1.1 and 1.3. Both should be a priority as they are a good and easy way to maximize affordable housing. It is also good to see the encouragement to build ADU's and JADU's. However, it's very important that they are very to extremely low income. In addition to goal three is also very good, such as Policy 3.4 and 3.5. Both will make it quicker to build affordable housing and expand the number of potential sites. Program, 6 Religious and Institutional Facility Housing is also good to see mentioned in the plan. Building on church, schools, hospital land is a good way to maximize affordable housing even if it's only a few units.

The city should continue to identify and remove all government, development and, financial constraints so its easier and quicker to build housing. The city should also encourage and provide incentives to develop affordable housing. The Local Land Trust and all of Program 14 are great ways to incentives development. In addition, the city should also peruse all state, federal and private sources of funding and programs that help with housing. The city should also peruse the California Department of Housing and Community Development Pro Housing designation. Achieving this designation will be a great benefit as it will make it much easier to obtain state and federal funding. It is great to see Program 9 Shopping Center Parking Lot Conversion. These empty lots can a be a great way to develop affordable housing and amenities such as shops in the same area. In addition, to parking lots the city should also identify empty commercial lots for possible conversation. This program should be a top priority since it these areas can produce lots of affordable housing and new businesses.

Another significant challenge is the limited number of landlords that will accept Section 8 vouchers and other housing vouchers. These vouchers are a common way for people with disabilities to obtain housing that would otherwise be unaffordable. However, it can be very challenging to find landlords that will accept these vouchers. It would be good to see the city work with landlords to accept these vouchers. This can look like educating landlords on the importance of accepting them and clearing misconceptions of who uses them. The city will also need to review its homeless services to make sure they can help keep people housed. This may mean providing help with rent, security deposits or providing wrap around services. Petaluma should also consider building additional shelters, safe parking or sectioned camps and all provide wrap around services.

The city of Petaluma achieved something great earlier this by becoming the first city in the county to adopt a Visitability ordinance. With the adoption of the ordinance it takes a huge step towards increasing the acesaaible housing supply. The current lack of acesaaible housing makes it very challenging to find a home that can accommodate one's accessibility needs. This is why the city should build as much housing using Visitability. Another benefit of Visitability is it meets the mobility needs for seniors. This is important given the rapid increase in the senior population in the city and county.

Accessible neighborhoods are another important need for the disability community. This will mean having a sidewalk network that has no sidewalk gaps and is well maintained. They may not see or hear a vehicle if they need to go into to the street due a sidewalk gap. It is also dangerous if the need to avoid an obstacle on the sidewalk. Furthermore, they may not be seen by a motorist if they use a mobility device. Sidewalks in disrepair can also pose a higher trip and fall hazard for those with a mobility and/sight disability. A crack, bump or uneven piece could also cause mobility device to get stuck and/or flip over. Crosswalks and intersections will need to be highly visible with large and bold striping. In addition, crosswalks will need to be signaled and adequately timed. For example, a crosswalk may need to be extended from 10 seconds to 20 seconds to allow for a safe crossing. It is also important that the bicycle network is also accessible. Ideally there are as many Class 1 pathways to provide a stress free area to ride for less experienced riders. In addition, as many bike lanes are built with a raised curb or another physical buffer. This is important for those who may have a bike that may be adapted to their disability and can be lower to the ground and, can be harder to be seen by motorists. Protected bike lanes will also provide a safe space if someone needs to avoid heavy foot traffic or an obstacle on the sidewalk. The 15 walkable neighborhoods are a great idea but will need to be accessible. For those who live in these neighborhoods and have a mobility disability its important that can get to their destination quickly. While they may move slower due to their disability it should take them anywhere from 15-30 minutes to get to their destination.

It is also that public transit is also accessible for those who may not drive due to their disability. The city should review its bus system to make improvements to routes, service areas and to schedules. The city should also work with the county to increase service to other parts of the county. Bus stops in neighborhoods should be under a mile so they are easy to get to and should be covered to provide protection from the elements. They should also provide real time information in both audio and visual format on schedules routes and delays. Maps should also be at bus stops and should be easy to read even if someone has a vision disability.

Thank you for taking time to read my comments on the Petaluma Housing Element. Having an affordable and accessible place to live is vital for everyone and especially for people with disabilities. With the adoption of the Visitability ordinance the city is on the verge being a model city on how to provide affordable and accessible housing. The city still needs to increase

its affordable housing supply before this can be achieved. However, once its achieved Petaluma can be proof that it's possible to provide housing that is both affordable and acesaaible.

Thank You,

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