

Regional Housing

From: John Mirisch <jmirisch@beverlyhills.org>
Sent: Monday, February 4, 2019 4:49 PM
To: Regional Housing
Cc: Peggy Huang; Wapner, Alan D.; Finlay, Margaret E.; Joel Kotkin
Subject: RHNA Subcommittee meeting, Feb. 4, 2019

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Dear Chairperson Huang, Dear Subcommittee members,

Please find below my comments on today's RHNA subcommittee meeting:

1. Some of the Yimby public comment today seemed to make the stock Yimby argument that we need to densify in order to create more housing affordability. However, the notion that "density=affordability" is simply false. The major issue facing us is housing affordability not housing per-se. The Yimbys use coded language when they talk about the need for more housing "at all price points." That means "market rate housing," which – because for-profit developers look to maximize profits – almost invariably means upper-end and luxury housing. Increasing the supply of upper-end and luxury housing will have no significant impact on affordability; simply stated, building more Rolls-Royces will not decrease the price of Priuses.

Furthermore, it is absurd to link homelessness with the supply-side notions of housing advocated today by the Yimbys. What we need is more affordable housing, so we should focus on that. In the following article, I address how current bills in the legislature which currently are real estate bills could actually be transformed into housing bills which actually help achieve the goals of more affordable housing.

<http://www.foxandhoundsdaily.com/2019/01/scott-weiners-sb-50-is-a-wimby-bill/>

2. We briefly heard the standard Yimby talking point that single-family houses are “immoral” and “racist” (which has its ideological basis in Richard Rothstein’s “The Color of Law”). The supposed “immoral” nature of SFH is constantly used by Yimbys as a basis to try to impose their misguided visions of density on local communities.

Yet single-family housing is a lifestyle choice for real, living people of all ethnicities, colors, gender preferences and backgrounds. How we choose to live is a very personal choice, just as personal and individual as whom we choose to love, what we choose to eat and how we decide to dress. The use of Rothstein’s historical analysis to suggest that SFH is “racist” or “immoral” is another absurd argument, as if – as studies show – people of all stripes and ethnicities don’t choose SFH as a lifestyle choice.

The elimination of SFH in Minneapolis was mentioned; yet it must be pointed out that this was a decision which was made locally, not one that was imposed by the state. A decision that may be right for Minneapolis might not be the right one for St. Paul, for example, which has taken no such measures.

SCAG members should embrace the diversity of our individual communities, from single-family housing to ultra-dense urban living – and everything in between. We need to encourage diversity and tolerance of various lifestyle choices. As Kevin mentioned, it’s not just difficult to figure out one-size-fits-all measures for 20 million people: it’s also wrong.

3. We need to be very careful about looking at TOD (transit oriented development) as a silver bullet, as some of the public comments suggested. In some cases, it’s just an excuse to eliminate local zoning and impose density so developers can increase their profit margins. The theory of TOD and the implementation are very different and, if anything, we should

be looking at the urban planning implications of the next generation of technology, such as autonomous vehicles. Looking at and developing plans for AOD (autonomous oriented development) would make more sense at this time.

While it does make sense to look at potentially reduced parking requirements in such a world, this notion would also include looking at building parking for the present which could be repurposed in the future. However, if we eliminate parking for current individual projects on the theory that they are near to transit, then we are making the assumption that those who live in the buildings would actually use transit. If that's the case, it would be imperative to ban car ownership for individuals moving into buildings near transit which have reduced (or eliminated) parking requirements on that basis. Otherwise, nearby transit simply becomes an amenity (which could actually increase the price of housing), and the cost of parking is transferred from the private sector to the public sector. This would be an unnecessary wealth transfer from the public to the private sector.

4. Paavo Monkkonen's pro-density, anti-choice agenda is indicative of the kind of bias I referred to during public comment today, as well as in a letter last year. In addition to his unwillingness to engage in dialogue with people who may not share his opinion, his bias should disqualify him from serving on the committee – or at the very least it should demand that some balance be brought on board in the form of another scholar, such as Joel Kotkin of Chapman University, who has a different take on the housing affordability problem and potential solutions.

Today, for example, Professor Monkkonen was quick to summarily dismiss Professor Richard Florida's analysis of a recent study which suggests that upzoning does not necessarily increase housing supply and reduce prices.

<https://www.citylab.com/life/2019/01/zoning-reform-house-costs-urban-development-gentrification/581677/>

In addition to mischaracterizing the author of the study's take on his own research, Prof. Monkkonen contended something to the effect that [paraphrase] "the study relates to Chicago, and LA is not like Chicago; it's more like Seattle, where additional density has led to reduced housing prices."

In actuality, as pointed out by Joel Kotkin, one could contend that LA has more similarities with Chicago than Seattle, where increased density due to a glut of construction meant that housing prices may be down from an all-time high, but are not anywhere near levels of affordability.

Prof. Monkkonen's one-sided dismissal of alternate perspectives, not to mention his faulty analysis, is not the basis for sound policy-decisions; it needs to be addressed.

5. Some additional brief points:

- CASA in the Bay Area is controversial, and some have described it as a top-down, special interest attempt at planning. We should not use it as a model, and instead should work on our own bottom-up approaches.
- We should study the fiscal impacts of upzoning and the wealth transfer it represents from the public to the private sector.
- We need to study the impacts of more market-rate housing on the need for affordable housing. We should perhaps commission nexus analyses (such as done by other cities). In general, they tend to show that market-rate housing creates a need for additional affordable housing, so we need to address how to avoid a situation in which adding market-rate housing simply is digging the housing hole deeper.

- We should look at the root causes of the housing affordability issues, including job creation/job concentration, income inequality and geographic equity. We should also suggest specific solutions which actually address the specific problems.

Finally, the individuality and uniqueness of our Communities make our region special. The unique DNA of our cities and their ability to define themselves should be preserved and we need to be careful to avoid going down the path of a Blade Runner or neo-feudalistic dystopian future for our region. We can, especially if given the resources, better address housing affordability issues in an organic fashion which fits in with our individual communities by cooperating regionally, including working more closely with non-profit affordable housing developers, who – in contrast to for-profit developers looking to use housing to profiteer – have as their sole purpose the creation of more affordable housing itself.

I look forward to continuing to work with SCAG in the spirit of what I call “urban humanism,” with the goal of allowing our diverse communities and cities the opportunity to become the very best versions of themselves possible.

Sincerely,

John Mirisch

Vice Mayor, City of Beverly Hills

CEHD Committee Member

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