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Public Comment

From: Linda Honikman <linda.honikman@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 4, 2026 3:50 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: County BOS Item #5 Workforce Housing proposals for Probation bldg site
Attachments: 5-4-26 Workforce Housing from Strong Towns SB.pdf

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Please distribute to the Supervisors.

Thank you!
Linda Homikman

(805) 683-0408 cell (8am-8pm PST)



May 4, 2026

May 5 BOS Item #5 (117 E Carrillo Workforce Housing Proposal)

Dear Chair and Members of the Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of Strong Towns Santa Barbara, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on Item #5 regarding the proposed workforce housing development at 117 E Carrillo Street.

First, we want to express our appreciation to past and current Supervisors for the foresight to fund a workforce housing study in 2021 and to prioritize the use of County-owned land for housing during the Housing Element update process. These actions have clearly laid the groundwork for what we see today—one of the most promising opportunities in recent years to deliver meaningful affordable housing in the urban core.

We also want to thank Lucille Boss and County staff for proactively using the future availability of the Probation site to identify model housing programs, financing strategies, and partnership opportunities. The Request for Proposals reflects a strong and thoughtful set of objectives: expanding housing across a range of income levels, leveraging public land without burdening the General Fund, promoting long-term community benefit, and creating a replicable model for future sites. These are exactly the kinds of policies that can move the needle on housing production in Santa Barbara County. We also appreciate that the top recommendation does not rely on Low Income Housing Tax Credits, which are becoming harder to get.

We commend all of the development teams who responded to the County's call. The proposals demonstrate a high level of effort, creativity, and seriousness—particularly in exploring innovative financing structures and cost-saving construction approaches such as modular systems. It is clear that this process has opened the door to new possibilities for delivering housing more efficiently.

From our review of Attachment B, it is evident that each of the top proposals offers meaningful tradeoffs in cost, unit count, and depth of affordability. For example, proposals range from approximately 72 to 116 units, with varying affordability mixes and cost structures—from roughly \$450,000 per unit to over \$800,000 per unit depending on financing strategy and subsidy levels. We like the 3BR that HACSB included and it is worth adding their 5-story option to future possibilities. This underscores that there is no single “perfect” project, but rather a range of viable approaches that could—and should—be pursued across multiple sites.

That leads to our central recommendation:

That this should not be a one-off project.

We could use three or four projects of this scale and type within the City's downtown core. The level of interest and quality demonstrated in this RFP process suggests that we now have several models that could be financed and replicated.

We strongly encourage the County, in partnership with the City, to:

- Identify additional publicly owned or underutilized sites (including surface parking lots discussed in recent meetings),
- Continue engaging both selected and unselected development teams—especially those with local partnerships,
- And build on this momentum to create a pipeline of similar workforce housing projects.

In particular, we want to emphasize the value of local housing authorities in these proposals. Santa Barbara is fortunate to have highly capable public housing partners who have a strong track record of responding to community concerns both during development and long-term operations. Their involvement provides confidence that these projects will not only be built, but will succeed over time.

At the same time, we encourage continued exploration of cost efficiencies. The wide variation in per-unit costs across proposals highlights the importance of innovation in construction methods, financing, and regulatory processes. If this project is to serve as a model, it should also serve as a learning opportunity for how to deliver high-quality housing at lower cost.

Finally, we want to emphasize the broader significance of this moment. This project has the potential to be a turning point for affordable housing production in Santa Barbara. For too long, the region has struggled to produce housing at the scale required to meet demand—particularly for low- and moderate-income households. This proposal demonstrates a new path forward: leveraging public land, partnering with experienced developers, and aligning policy with production.

We urge you to move forward with a strong project—and just as importantly, to treat this as the beginning of a broader program, not the end of a single process.

Thank you for your commitment to address this challenging problem.

Sincerely,
Strong Towns Santa Barbara