

Long Beach housing advocates will use vote delay to mobilize support

By Gregory Yee, Special to the Press-Telegram

Posted: 08/05/2013 06:09:32 PM PDT

Updated: 08/05/2013 06:20:35 PM PDT

A decision on a landmark affordable housing policy meeting has been pushed back three weeks.

The Long Beach Planning Commission vote on the Housing Element, a state-required document that will shape future housing plans in the city, has been delayed from Aug. 15 to Sept. 5. The City Council is scheduled to vote on the document on Oct. 1.

Community organizers say the delay complicates months of planning, but gives them more time to mobilize the community.

"Our role is to ensure we have adequate community participation throughout this process," said America Aceves, a community organizer with Housing Long Beach, a community organization that advocates for safe, affordable housing.

But finding people to share their stories has been difficult at times and city officials can be unwilling to face housing issues affecting their constituents, she said.

"Sometimes they don't want to think their districts have problems," said Daleth Caspeta, a community leader with Housing Long Beach. "Residents think they can't speak out because they'll be kicked out of their apartments. It takes a long time to gather people."

Organizers and activists agree, however, that the need for safe, affordable housing is essential.

"Safe, affordable housing is absolutely vital for the

Advertisement

success of our clients," said Porter Gilberg, administrative director of the The Center of Long Beach and member of the Housing Long Beach steering committee. "Without housing they can't receive mail, get a job or access basic community resources. I am incredibly hopeful that everybody representing Long Beach will be open to the policy platform points."

The Housing Element is a planning document required for all cities and counties by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. Those documents are updated every eight years and Long Beach is in the update process for the 2013-2021 cycle.

The city must produce 4,009 affordable housing units by 2021, but lacks local revenue sources to fund them, according to Susanne Browne, a senior attorney with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles.

Housing Long Beach is advocating for a mixed-income housing policy, a rent trust account program and establishment of permanent, dedicated funding sources for affordable housing

development, according to the organization.

The city's draft Housing Element does not include these policies, nor does it include a dependable method of implementing or enforcing them, Browne said.

"That's really unfortunate," she said. "At meetings there was consistent, extensive public comments on the need of the city to adopt it; there's some very vague language over funding sources and a pledge to consider researching. To consider researching is to do nothing."

The Housing Element law requires that the city commits to real, enforceable plans that will result in measurable, beneficial effects during the document's period, 2013-2021, Browne said.

"In our review of the housing element, we conclude that this level of specificity does not exist," she said. "It's time for the city of Long Beach to adopt real, enforceable, concrete housing solutions."

Generating support at the city level will be crucial in passing the Housing Element policy points, said Jeannine Pearce, senior organizer with the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy and a lead organizer with the Long Beach Coalition for Good Jobs.

"While there's a lot of community support, it isn't necessarily reflected on the council level," she said. "It's a matter of political will."

But for many residents, the issue is personal, not political.

"We just want to be sure that any new housing is built in good, safe areas," said Esther DeValle, a concerned resident. "We want this to be a real, effective document that will give housing for those in our community in need."