



*Educate. Advocate. Connect.*

June 15, 2021

Board of Directors

Zachary Courser, President  
Ilsa Lund, Secretary  
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Gene Boutilier  
Lynne Marsenich  
Nancy Treser-Osgood

Mayor Jennifer Stark  
City of Claremont  
225 Second Street  
Claremont, CA 91711

Dear Mayor Stark:

Housing Claremont has been a consistent advocate for alleviating housing shortages for low and very low-income residents in our community. The Village South development presents a rare opportunity for the city to make significant progress in doing just this. The scale of the project allows for the inclusion of a significant number of affordable housing units, which will help meet the city's state-mandated obligations for developing low-income housing. Therefore, our board is disappointed to see that affordable housing was not made a priority in this development. While other community development values, such as historic preservation, have been well-cared for in the final environmental impact study (FEIR), we find no specific or explicit reference to affordable housing being a project objective. In their response to public questions on the FEIR, the city staff responded that this development will contribute generally to meeting its 2020 Regional Housing Needs Assessment, and that the city's current inclusive housing ordinance meets affordable housing needs. **We disagree. The current market is very unlikely to meet the housing needs of low-income families, and the city should be making an effort beyond current policy to meet this critical need.** Affordable housing should be an objective of this project, and we ask the City Council to explore ways in which the city can commit to making housing a priority in Village South.

We are particularly focused on the Village South development because it has most of the elements that make it ideal for the inclusion of affordable housing. As a transit-oriented development, it has ample transportation connections to serve the needs of low-income families. Its proximity to shopping, education, and employment opportunities likewise makes it very suitable for affordable housing. Its scale and density also allow for many more affordable units than low-density housing developments could.

We have been a consistent advocate for affordable housing in the Village South development. In our February 2020 letter to then-Mayor Larry Schroeder, we asked that in the “Village South Environmental Impact Report, the city should keep foremost in their deliberations how this particular site can be a key to meeting our obligations for building low and very low-income housing.” In May 2020, we built a coalition with Sustainable Claremont and Inclusive Claremont to advocate for Village South Specific Plan to contain sufficient scale and density to allow for a more sustainable development. Our particular concern in doing so, of course, was making inclusion of affordable housing a project objective. We were gratified to see the outpouring of community support for our petition, and the City Council voting unanimously in favor of sufficient density.

We are disappointed that the Village South FEIR doesn’t rise above current policy in making affordable housing a project objective, and expressed this to the Planning Commission. Some members agreed with us: at the May 18<sup>th</sup> meeting, Commissioner Johnson-Hall said **“I am disappointed in the (lack of) affordable housing. Given the magnitude of this site, this is something we should re-visit... Given the elements that are here, this would be a very attractive site for affordable housing, and I’m disappointed that further consideration wasn’t given.”** Commission Frieson commented that in Village South **“we have an opportunity here that we should seize to use this as a beachhead to address our housing needs of this city.”** Despite these concerns, no modification or addition was made to the FEIR to include affordable housing.

You said at the May 11 council meeting, when the council voted down The Commons housing development, “What we have heard is our community come out loud and clear in support of affordability and in support of housing.” **Now we are asking the same question about affordable housing in Village South: if not now, when?** Few projects like Village South—which has nearly all the elements necessary to support affordable housing—are possible in the city. **Simply doing the minimum, or relying on the future promise of a new inclusive housing ordinance, isn’t sufficient.** We recognize that the Council must move quickly toward a decision due to planning grants related to the development, and we are not in favor of a protracted discussion that delays progress. But there is still time to make affordable housing a priority in Village South, and we feel that failing to do so would be an admission that Claremont isn’t taking the housing crisis seriously. **We expect the Council to demonstrate leadership on this issue, to live up to its values of sustainability and inclusion, and to meet the demands of the housing crisis by making affordable housing a priority in the Village South.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zachary Courser". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Zachary Courser  
President, Housing Claremont