

Kendall Sawyer

From: Eileen Morris [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, October 23, 2022 2:07 PM
To: Kendall Sawyer <ksawyer@cityofpetaluma.org>
Subject: affordable housing and the Fairgrounds

Dear Councilmembers,

I am unable to attend the workshop on the Fairgrounds on 10/24.

I am grateful for the work the citizen committee has done, but I want to suggest that the committee members are not looking at the site in the context of the entire city and its needs. That's your job to do.

I urge you to dedicate at least 12 acres of the Fairgrounds site to affordable housing. That is consonant with earlier plans. Anyone who voted to purchase the Fairgrounds for a park is long dead and received full value on the investment.

As I said in the meeting where you reviewed the draft inventory of sites available for affordable housing, I believe that you all want to fulfill the goals in our General Plan and vision statements. You want to help create a community that is diverse and where everyone, regardless of income, can participate in public life and thrive in private life. You want people who work here to be able to live here.

But I believe that your predecessors also wanted those things, too. And we must acknowledge that we have failed abysmally in the last two decades when it comes to creating the circumstances where affordable housing can be built. We're not alone in our failure: every community in the Bay Area has failed. And that provides no comfort at all to those who are struggling in this off-kilter rental housing market. It's unlikely that someone who struggles to afford rent will be able to participate in public life or thrive in private life.

It's also important to note that the City has not been a by-stander in the creation of that market. No, many of the Council's decisions have directly impacted it, enriching some and increasing the struggle of others. A few examples include the City's decision not to restrict Air B and B rentals and the City's decision not to adopt a rent control ordinance. Right next door to the Fairgrounds, the City rezoned the Kenilworth site, thus creating dozens--if not hundreds--of jobs that do not pay a housing wage but that do enrich corporations.

We know that building affordable housing is expensive. With affordable housing at the Fairgrounds, you can take away two of the greatest costs: land and the cost of NIMBY objections. You can site the housing in such a way that a NIMBY has no standing to object.

It is a large site and there is room for many uses. Councilmembers, it is time to begin to address this horrible dearth of affordable housing. It is time to live our values. I am not suggesting that it will be simple or easy, but I have seen this city do seemingly impossible things before. For example, I remember when the Army Corps of Engineers was ready to pull up stakes and abandon work on our flood project. This community rallied and found a way to get the project built, protecting the security and economic interests of many of our residents and businesses. I urge you to rally again to protect the interests of your constituents who do not possess great wealth but whom we know possess great potential to enrich our community.

Sincerely,

Eileen Morris