

BNC

**Berkeley Neighborhoods Council
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**Dedicated to improving the quality of life for all by creating
a unified neighborhood voice for promoting livability and resolving problems**

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July 21, 2024

Dear Mr. Mayor and City Councilmembers:

We are writing in opposition to the vast changes to zoning proposed in Item 1 of the July 23rd Special Meeting.

We all agree that we have an affordable housing crisis in Berkeley, but the drastic changes proposed will not solve this problem. The building boom of the last decade has shown that producing large amounts of market rate housing does not increase our supply of lower cost housing. If anything, we see skyrocketing land values because of real estate speculation. Our residents are being evicted and people who work in our city are being forced to move further away because our neighborhoods have become commodities for investors to hold or trade instead of places to live.

Residential and commercial units are held empty rather than lowering rents. Property owners find it more profitable to write off their losses than to lower the rents. Instead of studying how many units are vacant and ways to encourage renting them, we have before us a proposal that together with the demolition ordinance, will further promote real estate speculation at the expense of families who just want to be able to afford a home.

The term "Middle Housing" misleads Berkeley residents to think that this ordinance promotes Middle INCOME Housing. In reality, the proposed zoning plan merely promotes increased density in the middle of existing neighborhoods. Together with the State Density Bonus, residents will face buildings up to 50 ft next to their one- and two-story homes with only 4 foot setbacks. The State Density Bonus will provide a few very low income units, but let's be clear - there is still no help for low and moderate income residents.

The proposed changes will impact every neighborhood in Berkeley and supersede our Area Specific Plans, such as the Adeline Corridor Plan which is now three years in the making. The proposal on your agenda will put to waste the years spent and significant cost to taxpayers that went into creating these Area Plans, all for an ordinance that will likely not achieve the goal of creating truly middle income workforce housing. Density will be allowed to increase in all parts of the city, including in the very high fire zones, which will further exacerbate the problems of emergency evacuation and the difficulties residents are already facing when renewing their insurance policies.

We also must point out that for such significant changes to zoning in our entire city, there have been few public meetings. Berkeley residents spent years weighing in on the general ideas put forward in the Housing Element, but have not had much time to learn about the specifics in this ordinance. Furthermore, holding this meeting on a Tuesday afternoon in the middle of summer limits public engagement.

Berkeley Neighborhoods Council strongly urges you to vote no on this item and take a more incremental approach to zoning changes so that you can study the effects of each change and adjust for unintended consequences. We also urge you to hold evening meetings for topics of this magnitude to allow your constituents to fully participate and to hear your views.

Sincerely,

Berkeley Neighborhoods Council Executive Committee