

Group Stumps For Affordable Housing Measures

By Jonathan Van Dyke

Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, May 13, 2013 12:15 am

There are personal stories linked to Long Beach's housing woes — reasons, according to Housing Long Beach advocates, that the city needs to look at new provisions to ensure the city builds enough affordable housing in the future.

New City School Founder Stephanie Lee said she has had a student talk and act suicidal — but when the child's family finally found more permanent, affordable housing, it was the only outlier in why his behavior and grades changed for the better.

Cambodian immigrant Tongratha Veng said he works multiple jobs just to be able to share a living room with others. He said he desperately wants some nook for just himself, but that he cannot afford to on what he makes, about \$1,200 a month, especially after spending all his savings on the naturalization process. Is now the time the city should include affordable housing strategies in its development plans? Housing Long Beach officials and fellow advocates said they thought so, on Wednesday afternoon.

The group introduced the White Paper, a document that takes a look at the historical context of Long Beach's housing development, while also introducing four priorities for future development in relation to affordable housing.

“We think it is a critical tool in solving our city's housing crisis,” said Susanne Browne, senior attorney for Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles.

Officials pointed to an influx of new residents in the 1990s that was not supported by the necessary increase in housing inventory.

“This is really when we see the modern housing crisis beginning,” Executive Director Kerry Gallagher said. “Where you live matters. It has a tangible effect on your health and life.”

Housing Long Beach officials presented data correlating where people live and how they live to a number of things — like school truancy rates and life expectancy (the nicer the area, the longer the life). Advocates said that the majority of job growth in the area would not pay enough for average housing — affordable housing is considered to be 30% of a person's income.

The city will be updating its Housing Element this year, which serves as a type of road map for the next eight years as far as what will be built. Housing Long Beach offered the following four suggestions in order to address affordable housing needs of the city:

- Include a mixed income housing clause that would require a certain percentage of each incoming housing development to be affordable housing (generally 10-15%).
- Come up with permanent, local sources of funding for affordable housing. Examples include using a developer linkage fee, which would tack a one-time fee onto developments of hotels, retailers, restaurants and offices.

- Start a Rent Escrow Account Program at no cost to the city that would help tenants residing in developments that require improvements.
- Collaborate with community stakeholders when it comes to identifying appropriate and healthy sites for future housing developments.

“This is our hope to do something differently,” Gallagher said.

The city will release the Draft Housing Element on June 7 for public review and comment.

Brown said the time to strike is now, because the city is beginning to see the effects of the loss of the Redevelopment Agency and the money that was going into it — at least 20% of which was put aside for affordable housing. The city actually receives interest on that money that was taken away starting this year — which was put into the general fund.

“You have to get there, you don’t just stop,” Brown said in regards to why the group keeps fighting.

For more information on Housing Long Beach, visit www.housinglb.org.