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April 4, 2022

Dear Editor:

On Thursday night, Jamboree Housing Corporation hosted a community meeting to share plans for the new permanent supportive housing program, Larkin Place, that will be built on the vacant lot adjacent to Larkin Park. I listened quietly trying to identify how the Housing and Homelessness Collaborative of Claremont (Housing Claremont) can do its best work to support the project, serve as an honest broker of information, engage in good faith conversations about community concerns, and help move the discourse away from “how do we stop this” and toward “how do we make Larkin Place work for the entire community.”

That night, I heard the frustration many community members feel about decisions that were made without their input. I heard many questions asked in the spirit of learning, and I heard the disappointment and hurt from some who have been made to feel like heartless NIMBYs for expressing their concerns. I heard traumatic stories of lives impacted by homelessness, doubt about the efficacy of the permanent supportive housing model, conjecture about the behaviors of people who will eventually live at Larkin Place, and fear for the safety of our schoolchildren and seniors. It struck me that what I heard most—and from nearly every person who spoke—is that helping people who are unhoused is a good thing. That seems like a good place to start.

If we can agree that having concerns about the project doesn’t mean that you oppose helping the unhoused, we might also agree that supporting Larkin Place doesn’t mean that you don’t care about the safety of our community. Maybe we can agree that Jamboree isn’t trying to pull one over on Claremont and stands behind its commitment to being a good neighbor. Perhaps we can believe in their tenant vetting process, staff to tenant ratio, and trained, professional staff. With careful planning and engaged stakeholders, we can serve the unhoused and maintain safety. We can engage in a community process to create accountability and safety plans that ease our misgivings. We might even take ownership and pride in the success of Larkin Place.

There are some who will never be convinced that a project like this will work, and I expect they will oppose the proposed parking easement (resulting in a less community-oriented design) and \$1.5 million city investment (resulting in less accountability by the City for the project’s success). Both might delay the project, but neither will derail it because the project is protected under by-right housing law—law that was enacted to prevent neighborhood opposition to new housing that has contributed for decades to California’s housing and homelessness crisis.

Someone on Thursday night worried that the project's supporters simply "hope" that it will all work out. In fact, there is ample evidence supporting the efficacy of permanent supportive housing and Jamboree's success delivering it. But more than that, isn't hope a good thing? Housing Claremont hopes that the community will come together to show that successful permanent supportive housing is possible in Claremont, and we look forward to creating opportunities to do so.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ilsa Lund".

Ilsa Lund
Housing Claremont, Board President