

PCL Insider for August 9, 2016

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In May, under the headline “Streamlining Affordable Housing Approvals,” Governor Brown issued a controversial “by-right” development proposal, which would eliminate discretionary approvals for certain types of housing developments. The governor’s proposal has been met with a firestorm of opposition and limited support from certain interests.

While PCL appreciates the governor’s attention on this public policy matter, his proposal exacts far too high a cost for extremely limited, even questionable, benefits. Among PCL’s concerns:

1. The lion’s share of benefits would flow to developers of market-rate apartments and condominiums — and not affordable housing.
2. It would facilitate sprawl by allowing by-right development outside of urbanized areas.
3. It would eliminate not only discretionary approvals but also key environmental protections.
4. It could undermine existing local inclusionary zoning ordinances.
5. It incentivizes the lowest number of below-market-rate apartments/condos near transit, where the need for below-market-rate housing is actually most pressing.

In response to the governor’s proposal, PCL is pushing a different approach to forcefully address the need for more affordable housing while protecting the environment and preserving community planning prerogatives. PCL’s proposal would grant by-right benefits exclusively to developments that are:

1. 100% affordable to households earning below 60% area median income (AMI) for rental units and 80% AMI for ownership units, and
2. Proposed on sites identified by local governments for multifamily development, at the relevant density, in the locality’s latest housing element.

A number of benefits would flow from PCL’s proposal, without imposing costs on the environment or communities. Because of where they’re built and who lives in them, 100% affordable developments produce far

lower GHG emissions and consume less land per capita than market-rate developments. 100% affordable developments also support strong transit ridership.

Linking by-right benefits to the housing element also protects public participation in the planning process because, unlike General Plans, housing elements are updated regularly with mandated public participation. And each housing element update undergoes CEQA review, making them more reflective than General Plans of current environmental conditions and concerns.

PCL's 100% affordable proposal also addresses environmental justice concerns by making it easier for developers to access sites near good schools, jobs and other opportunity-enhancing community institutions. And 100% affordable developments are a partial solution to displacement and exclusionary zoning concerns.

PCL's "100% affordable" by-right approach will increase the supply of the housing most needed in our state while preventing damage to the environment and communities. We are working to build momentum behind this proposal among advocates and within the legislature in the hope that we can provide a forceful counter-balance to Governor Brown's proposal and ultimately convince him to embrace our affordable housing approach.

Note: We are waiting for an updated version of the proposal from the Governor's office by the end of this week. Hopefully some of these concerns will be addressed in the new version.



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