

**SUSTAINABLE TAMALMONTE
215 JULIA AVENUE
MILL VALLEY, CA 94941**

July 28, 2014

Marin County Planning Commission
3501 Civic Center Drive, Suite 308
San Rafael, CA 94903

Re: 2015 to 2023 DRAFT Marin County Housing Element's Feasibility Analysis, Policies & Programs

Dear Marin County Planning Commission,

We have the following comments and recommendations regarding the 2015 to 2023 DRAFT Marin County Housing Element's Feasibility Analysis, Policies, and Programs:

I. Feasibility Analysis

To lower environmental impacts, ensure that the traditional character of local communities is upheld, and increase the probability that housing will be built, sites identified in the Housing Element's Available Land Inventory should be zoned at 20 units per acre or lower. The Metropolitan Default Density of 30 units per acre should not be accepted.

Assembly Member Mark Levine introduced Assembly Bill 1537 to allow Marin County and its cities with a population over 50,000 to have their default density classifications changed from metropolitan (30 units per acre) to suburban (20 units per acre). However, there is no guarantee that this bill will pass.

Therefore, Staff should immediately begin developing a Feasibility Analysis to demonstrate how lower densities can facilitate the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) for all income levels, including lower income households. We suggest that you advise staff to seek advice from other jurisdictions' planning departments to learn how to create the most convincing Feasibility Analysis possible and how to best negotiate with the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

Based on the capability of other jurisdictions, we have confidence that, through persistent and strong negotiation tactics and a thorough and compelling Feasibility Analysis, Unincorporated Marin can convince HCD to accept sites zoned at 20 units per acre or lower to accommodate the County's RHNA for all income levels, including lower income households.

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct Staff to do the following:

- Seek advice from other Planning Departments on how to create the most compelling Feasibility Analysis and how best to negotiate with HCD.

- Conduct a thorough and compelling Feasibility Analysis to demonstrate that lower densities can accommodate the County’s housing need for all income levels, including lower income households;
- Identify low density sites in the Housing Elements Available Land Inventory; and
- Lower residential densities throughout Unincorporated Marin to below 20 units per acre.

II. 2015 to 2023 DRAFT Marin County Housing Element Policies & Programs Carried Over From the last Marin County Housing Element (2007 to 2014) Policies & Programs.

The 2015 to 2023 DRAFT Marin County Housing Element policies and programs that are being carried over from the last Marin County Housing Element (2007 to 2014) reduce local control, public input, transparency and environmental protection by fast-tracking permit review of affordable housing.

Other housing element programs also treat affordable housing differently than market-rate housing, giving affordable housing exceptions — exemptions to density limits, development standards and safety regulations.

Thorough permit review and development standards, requirements & limitations exist for public health & safety, protection of the environment & wildlife, community values and for preservation of a high quality of life.

The above referenced exceptions for affordable housing are a boon to housing developers but pave the way for lower income households to live in conditions substandard to those of higher income households. This is a form of social injustice. All such exceptions should be stopped. Development of affordable residential units should be treated like any other development.

RECOMMENDATION:

Eliminate Streamlining, Incentives and Exceptions for Affordable Housing in the 2015 to 2023 DRAFT Marin County Housing Element.

III. 2015 to 2023 DRAFT Marin County Housing Element New Policies and Programs

We will soon follow up with comments and recommendations regarding the new policies and programs proposed in the 2015 to 2023 DRAFT Marin County Housing Element. There are a number that we are very concerned about.

Thank you for your conscientious consideration.

Very truly yours,

/s/

Sharon Rushton

Chairperson

Sustainable TamAlmonte