

Affordable Housing Work Group's Goals

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Our group needs to define the affordable housing we want to produce. I am feeling uneasy that we still seem to be wandering on that major point. We need to specify now what we are after so we can focus down on how to tackle it. The original idea of Senate Bill 187 was supposed to be to provide one way for a city to create conditions for the production of ownership workforce housing for persons and families that have enough income to realistically become homeowners. Typically this would be household incomes possibly as low as 80% median but more likely at 100 and on up to 120 or even 140% median depending on local conditions.

OHCS programs and its non-profit partners routinely provide subsidized housing for incomes 60% of median and below. Typically this is rental housing and is the type of housing that our guest from last meeting Ed McNamara so ably produces. Such rental housing both subsidized and low end market rate is usually available in most towns. The rental situation could always be better but it is not the Goal Ten challenge that ownership workforce housing is. That problem is created when a working household achieves an income level that will allow them to move on to homeownership. Then the typical pattern in many American cities is a move from the more central rental to the cheaper edge trading hydrocarbon consumption and lost time commuting for an affordable house payment.

What we are working for is to find and implement realistic ways to keep working people from making that move. Those strategies have to be ones that do not cost any public body a significant amount of money since there is no source of funding. The bill we are considering will contribute to that effort at little expense to a city. Let OHCS and other subsidization programs continue to handle deep subsidy rental development. I submit that cannot be in this group's purview.

I have two big concerns today. One is that at the last meeting Mary Kyle seemed to be saying that 1000 Friends was not in favor of our proposed House Bill and that we should only be using other resources such as infill to achieve our goals. I hope that we are not losing a very able partner in this effort and that if 1000 Friends has doubts, they will help further craft the bill to meet their concerns. Secondly, on the other hand, I totally agree with the message implicit in Mary Kyle's statement: that we need to be using all the resources at our disposal. We have spoken in passing of many of these such as abolition of height restrictions, building housing for downtown workers over existing parking lots, and other worthy infill strategies. Let's formally include them in our list of answers a community can employ to meet its Goal Ten responsibilities.

If we keep our focus on developing as many realistic and inexpensive programs as we can for a city to attract the working family to affordable ownership housing in the town where they work we will be successful in keeping our carbon footprint to a minimum and our communities diverse and healthy.