

Public Comment



#3

February 13, 2023

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

Das Williams, Chair

Subject: Agenda Item 3, Planning & Development Department, Housing Element Update 6

Honorable Board of Supervisors:

My name is Lisa Knox Burns and I serve on the governing board of the County Housing Authority. Our mission for decades has been to build and manage rent subsidized housing for the unincorporated area and the 7 cities of Carpinteria, Goleta, Solvang, Buellton, Lompoc Santa Maria and Guadalupe.

As a federal agency we receive rent subsidy vouchers directly for projects we build and finance. It is our goal that the 1,333 multifamily apartments & single-family homes distributed throughout the County are good neighbors. We proudly compete with rental companies who seek our clients for their Section 8 rent vouchers of which approximately 4060 are placed. The difference between paying a landlord a rent subsidy and a County Housing Authority development is that, a rent subsidy voucher in a Housing Authority development benefits affordable housing permanently, and is not just a month by month subsidy.

County Housing Authority developments provide more than just a place to live, because we provide onsite supportive services like food pantries, training classes in finance with programs designed to help people put aside savings that are matched to incentivize households to improve their lives. We guarantee internet access to every tenant. We have a responsive maintenance staff and many of our apartment projects have an onsite manager. Most of our properties have security cameras, some have onsite security personnel. These are not needed for the residents who live there, but protection from outside influences. We have strict rules regarding smoke of any kind in living units due to health concerns of our tenants. Most importantly, we know from surveys of our waiting list that nearly all of our prospective tenants reside in Santa Barbara County.

On a personal note, I worked on the County's first Housing Element, codified in the Public Resource Code, forty years ago. What is proposed today is not new. In 1980, County Supervisors designated affordable housing sites, County planning staff prepared Initial Studies for each site to expedite CEQA processing of subsequent projects, and the sites were designated for an Affordable Housing zone district. Experience shows that does not guarantee that affordable housing would be built because it is a special alchemy that combines Federal subsidies, land cost, willing financial partnerships, tax breaks and other cost saving measures to create truly affordable housing. However, creating opportunities for affordable housing begins now as before, with the community and its leaders acknowledging there is a local need for it. It's not just talk, there has to be action. The action called for today is to affirm the goals and policies of the Housing Element, including designations of potential sites.

Lisa Knox Burns

Commissioner, Second District

Housing Authority of Santa Barbara County (HASBARCO)

C: Supervisor Laura Capps