

Allied Neighborhoods Association

Comments on Plan Santa Barbara for June 3, 2010

Affordable Housing

There is a very real and serious problem with the proposal regarding affordable housing. It appears to be just another subterfuge to get higher density. Are we really saying that everyone from very low to upper middle income is entitled to housing here? Why should those who have struggled to live here put up with the affects of higher density to order to house those whose income may in many cases exceed theirs? Something is wrong with this picture. Furthermore there is no guarantee that increased density will result in more affordable housing, note the use of the word “hopefully” in the staff report.

The questions that should be answered will this proposed high density solve the housing demand? Is high density the type of housing people want to live in? Or are we setting up policies that will dramatically change our city ?

Allied would urge you to eliminate the Higher Density residential designations. We oppose additional density increases of 100%. Even granting a few exceptions can easily lead to what is considered “normal” and sets a precedent. The city will not be able to legally deny some developers who want to build at these increased densities while allowing others to proceed. Once the door is open to these densities, there is no way to control growth.

We urge you not to affirm the base densities put forth in Plan Santa Barbara and oppose the 100% increase. The staff appears to be headed on the path of doing away with everything achieved with the previous down-zoning. While we are currently in difficult economic times, this does not mean things will not change. History has shown that the economy goes in cycles.

Staff has failed to pay attention to input and valued concerns from our larger community. Residents have said time and time again that they like Santa Barbara’s small town feel and character. They do not want us to become a high density city. They do not want density with increased population and all its costs and implications.

Targeted Development

We agree with the statement “As future growth and development is focused within the downtown “grid” historic resources will need further consideration and protection.” To even consider a 100 foot buffer as adequate is an illusion. This small buffer will fail to protect our historic resources and character. Allied recommended that the entire square block be taken into consideration and that the heights be limited to the height of the historic resource.

Traffic Congestion

The downtown merchants have serious legitimate reasons to be concerned that parking pricing will discourage business. We have already lost many small businesses and this will not help maintain those few that are left. The very reason that staff gives in support of this policy, that it will reduce congestion because it affects everyone, points to the problem with it. In this case, less congestion means fewer people coming downtown and fewer customers. Those who have a choice, who are not within walking distance of businesses downtown, will exercise their choice and go elsewhere.

Public Services and Capital Improvements

An issue that is being overlooked is that additional major expensive capital improvements required by the density proposals will raise the cost of living in Santa Barbara for our residents. I would refer you to the article in the Independent, Plan Santa Barbara Most Affects Those living in City Core, by Brian Fahnestock, dated Friday, May 7, 2010 at <http://www.independent.com/news/2010/may7/downtown-man>.

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There is still skepticism as to how well this will work as opposed to normal record keeping and existing defined limits. It is not clear that the city will be able to stop growth once it is allowed.

We remind you that once density and the ensuing results of growth are allowed, the city will be unable to turn that clock back. The slow growth policies have made Santa Barbara a unique city that residents have enjoyed. These policies have withstood the test of time. Minor tweaking of the general plan can fix those items that need improvement, but drastic changes are not desired. Santa Barbara has limited resources and the policy to live within these resources does not support high density.

Cathie McCammon, President of Allied