

Opinion

Sentinel Editorial

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The Housing Dilemma

It is interesting to note the sudden concern by Santa Cruz City officials over the fate of what used to be low or moderate cost housing in the community.

It is commendable that the officials are concerned about the seriousness of the problem, but it is somewhat unfortunate that a part of the blame over the lack of lower cost housing in the area must be attributed to the city's attitude and its regulatory agencies over the past decade.

Obviously, we are not talking about today's housing costs for the enormous increase in the price of housing is due to a wide variety of causes, including the shortage of available facilities.

But when you look at the picture over a longer time span, there is simply no question about the fact that unsound governmental practices started the phenomenal increase in the cost of housing.

Back in the days when you could buy a lot in many areas of the community for \$5000 to \$10,000, we began the process of questioning housing development.

First, it was the question of lot size, then the amount of the land which could be legally improved with setbacks gaining in size.

Then, we started raising various fees associated with house building along with upgrading codes which, in effect, raised the price of the building.

Then we started adding taxes to the project. So much land for schools, a bedroom tax to support recreational activities was applied only to new housing.

Connection fees suddenly soared.

All during this time we were on the downgrade approach. If a developer proposed 40 units, by the time he was through with the planning commission it was 26 and if he received approval at the council level the units were more likely to be reduced to 20 and the average cost doubled.

If you suggested cluster housing to lower costs, you

would usually windup with single family units and higher per unit costs.

During the same period the housing crunch was accelerated by higher labor costs, increased material costs and land costs which soared out of this world.

So what have we today? In one subdivision where homes of good quality were available for \$35,000, similar houses today cost \$120,000.

Fortunately some of the slack has been taken up by public housing developed by the Santa Cruz Housing Authority. PROD has provided some rehabilitation in a subsidized program.

We have an exceptionally fine example in HUD Section 8 housing developed by Jack Baskin with the San Lorenzo Park Apartments, a federally supported subsidized facility for modest income families.

But as far as low cost housing is concerned, there is no such project. And it appears that moderate cost housing is a thing of the past.

Many of our limited income homeowners are in an impossible bind. They can't afford to live in their own homes, but if they sell them, they won't be eligible for subsidized housing.

There are no easy answers on the horizon.

About the best we can hope for are programs such as Section 8 and the existing rehabilitation projects.

It would be nice if we could develop methods to aid some of the longtime local families who have been most adversely affected by the housing and tax dilemma.

These people have spent a lifetime here, working, paying their bills, contributing to the community and now find themselves forced to leave their homes because of factors far beyond their control and their ability to pay.

And perhaps we should give a little more thought to mobile home clusters.