

THE LEAGUE  
OF WOMEN VOTERS  
OF PALO ALTO



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Planning and Transportation Commission  
City of Palo Alto  
250 Hamilton Ave  
Palo Alto, CA 94301

January 18, 2013

Dear Chair Martinez and Commissioners,

The League of Women Voters of Palo Alto (LWVPA) supports the Draft Density Bonus Ordinance that was attached to the Staff Report ID #3347 for the January 9, 2013 meeting of the Planning and Transportation Commission.

The City continues to need housing for low, very-low, moderate and middle-income residents. The City is no longer able to require Below Market Rate (BMR) units in new rental housing and likely will lose affordable housing units at Buena Vista Mobile Home Park. The current density bonus has not resulted in any units added to the affordable housing market. The City needs creative ways to encourage the production of more affordable housing. The Draft Density Bonus Ordinance presented to the Commission is one such option.

LWVPA agrees with the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan that the City should not be building housing in the Baylands and very low densities are appropriate in the foothills. This means that increased density must occur in the core of the City. The density of units allowed per acre is not the only constraint on the number of units that can be built per acre. The FAR, set backs, height, parking requirements, and daylight plane all play a part in restricting the number of units per acre. It is difficult to increase the density per acre without forgiving some of these restraints. For example, some forgiveness in height may allow for an increase in unit number without necessarily adding bulk to a building. Additionally, podium parking which is partially submerged allows a project to meet its parking requirement but may require more height if the building is to meet the bonus density. LWVPA recommends that the City's zoning ordinance offer a wide range of incentives to a developer so that the developer can be creative and flexible. What works on one site may not be the answer for another.

We have one concern. The requirement that developers show a cost reduction as a result of concessions or incentives not on the approved list may have a chilling effect on the creativity of the project. The goal of the Draft Density Bonus Ordinance is to encourage the development of affordable housing; the bonuses are not granted because the developer wants a cost reduction.

The Draft Density Bonus Ordinance will allow the City to integrate affordable housing into the community as a whole and continue its fine example of producing quality units spread throughout the City. In order to encourage developers to build creative projects that meet the demand for quality affordable housing, the League urges you to support a range of incentives/concessions in the Draft Density Bonus Ordinance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Alice Thornton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Alice Thornton  
President LWV Palo Alto