

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT
COUNTYWIDE PRIORITY SETTING COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE FOR ANALYSIS OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING CHOICE

PUBLIC HEARING

ANALYSIS OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING CHOICE
(INCLUDING IMPLEMENTATION PLAN)

Tuesday, May 24, 2011
7:00 p.m.
Pickleweed Park Community Center
Art Room (Room #8)
50 Canal Street, San Rafael

Attending:

Subcommittee Members

Supervisor Judy Arnold, Marin County Board of Supervisors
Vice Mayor Greg Brockbank, City of San Rafael
Mayor Ken Wachtel, City of Mill Valley

County Staff

Brian Crawford, Marin County Community Development Agency
Stacey Laumann, Marin County Community Development Agency
Leelee Thomas, Marin County Community Development Agency
Roy Bateman, Marin County Community Development Agency

Members of the Public

Larry Bryson, Novato Housing Coalition
Paul Cohen, Legal Aid of Marin
Dave Coury
Jolene Cox
Rafael Durr
Pam Drew
Gary Hamilton
Jan Hamilton
Nancy Kenyon, Fair Housing of Marin
Andrina Ruzick
Gayle Theard, Grassroots Leadership Network

Supervisor Arnold opened the meeting, introduced the Subcommittee members and County staff, thanked the Community Media Access Center for filming this meeting, and asked everyone present to introduce themselves. Supervisor Arnold explained that the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice is a planning document that is intended to identify barriers to fair housing choice in Marin County. Supervisor Arnold said that, in response to requests from the community, the Subcommittee decided to hold two additional meetings for community input, one last night in Marin City, and one tonight in the Canal neighborhood.

Supervisor Arnold said she agreed that the timeline has not been ideal. Unfortunately, we had a July 20 deadline from HUD to file a completed Analysis of Impediments, and that limited the time available for community consultation. We requested a 3-month extension from HUD, and we just got word yesterday that HUD granted the extension. With the extension, our deadline is now October 30, which gives us an opportunity to expand our outreach efforts and hold additional meetings. We had been proceeding assuming that we might not get the extension. Since we had already publically noticed the meetings for May 23, 24, and 31, we decided to go ahead with those meetings.

Supervisor Arnold reported that she and Supervisor Susan Adams have directed county staff to make procedural changes to allow for the Board of Supervisors to select a representative from the protected classes to serve on the countywide priority setting committee for Community Development Block Grants, and also on our local area committees, except for Novato and San Rafael, where the city councils have the option of setting their own procedures.

Roy Bateman explained the proposed format for tonight's meeting: Everyone is asked, "What are the major barriers to fair housing choice in Marin, and how might they be addressed?" We will note everyone's responses on flip chart pages in two categories, "Barriers" and "Solutions." Then there will be an opportunity to provide specific comments on the text of the Analysis of Impediments, and to suggest what we might do create a deeper consultation now that HUD has given us more time for the process. Then each person will be given 5 self-adhesive dots for barriers and 5 self-adhesive dots for solutions, so they can "vote" on the flip chart sheets for which items are most significant.

Supervisor Arnold announced open time for matters not on the agenda. There were no comments.

Barriers to Fair Housing Choice and Potential Solutions

We began the discussion of barriers to fair housing choice and potential solutions.

Pam Drew: The letter from Public Advocates was unfairly critical of Novato's Housing Element housing site selection process. The City's plan, which proposed to put all the housing at just one site, was unworkable and inconsistent with the City's vision. Poor communications from local government to the community: The card City of Novato sent me as notice of the Planning Commission hearing was unclear. Poor public outreach resulted in angrier and larger turnout at public hearing than would have happened with better outreach.

Roy Bateman: Described the intent of the Analysis of Impediments and gave a summary of the Westchester County [New York] case.

Larry Bryson: Median income is high in Marin, so government standards for housing affordability that are tied to median income are also too high.

Ken Wachtel: We want to hear about barriers to fair housing, not just barriers to affordable housing. Do you know of instances where people or local governments have interfered with fair housing rights, and what do you suggest to resolve those impediments?

Greg Brockbank: A diverse community is a stronger community.

Dave Coury: Of those precariously housed in Marin, 70% are black or Hispanic. (Last night, I incorrectly said "homeless" instead of "precariously housed.") Roy Bateman should look at trends since 1960 in the percentage of Marin's population which is comprised of minorities. Marin has lost people at 10-20% of median income. Marin has 7 of the whitest cities in the USA.

Paul Cohen: Heard last night's meeting in Marin City was very positive. Were notices of tonight's meeting in Spanish and Vietnamese circulated beyond the County website? Should do more extensive outreach. Racial profiling is a problem in Marin. Police stop those "driving while black/brown." A black man left his house in Mill Valley, a neighbor assumed he was a burglar and called the police. People assume that brown people are criminals or will de-value property. Anti-immigrant sentiment is also a problem in Marin. People have free speech rights, but anti-immigrant organizing can become persecution.

Pam Drew: Novato has the most diversity of any town in Marin; yet we are criticized as a community, unfairly tarred with a broad brush.

Andrina Ruzick: In the housing element process, ABAG criteria for sites acceptable for affordable housing development are not conducive to creating the best affordable housing. Small sites (under 1/2 acre) provide the best affordable housing. The ABAG requirement that sites be at least 2 acres is an impediment. EAH and Eden Housing do large projects, but we also have developers that will build 8 to 15 unit projects.

Ken Wachtel: Mill Valley is built out, no vacant sites over 1 1/2 acres are available.

Andrina Ruzick: Chambers of Commerce want to retain commercially zoned land, and they oppose housing above commercial uses. Mixed use is our future.

Greg Brockbank: There's an overlap between the need for affordable housing and fair housing issues. 60% of those who work in Marin commute from outside the County, and this gets worse as we build more commercial development with more low-wage jobs. The best place for affordable housing is downtown near transit. Nobody wants to see huge dense affordable housing. But all over Marin, we have attractive affordable housing that improves the neighborhood, some at 30 to 80 units per acre! Marin needs to address its jobs-housing imbalance by building more appropriately located affordable housing.

Ken Wachtel: Local governments don't build affordable housing; all they can do is to facilitate higher densities so that affordable housing can be built.

Stacey Laumann: Fair housing has to do with affordability, proximity, and accessibility. We say Marin is built out, but we're not using all of our land effectively, for example, we have a lot of land in surface parking. How, as government employees, can we bring more people along to accept the need for affordable housing?

Andrina Ruzick: People's attitudes are hard to change. The planners for the Novato Housing Element put my family's owner-occupied house on the underutilized property list, but we have a right to continue its present use. Thirteen affordable housing sites were proposed in a small area along Novato Boulevard; that's too much concentration! "Quality of life" and "neighborhood character" are legitimate values for planning; they don't represent discrimination.

Gary Hamilton: How affordable housing is designed and how it fits into the neighborhood are crucial. Novato has 33% of the county's affordable housing but only 20% of the population.

Pam Drew: Planners' jargon is a barrier; we find terms like "underutilized" offensive. We wanted Novato city staff to post billboards on sites that they recommended as affordable housing sites, but they said that would be too costly. When city staff fail to communicate effectively, the result is more acrimonious hearings.

Ideas for Future Outreach

Judy Arnold: How should we do outreach for the extended Analysis of Impediments process?

Jan Hamilton: Put flyers in grocery stores, day care centers, churches, community centers, and other places where people go.

Inform Canal Alliance and ask them to publicize these meetings.

Nancy Kenyon: Conduct a meeting in Spanish.

Greg Brockbank: Have interpreters present.

Paul Cohen: Today was a day of immigrant demonstrations in Sacramento, not a good time for getting turnout at this meeting in the Canal neighborhood.

Nancy Kenyon: Fair Housing of Marin sent notices of this meeting in Spanish to 400 agencies and individuals.

Jan Hamilton: Include Google translation bar on the County website.

Greg Brockbank: There was a well-publicized case where the former County Director of Health and Human Services left Marin because her bi-racial children felt unwelcome in Marin.

Ken Wachtel: The reputation of Marin has an impact.

Nancy Kenyon: People of color feel more uncomfortable if they aren't alone standing out in a neighborhood.

Paul Cohen: Nobody wants to keep serious criminals in public housing, but we want to protect the mother and grandmother of a young person who commits a crime. The Housing Authority's one-strike policy, as written, would require the entire household to be evicted. The Housing Authority has been reasonable in how they implement their one-strike policy, but their lease language doesn't specify that they will exercise discretion in the application of the policy.

Pam Drew: Living in Marin is more dull than more diverse counties.

The "Dots" Exercise

We did the "dots" exercise, after which the meeting was adjourned. (See the results on the next page.)

NOTES FROM FLIP CHARTS: SUMMARY OF THE BARRIERS TO FAIR HOUSING CHOICE

High median income	5 dots
Lack of communication (City to citizens)	3 dots
Anti-immigrant sentiments	3 dots
Lack of diversity makes this an uninviting community for minorities	3 dots
Criteria for Housing Element sites for Affordable Housing (small sites not included)	2 dots
Concentration of Affordable Housing sites in small area in proposed Novato housing element	2 dots
Minorities feel unwelcome	2 dots
Diversity already lacking	1 dot
Chambers of Commerce which are opposed to developing housing in commercial districts	1 dot
Underutilization of valuable land (such as surface parking)	1 dot
People's attitudes	1 dot
One-Strike Policy (Marin Housing Authority lease doesn't have provisions to file a grievance to appeal an eviction)	1 dot
Income inequality has increased	
Racial profiling ("driving while black/brown")	
Unsustainable development patterns	
Planners' jargon (calling single-family houses "underutilized")	
Children of color stand out in the schools	

NOTES FROM FLIP CHARTS: SOLUTIONS TO BARRIERS TO FAIR HOUSING CHOICE

Design affordable housing to be attractive and fit in with surrounding neighborhoods	6 dots
Actively address lack of diversity	3 dots
More outreach	2 dots
Ecumenical (nonprofit) developers who can do small projects	2 dots
Better noticing of meetings in multiple languages	1 dot

NOTES FROM FLIP CHARTS: HOW TO DO MORE AND BETTER OUTREACH FOR MEETINGS LIKE THIS ONE

Put flyers in grocery stores, churches, parks, and community centers	3 dots
Post meeting information in multiple languages on website (use Google translation tool)	2 dots
Posters	1 dot
Canal Alliance	1 dot
Ask the question: What are impediments to moving out of impacted communities?	1 dot
Hold meeting in Spanish or provide interpretation	1 dot
Begin outreach early; check to see if there are other events for minority communities on your proposed meeting dates	1 dot