



Statement on the City of Davis Draft Housing Element Update

May 18, 2021

The City of Davis Housing Element update is a key opportunity to address our region's housing affordability crisis by facilitating critically needed housing development. Like many parts of the state, an overwhelming number of Davis residents face housing insecurity, an impact stretching far beyond the college student population. Updating the city's Housing Element - a process that occurs only once every eight years - presents a vital opportunity to not only address longstanding inequity, but to improve the quality of life for all members of the Davis community.

However, in its current form, the draft Housing Element fails to incorporate material changes that will meaningfully increase the housing supply. The city is legally obligated to make a reasonable attempt to zone for new housing. However, in the last two decades, Davis has one of the lowest rates of new housing with zero market-rate apartments built between 2002 and 2019. In the previous site inventory for the 5th RHNA cycle, only 14 of the 25 sites or 56% were approved to be developed. Currently, the proposal's projections fail to meet the requirement for low-income housing. The housing element draft significantly overestimates the rate of construction and does not modify zoning regulations to increase the likelihood of new housing.

To put it plainly, the current draft of the Davis Housing Element does not go nearly far enough to address the city's severe housing affordability crisis, and if adopted in its current form, will only further exacerbate housing inequity in Davis and the Yolo County region.

During the Housing Element public outreach process, the Associated Students of UC Davis (ASUCD) and the UC Davis Graduate Student Association (GSA) proposed a series of reasonable reforms that were not included in the current draft. Combined, these organizations represent up to 40,000 UC Davis undergraduate and graduate students and approximately 25,000 that live in the City of Davis proper. Sustainable Growth Yolo supports these reforms as clear and meaningful ways the city can facilitate more housing development in Davis, and advocates that the city does not adopt the updated Housing Element without including these modifications. The suggested reforms include:

Eliminate Parking Minimums: Parking is a significant cost to any new development with estimates ranging upwards of \$30,000 per parking space. Space required for parking discourages biking and walking and promotes an unsustainable car culture. Davis, being one of the few suburban cities in the United States, built after WW2 with an effective bus and bike systems, should embrace these policies. Eliminating the requirement to build excessive parking will dramatically reduce the cost of new construction, helping promote more infill. It's worth pointing out that downtown Davis would not have been built in the state many of us love if current parking minimums had been in place.

Fully Fund Housing Trust Fund: The current Housing Trust Fund (HTF) should be a major resource for the City of Davis to support Affordable housing. However, the HTF currently has very limited revenues. This fund can be used for upkeep on current Affordable properties, subsidize the creation of new housing, or purchase and renovate older properties to repurpose as Affordable housing akin to Project Homekey. Additional funding could be raised from programs such as a Real Estate Transfer Fee since it does not put a cost on the creation of new housing.



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Rezoning All Strip Malls to Mixed Use: In the sites inventory, the draft housing element includes only one property to be rezoned as mixed-use. Together the Westlake Shopping Center, The Marketplace on Covell, Davis Manor, and Target Shopping Center have 16.5 acres of underused surface parking. By rezoning these properties for mixed-use, the city will immediately create the opportunity for denser and often more affordable housing to be developed with minimal impact.

By-Right Approval Process: Davis currently has an approval process consisting of multiple public hearings and veto-holding unelected commissions, resulting in not only a decrease in approved housing projects but even housing proposals. Uncertain processes lead to long politically contentious meetings, ultimately delaying projects and adding significant development costs. For example, the Sterling Apartment complex was first proposed to be a four to five story project with 203 units, but through the public hearing, the process was reduced to a mere 160 units. Plaza 2555 was first proposed with 646 bedrooms, but later reduced to 500 beds after a two-year delay between the penultimate public hearing and approval by council. Allowing projects to avoid the extended public hearing process if they meet the local zoning and Affordable Housing ordinance adds certainty and stability to the process, which will increase development and bring down costs.

Include City-Owned, Underutilized Locations in Site Inventory: The City of Davis has multiple properties that are currently underutilized or vacant. Some sites that could be considered are a public works yard, outdated fire station, parking lots, sports complexes, and open spaces. These sites should be reviewed and assessed for possible inclusion in site inventory for future housing development.

Legalize Small Increase in Density in Residential Areas: Large areas of Davis are zoned as R-1 for single family only homes or as PD, Planned Development. Legalizing the addition of up to four units on a single family zoned lot would allow for more housing development without expanding the city footprint or contributing to urban sprawl.

These reasonable reforms to the Housing Element are supported by a broad coalition of community members ranging from housing advocates to student organizations to social justice groups. The City of Davis has a responsibility to represent all of its residents, and address equity issues that impact their quality of life. Sustainable Growth Yolo believes that ensuring the city's updated Housing Element facilitates an increase in the supply of attainable housing is key to making Davis a healthier, more sustainable, and inclusive community.

Davis, being one of the best cities for high paying job jobs, good schools, and a high quality of life, in the Sacramento region should be a leader in ensuring it meets the RHNA allocation as opposed to likely missing the allocation in the current draft. For these reasons, Sustainable Growth Yolo calls on the City of Davis to incorporate the above mentioned reforms to its Housing Element update.

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Sustainable Growth Yolo is a grassroots, volunteer-run housing advocacy organization. Our mission is to make the region an affordable place to live, work, and raise a family through access to quality housing and economic opportunities. You can learn more about our organization and how to get involved by visiting sustainablegrowthyolo.org or email info@sustainablegrowthyolo.org