

ACT

Alameda Citizens Task Force

Vigilance, Truth, Civility

Dear Mayor Ashcraft, Vice Mayor Vella and Council Members Knox-White, Herrera Spencer and Daysog:

ACT strongly supported the Planning Department's (PD) proposed R-1 amendments submitted to the Planning Board (PB) on Dec. 13, 2021. However, the PB rejected the two most important standards contained in the proposed amendments, the maximum allowable size of any new dwellings of 1200 sq. ft. and the maximum allowance of two total units on a lot with four units allowed on each lot created by a lot split. Instead, the PB replaced these standards with a maximum allowable new dwelling standard of 1600 sq. ft. and full application of our current ADU ordinance to the R-1 district. This would allow as many as five units on a current lot or ten units if the owner does a lot split.

The PB recommendation was placed on your Jan. 4 Council agenda at which time we submitted a letter opposing their recommendation and supporting the PD recommendation. At the Jan. 4 meeting Council directed the PD to further explore its original recommendation. It has completed that task and now submits a revised version which we continue to support and discuss below.

1. Two Dwellings Per Lot Maximum: This is far superior to the PB recommendation which could allow as many as five units on the original lot and 10 units after a lot split. This level of density is unsustainable regarding parking, water, sewer and other infrastructure needs, and reduction of our urban forest protection against carbon dioxide and heat. Quadrupling the density of our R-1 districts via a lot split will be difficult enough for the community to absorb. We believe that increasing density by a factor ten simply makes no sense.

2. 1200 sq. ft. Maximum New Dwelling Size: The Planning Department presented its rationale for a 1200 sq ft. maximum lot size of 1200sq. ft. in its written report to the PB:

“Staff recommends a 1,200 square foot maximum for three reasons: 1) smaller units are more affordable than larger units and the greatest need in Alameda is for smaller, more affordable units, and 2) Alameda’s Accessory Dwelling Unit Ordinance establishes a cap of 1,200 square feet for ADUs. Having a consistent maximum size for both ADUs and “SB 9 units” will simplify the administration of the ministerial permitting process for both ADUs and SB 9 units, and 3) smaller units will result in smaller buildings, which will result in less visual, shading, and other community character issues.”

We asked Karen Lithgow, a well-known local realtor, to compute the 2021 cost difference between purchasing/renting a 1600 sq. ft. dwelling or a 1200 sq. ft. dwelling. The larger dwelling

median price is \$1,275,001. The smaller dwelling median is price \$1,037,500. The larger dwelling average rent is \$4286. The smaller dwelling average rent is \$3391.

Adopting the Planning Department recommendation will provide us a with an inventory to meet the needs of poorly served “missing middle” or “workforce” residents who perform vital services for our community as well as providing the other benefits set forth in their rationale quoted above.

3. 800 sq. ft. Dwellings: At the Jan. 4 Council meeting Mayor Ashcraft mad some positive comments about encouraging the construction of 800 sq. ft. dwellings. We believe that the R-1 ordinance can help improve our inventory of these smaller units. This could be accomplished by requiring that a lot split proposing to build 2 units on the new lot must include at least one 800 sq. ft. unit.

3. The Need for an Urgency Ordinance: Our prior letter that appears in the correspondence file for Item 7-A in the Jan 4 Council agenda presented a detailed analysis of the legal propriety of an urgency ordinance which will not be repeated here. However, we are again faced with a scenario where the normal process will delay the effective date of the new R-1 amendments until mid-March, allowing a month for applications to be filed under existing law which would require approval of up to five units on an existing lot or ten units with a lot split. Therefore, we again implore Council to adopt the R-1 amendments as an urgency measure.

Sincerely,

Paul S Foreman
ACT board Member