



April 5, 2018

Palo Alto City Council

Re: April 9, 2018, Agenda Item No. 7: Affordable Housing Combining District Draft Ordinance

Dear Mayor Kniss and Council Members,

The League of Women Voters of Palo Alto (LWVPA) has come before you many times to show our support of your efforts to increase the supply of housing for all, particularly for those with very low, low and moderate incomes.

LWVPA urges you to adopt an affordable housing overlay ordinance that will create opportunities for, and eliminate barriers to, the development of affordable housing. The Affordable Housing Combining District Draft Ordinance, Attachment A to the staff report, will go a long way towards that goal. However, to ensure more affordable housing opportunities and units, we also urge you to include the following changes to that draft ordinance. We had asked the Planning and Transportation Commission (P&TC) to include these improvements which are reflected, for the most part, in the March 27 Minority Recommendation.

- Expand the scope of the combining district to include the Research Park and General Manufacturing Districts.
- Include language that allows some flexibility regarding the distances from the transit corridors. The language, "major transit stop or high-quality transit corridor," is too limiting and should be broader in scope.
- Allow the Planning Director to approve increases in the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and height where appropriate, particularly in the areas around University Avenue and California Avenue.
- Allow the Planning Director to waive the retail requirements in all districts. Retail usually requires more parking which is expensive to provide. Moreover, the presence of retail in an affordable housing project severely complicates the funding opportunities. Thus, a retail requirement may make an affordable housing project infeasible, even with the benefits of the combining district.

For the last two bullets, LWVPA believes that it is important to streamline the entitlement process. To do so, the Planning Director, not the City Council, should have the authority to approve increases in FAR and height and to waive retail requirements where appropriate.

To demonstrate that the Council is serious about meaningfully addressing the housing crisis, we urge you to reject the majority recommendation of the P&TC. We believe the P&TC decision to not recommend at this time any ordinance to allow more affordable housing at this time is contrary to the City Council's priority on housing, ignores the housing crisis and flies in the face of the housing policies in the Comprehensive Plan and the Housing Element. With this decision, the majority turned a deaf ear to the professional testimony of many affordable housing experts and to the compelling testimony of those suffering from the lack of adequate housing in our city.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bonnie Packer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bonnie Packer
President, League of Women Voters of Palo Alto