

CITY OF VENTURA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA

Supplemental Information Packet

**Public Communications Received by 8:30 a.m.
March 28, 2023**

Meeting of March 27, 2023

Supplemental Information:

Any agenda related public documents received and distributed to a majority of the City Council after the Agenda Packet is printed are included in Supplemental Packets. Supplemental Packets are produced as needed. The Supplemental Packet is available in the City Clerk's Office, 501 Poli Street, Room 204, Ventura, during normal business hours as well as on the City's Website – www.cityofventura.ca.gov <https://www.cityofventura.ca.gov/1236/City-Council-Public-Hearing-NoticesSuppl>

**13. Authorization for a Local
Coastal Program Amendment for
2325 Vista Del Mar (APN: 080-0-
020-275)**

**Note: Originally Item No. 4.,
adjusted to Item No. 13 on Revised
Agenda issued March 24, 2023.**

From: noreply@cityofventura.ca.gov
Sent: Monday, March 27, 2023 10:14 PM
To: City Clerk
Subject: -EXT- Online Form Submittal: Public Comment Form


Public Comment Form

Disclosure:

Providing your name/contact information is optional to participate in a Public Meeting. However by providing, it will allow staff to follow-up with you on your item. All emails submitted to any Legislative Body are Public Records. Copies of forms submitted are posted online, with name and contact information redacted. You may only submit one comment form per agenda item. You may submit more than one form per agenda to address additional topics.

Submission Deadlines:

Submit your Comment Form at least 2 hours prior to the scheduled/posted start time of the meeting, as stated on the posted Agenda. If submitting a comment during a meeting, please submit before the Agenda Item concludes, during a Live Meeting, to be considered part of the record. Select the Legislative/Hearing Body below to ensure your comment is emailed to the correct body.

Select Legislative/Hearing Body	City Council
Meeting Date	3/28/2023
Select a Topic:	Public Comments
Name	Tara
Address	Field not completed.
Phone Number	Field not completed.
Email Address	
Recommendation	Against Recommendation
Written Comments	This area should be a beautiful, scenic gateway to the City of Ventura, and thought out as a whole, not piece by piece. Let's work together to create the Ventura we deserve and desire!
Upload Files	Field not completed.

Email not displaying correctly? [View it in your browser.](#)

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From: noreply@cityofventura.ca.gov
Sent: Monday, March 27, 2023 5:02 PM
To: City Clerk
Subject: -EXT- Online Form Submittal: Public Comment Form

Public Comment Form

Disclosure:

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Select Legislative/Hearing Body City Council

Meeting Date 3/27/2023

Select a Topic: Agenda Item Number/Topic

Agenda Item Number/Topic "Consent Item 4. Authorization for a Local Coastal Program Amendment for 2325 Vista Del Mar (APN: 080-0-020-275)

Name Susan Vinson

Address

Phone Number

Email Address

Recommendation Against Recommendation

Written Comments

RECOMMENDATION

a. Adopt a Resolution authorizing and directing staff to initiate a Local Coastal Program Amendment for 2325 Vista Del Mar (APN: 080-0-020- 275. "

I oppose the recommendation to approve. I support the alternative.

- Project Denial. Since the project is currently inconsistent with the legal regulating documents for the site -- the 1989 Comprehensive Plan, Local Coastal Program, and Zoning Ordinance -- the project can be recommended for denial.

Upload Files

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Gail Davis

From: michele mc [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 27, 2023 5:13 PM
To: Council
Subject: -EXT- Item 13 -Stop KB homes from building too high and too dense at Seaward

Please don't let KB homes build 394 homes on their parcel near Seaward. This neighborhood has already endured too much overbuilding of high density united.

Please put in a footbridge over the train tracks and freeway. Seaward has too much traffic, it moves too fast 50 MPH, there is no enforcement. It needs more lit up signs at the top of the hill so traffic is slower going down the hill 35 speed limit or slower). A teen ager was killed on Seaward on the side of the street a couple of years ago by speeding traffic.

Stop KB Homes.

Thank you
Michele McKinley
[REDACTED]

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Gail Davis

From: Lorna Christian [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 27, 2023 6:35 PM
To: Council
Subject: -EXT- Rezoning coastal amendment

To the city council of Ventura,

I am aware of your upcoming discussion related to rezoning the coast. I do NOT support the rezoning coastal amendment. We need a thoughtful comprehensive approach to our city, not piece mealing it together. More energy must be put towards what we already have- roads, beaches, parks, traffic, etc.

Thank you,

Lorna Christian

Pierpont homeowner

Sent from my iPhone

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the City of Ventura. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

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Mayor, council persons, staff, public.

My name is Joe Richardson, some know of me, I don't believe many on the dais now do though. So, I was the city of Ventura water production supervisor from 1985 till 1992 in charge of all the city water tanks, reservoirs, pump stations, wells, Ventura river production facilities, Saticoy country club water system and the maintenance of the city water treatment plants.

I was hired by then superintendant Mr. Dettlof to complete the programming, construction, and installation of the city water departments SCADA, supervisory control and data acquisition system, the first fully automated monitoring and control on the city water system.

During my tenure the complete construction of the now Public works yard on Sanjon took place at what had been the water dept. property for management, control, and storage of water system equipment, along with the garage and sheds for the parks dept.

That rehab led to the removal of the water division 'barn' that had for decades been the main storage for ALL data and records related to the water system infrastructure including all the legal documents related to its permitting and licensing by the sdoh and the recording, charts, and manual controls of pumps on the system.

When we cleaned out the attic of that barn and disposed of decades of charts and files we found a wooden flat file cabinet that contained, to say the least, some very historic documents.

Such as the original Spanish land grant deeds and water rights of the original 12 ranchos that made up the water shed of the Ventura River and the then the church led community of Sanbuenaventura.

There were also the documents laying out how the city allowed the county to have the land at Foster Park for a park to be used only as a free use space for the public for 1 dollar and that the land would revert to the City if or when those restrictions were not met. That clause was used by the city in 1987 to disallow the county to develop a horse boarding and care facility that the county wanted to do when trying to take advantage of the access to the Ojai valley trail that followed the old Ojai railroad right away.

Also in the flat file were all the records, plans, drawings, and the lead engineer's construction notes relative to the attempt to install a subsurface dam at what we call Foster Park today. The plans were developed in 1898, construction started in 1901, and was stopped and the attempt abandoned in 1903.

The reason was that starting from the north side of the river with about only 12 feet down to bedrock the digging and concrete work had progressed approx 1100 feet southward where they were now at about 36 feet down to bedrock but the amount of water flowing at that depth made it impossible for them to continue.

Wells were drilled in the remaining gap from where they had stopped on the wall over to very near the Ojai railroad right away where the bedrock had risen above grade. The gap from the end of the wall to the Ojai right away is approx 300 feet and bedrock is approx 150 feet down.

That's right, there is NO dam at Foster Park, there has NEVER BEEN one, and for many years it was clear that ~~only when there were sufficient storm flow in the river would there be surface flow at Foster Park because it~~ just goes subsurface for about a 1000 yds where it reappears flowing back into the channel from the southern

riverside just below where the homes were relocated to when the freeway was built and becomes the river flow that we see going by the Ventura wastewater plant YEARROUND.

In 1969 the flood on the river completely filled the subsurface facility with rock and sand. The then supervisor of water Stan Narwold had his crews close the wall mounted slide gates on the clay broken bell infiltration pipes that had been installed originally for 300 feet each at 45 degree angles upriver.

Those infiltration pipes were blocked off and the whole subsurface facility was unused and out of service from 1969 till 1986 when my crew seeking to get more water from the river during that drought stretch cleaned the sand and rocks out, found the slide gates inoperable and so used our crane to rip the valves off the walls.

NOTE .. At the time we did this there had not been ANY surface flow in the river for over a year.

The building started to fill with black stinky water immediately and was full to the overflow transition trench within an hour or so. We pumped the water out and within the remaining afternoon we soon had more than 1.6 million gallons of clear water running down the old pipeline to the plant.

That source of water would continue to flow, though eventually it dropped to less than ½ mgd just prior to the March miracle.

Why is all this history important?

Actions taken by city managers have led to a situation that for over 30 years now has led to city staff, commissions, and council establishing water availability on INCORRECT DATA, something myself and others with direct knowledge of what had and was happening at Foster Park tried many many times to bring out to those people making decisions and to the public at large.

The water production data numbers used for the Ventura River facility since 1996 are based on incorrect understanding of where the water came from and how it was allowed into the system.

First... the where is that after 1986 when the subsurface was restored from the 1969 flood was not identified specifically as a source as it had no metering.

Second. The refurbishing of the intake structure with a pump added provided surface water AND subsurface water to the treatment plant with no distinction between them

Third... the pipeline from foster park to the ave treatment plant was losing more than 25% of the water flowing in it due to it significant failure from old age (over 90years at that time)

We slip lined the old pipe (over 7000feet of 30" inside the original 36" concrete Pipe), and finally had the ability to take advantage of the water from the river without major loss.

AND THE BIGGEST miss spoke and faulty production numbers came about NOT because there were faulty facilities at the river or because there was somewhat more water in the river ... the increased production and the ability for the city to NOT buy water from Casitas for nearly two years was we automated the Ave treatment plant. Since its conversion to a water treatment plant instead of a softening plant in the 40's the plant was rated at 7mgd ... that rating was based NOT on how much water it could treat ... it was based on

ONLY RUNNING THE PLANT for 8hour days 5 days a week ... eventually as the city grew that was moved to 10hour days 6 days a week.

The leaking pipes, the limited treatment hours is what set the production values from Foster Park.

After the pipelines were fixed, and some of the wells repaired from the 80's flood flows... MY CREW automated the plant, Steve Wilson then treatment supervisor got it relicensed at 13.7MGD based on how much water we were now able to get down to the plant .. And measured correctly with the new meters and the SCADA system equipment I had gotten up and running.

THE PRODUCTION NUMBERS used by commissions and by city public works personnel have NEVER related directly into HOW MUCH WATER was in the river, only what we were able to take and treat.

In recent years the City allowed themselves to sign on to legal settlements about the river that again were all based on FALSE DATA.

In the last two years the City has spent literally millions of dollars doing things at Foster Park that make no sense. There is this constant referral to a DAM ... there is NO dam at Foster park on the Ventura River, never has been. You have had the wool pulled over your eyes... you spent up to ten thousands of dollars cutting a notch in the top of the concrete wall so fish could go by, but the water is going around the end of the wall and will continue to do so except when storm flows exist UNTIL the dam is actually completed.

The original river water rights the city acquired in 1965 amount to 59,000acft of water. For sure there is not that amount of water available anymore on the river with upriver usage. But to say that 1200-1600 acft would be a good year is just plain malarkey.

And now why the public should be interested in this? all the efforts to utilize average numbers based on treated water used instead of AVAILABLE water has led to rationing and pricing gouging to pay the unbelievable price to take toilet water, treat it to potable water standards, and pump it back into the ground to mix with the worst groundwater basin there is in the county.

Just ridiculous

AND EVERYTHING I HAVE RELATED HERE IS PROVABLY TRUE AND FACTUAL

DAIS HANDOUTS

Huntington Beach's 3-3 vote stalls state-mandated housing plan

The council did vote to resume accepting applications for SB 9 and ADU projects, a move that may make the state's new lawsuit moot.



Huntington Beach Mayor Tony Strickland speaks during a press conference announcing a federal lawsuit regarding the state of California's housing mandates in Huntington Beach, California on Thursday, March 9, 2023. (Photo by Jeff Gritchen, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By **JEFF COLLINS** | JeffCollins@scng.com | Orange County Register

PUBLISHED: March 21, 2023 at 10:27 p.m. | UPDATED: March 22, 2023 at 1:19 p.m.

Referring to state housing laws as the "governor's mandate," Huntington Beach Mayor Tony Strickland and two other city council members blocked approval of the city's massive housing plan for the rest of the 2020s.

But rather than kill the city's 1,164-page "housing element" outright, the sharply divided city council united behind a motion to postpone the matter for further consideration at its next city council meeting on April 4.

Strickland and one other council member cited environmental concerns for blocking the homebuilding plan.

"I don't believe (Gov. Gavin Newsom's) housing crisis, his housing mandate, is more important than the health and safety of our citizens," Strickland said during the council's meeting Tuesday, March 21. "That's why I'm opposing this housing element."

Strickland was joined in voting down the housing plan by Mayor Pro Tem Gracey Van Der Mark and Councilmember Pat Burns.

Councilmember Casey McKeon, who frequently votes with the majority, recused himself because of a potential conflict of interest. That resulted in a 3-3 vote, one vote shy of the majority needed for plan adoption.

"I cannot in good conscience support (this) item," Van Der Mark said before the vote, complaining about the effects of housing construction on clean air, water supplies, traffic and the city's wetlands. "I don't believe the benefits of building outweigh the consequences of destroying our city."

The decision raised the specter of past housing fights that erupted over the city's refusal from 2015-20 to comply with state demands it revise its last housing element. That resulted in a 2019 lawsuit against the city. The two sides returned to court earlier this month, trading state and federal lawsuits over housing on March 8 and 9. At stake is a state-required blueprint for how the beachside city of 199,000 will increase housing by 2030.

Although some council members tied the state's homebuilding mandate to Newsom, it's actually rooted in a 53-year-old statute lawmakers began strengthening under Newsom's predecessor.

The law requires all California cities and counties to develop periodic housing plans that include affordable housing. More recent legislation stiffened penalties for failing to adopt a substantially compliant housing element, including the authority for the state to sue recalcitrant cities and levy fines up to \$600,000 a month for failing to have an approved housing element.

Huntington Beach, already 17 months late in adopting a state-approved plan, had been ordered to make room for 13,368 new homes this decade — enough homes for 29,475 residents, Van Der Mark noted.

But members of the Huntington Beach council refused to approve a required statement that the need for housing overrides potential environmental impacts like air and water pollution, noise and overtaxed public facilities like parks.

"(The state housing department) is requiring us to sign a statement ... that we believe that the benefits of these affordable housing projects override the negative impacts that they can cause to the environment," Strickland said. "The state is forcing our speech and violating our First Amendment rights."

Huntington Beach's conflict with the state boiled over again in the past two months when the city stopped accepting applications for duplexes in single-family neighborhoods under Senate Bill 9 and stopped accepting applications for backyard "accessory dwelling units," or ADUs, under state laws easing restrictions.

The state sued the city on March 8. The city retaliated by filing a federal lawsuit against the state the next day.

On Tuesday, a federal court judge rejected the city's request for a temporary restraining order barring the state from enforcing fines and penalties for failing to comply with housing laws. The judge ruled there was no risk of irreparable harm to the city since such penalties aren't imminent.

In addition, the council voted 4-2 Tuesday to resume accepting applications for SB 9 and ADU projects, a move that may make the state's new lawsuit moot.

During the public comments portion of Tuesday's city council meeting, nine residents spoke in favor of adopting the housing element while three either opposed the plan or criticized Newsom.

City staff and Councilmember Dan Kalmick argued the environmental statement is just a technicality.

The city has been working on the housing element since the summer of 2021. Without approval of the environmental statement, said City Manager Al Zelinka, "then the rest of it is for not."

"I'm disappointed ... that after going through all of this work that we're getting hung up on a technicality," Zelinka said.

Kalmick said it's ironic that plan opponents cited environmental concerns when they recently rejected a city purchasing plan to use 100% renewable products.

Burns renewed his calls "to fight state overreach," complaining about threatening letters state officials have been sending to the city.

"It's just bullying," Burns said. "What Sacramento is trying to do to us is just negate our influence and take over."

City staff and plan supporters warned the council could be putting the city in legal jeopardy without a housing element, including the risk of lawsuits, lost state funding, fines, the loss of control over permits and ultimately the appointment of a receiver to choose what housing plan the city will adopt, city staff said.

"If you don't like a loss of local control," responded Councilmember Natalie Moser, "then you're really not going to like the potential ramifications of not adopting a housing element."

CALIFORNIA

SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 2023 # LATIMES.COM/CALIFORNIA

What are California lawmakers doing to fix the housing crisis? A look at 2023's new bills

California lawmakers have introduced a flurry of bills to make it easier to increase housing production and strengthen tenant protections.

(Myung J. Chun / Los Angeles Times)

BY HANNAH WILEY STAFF WRITER

MARCH 26, 2023 5 AM PT

Feeling political pressure to solve California's severe housing shortage and ballooning homelessness, state lawmakers are pushing new bills to increase production of affordable homes and strengthen tenant protections against evictions and surging rents.

Some of the proposals include letting religious organizations quickly build affordable homes on their excess land and lowering the cap on how much landlords can raise rents each year. Others would ask voters to add housing as a human right to the state Constitution and ease barriers homeowners face when building duplexes in their single-family neighborhoods.

Those efforts would add to laws passed in recent years to streamline student housing on college campuses, funnel hundreds of millions of dollars into affordable housing and clear red tape for more accessory dwelling units, known as casitas or granny flats.

And yet the majority of voters remain disillusioned with housing costs in California. Seventy-four percent of voters view housing affordability as a major issue, according to a February survey by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California, and nearly 90% are worried that younger generations won't be able to afford a home in the state.

State Sen. Scott Wiener, a San Francisco Democrat who leads the Housing Committee, said progress has been made over the last several years to address the state's multimillion-unit shortage. But greater change will take time.

"I think we are actually starting to turn the corner," he said. "This is a long-term process."

Here are notable housing bills to watch this year.

Rewriting zoning rules to protect the environment

Housing advocates and environmentalists have teamed up on a new bill to overhaul California's zoning rules to prevent so-called urban sprawl into rural regions where wildfires and floods are more common.

Assembly Bill 68, which is supported by California YIMBY and The Nature Conservancy, aims to make it easier to construct multifamily housing in developed communities that are hubs for transit and jobs.

Local governments would be able to approve projects outside of existing communities if they can show there's no more available space or that they have to expand outward in order to meet their state-required housing goals. The overall ambition is to encourage housing where climate risks are minimal and infrastructure already exists.

Melissa Breach, chief operating officer for California YIMBY, said the housing and climate crises are “inextricably linked” and that AB 68 offers a solution to both.

“We want to encourage housing in existing communities where people really want to live,” Breach said. “And we want to protect people from the incredibly high risk of fire and flood, and all the other climate risks associated with that.”

But developers argue the proposal doesn’t acknowledge how impossible and costly it would be to limit new construction to urban centers.

Dan Dunmoyer, president and CEO of the California Building Industry Assn., called AB 68 “the farthest-away solution to the housing crisis that can possibly be suggested.”

Urban areas flood, too, Dunmoyer said, and many of California’s cities, such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, are at high risk of earthquakes. And when you reduce the amount of land that’s available for housing, the remaining parcels will increase in price. That could mean new homes would be affordable only to wealthy people.

“This is the ultimate housing killer,” Dunmoyer said.

The California Chamber of Commerce agrees. It has recently added AB 68 to its annual “job killer” list, a designation that indicates the group will lobby hard to kill the bill.

Another fight over labor standards

Wiener introduced two bills this year that he hopes will build on a rare deal Democrats struck with labor unions in August with legislation to convert underused commercial space into new units.

Senate Bill 4 would allow nonprofit colleges and faith organizations such as churches, mosques and synagogues to quickly build affordable homes on their land, while Senate Bill 423 would make permanent a 2017 law that lets developers streamline their projects in cities that have failed to meet state-mandated housing goals.

Both bills include a guarantee of union-level pay, known as prevailing wages, and some healthcare benefits for construction workers. Those labor standards were included in last year’s agreement and are supported by the California Conference of Carpenters .

The carpenters have split from other labor groups in backing the bills, including the influential State Building and Construction Trades Council, which has long advocated for the more rigorous requirement of a “skilled and trained workforce.” That standard guarantees that a portion of workers have gone through an apprenticeship program and most are unionized.

The elevated requirement protects workers against exploitation and wage theft and opens up opportunities for women and other marginalized groups to join the industry, said Sabrina Hernandez, who represents an electricians union that’s part of the Trades Council.

“Skilled and trained provides safety and security for those individuals who may be vulnerable,” Hernandez said in an interview after testifying against SB 423 at a recent hearing.

Wiener said he’s hopeful the two sides can find a solution that works for everyone. He’s supported by Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (D-Oakland), who helped broker last year’s deal and is chair of the Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee.

Wicks said it’s time to find new ways to build housing and abandon the “status quo.”

“We’re done with that,” she said during a recent housing conference. “We’re trying to find the coalition of the willing who is going to say it’s time to get on this train and build the housing that we need.”

Increasing tenant protections

Current law allows landlords to raise rents by 5% plus inflation each year, or a maximum of 10%, and to pursue certain evictions outside of standard violations of a lease. That includes when landlords or their family members want to move into the home or if they have plans to renovate the property or take it off the rental market.

Sen. María Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles) introduced Senate Bill 567 to further crack down on what she said are outrageous rent increases and unfair evictions that have worsened homelessness.

“The rent increases are out of control,” Durazo said.

Durazo’s bill would cap the increase to inflation, not to exceed 5% annually, and expand protections to renters in single-family homes, condos and mobile homes, according to a summary sheet provided by Durazo’s office.

It would also establish accountability measures to ensure landlords or family members move into the homes and stay there for a period of time, and prohibit permanent evictions after renovations. Instead, tenants would be allowed to move back in after the rehabilitation is finished.

The effort has reignited opposition from organizations representing landlords that fought against the 2019 law that established the current rent cap and eviction standards.

“We came to the table and we struck a balance. That was historic,” said Debra Carlton, executive vice president of state public affairs for the California Apartment Assn.

Carlton said more time is needed to evaluate whether the law is working before it’s expanded, especially because the COVID-19 pandemic provided renters with strong eviction protections through local states of emergency.

The association is also opposed to Assembly Bill 12, which would limit security deposits to one month’s rent, which advocates supporting the bill said would prevent renters from falling into debt just to make that payment.

Another proposal, Assembly Bill 919, would give tenants, local public agencies and nonprofits the first opportunity to buy a rental property or match an offer when an owner puts it on the market.

Adding social housing options

Assemblymember Alex Lee (D-San Jose) introduced Assembly Bill 309 to increase social housing options in California. Two previous social housing bills by Lee have failed to pass the Legislature.

There are many social housing models, but the general idea is that it’s government funded and occupied by residents of all income levels. It’s typically more affordable for low-income people, and tenants are granted a greater say over how the building functions and is managed.

Lawmakers took a trip to Vienna in the fall to learn how about the widespread use of social housing in that city, and have pointed to projects in Singapore as a model for what could be done in California.

They could also look down the street from the Capitol for inspiration.

The Capitol Area Development Authority is a public agency that manages more than 700 rental units, according to its website. Though it’s not exactly social housing, its residents have mixed incomes, and around 25% of the units are affordable for lower-income tenants.

OP-ED

Opinion: California housing and the environment are often at odds. They don't have to be

BY LIZ O'DONOGHUE,

MELISSA BREACH

MARCH 23, 2023 7 AM PT

California's housing shortage and climate crisis are often treated as if they are unrelated to each other. In fact, they are deeply interconnected.

We need to address not only how much housing we build but also where we build it. That's the idea and the promise behind new legislation backed by a novel coalition of housing and environmental advocates.

California must add at least 2.5 million new homes by 2030 to meet its needs. Decades of underproduction have exacerbated skyrocketing rental prices, put homeownership increasingly out of reach for most Californians and pushed more of our neighbors into homelessness than in any other state. The housing shortage is driven in large part by local government policies that prevent new housing from being built in existing neighborhoods, forcing most development into exurban and rural areas.

Without enough affordable housing near jobs, schools, transit and other resources in existing communities, Californians are increasingly forced into long commutes from remote areas that are often more vulnerable to wildfires, flooding and other climate-accelerated disasters. Between 1990 and 2010, half the housing development in California was at the edge of wilderness areas, known as the "wildland-urban interface," or WUI. As a result, about 25% of Californians live in areas at high risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Expanding development into natural lands not only puts more people in harm's way; it also increases the likelihood, frequency and devastation of fires, floods and other disasters. Human activities spark most wildfires. And development often paves over floodplains that could otherwise absorb rainfall and runoff, making floods more common and destructive.

California has lost more than 1 million acres of natural habitat to development over the past 20 years. Forests, wetlands, coastal areas, grasslands and rivers provide clean air, fresh water and access to green spaces for all of us. The movement of housing into more remote regions fragments wilderness, reduces community resilience and exacerbates the global biodiversity and climate crises, affecting every Californian.

We need to reframe the way we think about the relationship between housing policies and climate change. We need to significantly increase the number of homes we build, but if we do so in the undeveloped wildland-urban interface, we will only worsen the climate crisis. Building housing far from jobs doesn't just require longer commutes and new roads, increasing the pollution that causes climate change. It also reduces the landscape's ability to store carbon by paving over natural and agricultural lands that would otherwise remove it from the

atmosphere. And it destroys or degrades wildlife habitat and increases water demand in areas where wells are already running dry.

Assembly Bill 68, introduced last week by Assemblymember Christopher M. Ward (D-San Diego), would expedite approval of new housing in areas close to jobs, schools, parks, transit and other amenities. It would make it faster, cheaper and easier to build housing in safe, environmentally smart locations. It would do so by requiring such housing to be approved through an objective, streamlined process that eliminates needless delays.

AB 68 would also ensure that local governments approve such housing within existing communities before they allow development of the open space and farmland that make us more climate-resilient. Cities and counties that want to add more housing in undeveloped “greenfields” will essentially have to demonstrate that a similar amount of housing can’t be built in neighborhoods that already have infrastructure and services. Most cities and counties could accommodate much more such climate-safe housing, but severe restrictions on infill construction effectively mandate sprawl, pollution and disaster.

This legislation’s counter-mandate — don’t sprawl unless you must — takes a novel approach to land use. For most of the last 50 years, California’s tight restrictions and outright bans on dense, multifamily housing in existing neighborhoods have made low-density, single-family, greenfield housing the default when we do accommodate growth. And while recent legislative reforms have sought to ease development of affordable, multifamily housing in cities by reducing zoning, planning and other restrictions, it’s still easier in many cases to build in rural areas that are more vulnerable to fires and floods. AB 68 would begin to correct the incentives that too often pit the need for housing against environmental stewardship by encouraging sprawl.

It’s significant that the environmental and housing movements are coming together to address these problems. Historically we have worked separately or have even been at odds. Environmental and conservation organizations, focused on maintaining vital habitats, protecting air and water quality and preserving open spaces, sometimes oppose development and growth in general. Meanwhile, housing advocates working to open up cities and towns to more housing development may have been less concerned about the dangers of building where we shouldn’t.

Now our issues are colliding. The housing affordability crisis has become a significant contributor to loss of habitat as well as climate pollution, so we’re breaking our silos and working on a shared vision. These problems are inextricable from each other, and we need to tackle them together.

Melissa Breach is the chief operating officer of California YIMBY. Liz O’Donoghue is the director of sustainable and resilient communities strategy for the Nature Conservancy.

How the high cost of housing pushed many LAUSD workers to strike

BY PALOMA ESQUIVELSTAFF WRITER

MARCH 24, 2023 5 AM PT

Before the sun rose, Yadira Martinez, a special education assistant at Florence Avenue Elementary School in South L.A., shuffled around her tiny kitchen, sauteing eggs and potatoes to share with her fellow strikers earlier this week on the picket line.

She joked about the tight confines: “You turn around, take one step and you’re at the sink.”

Martinez, 53, has worked for L.A. Unified for 28 years, spending her days caring for young children with disabilities, changing their diapers, feeding them and teaching them. She makes about \$32,000 a year and lives in low-income housing, paying \$1,450 a month for a two-bedroom, one-bath, 750-square-foot apartment.

She shares a bed with her 18-year-old granddaughter; her teenage daughter sleeps on the bunk above them. Her dresser is in the living room, across from a small sewing station where she makes aprons, which she sells to supplement her income.

“It’s a dream of mine to have my own room,” she said.

For Martinez and many other public school workers who went on strike for three days this week, the crux of their fight is the ability to live decently in Los Angeles, where the exorbitant cost of housing exerts a brutal burden on the working class, forcing families to live in overcrowded homes or pushing workers to commute for hours to more affordable communities.

The average yearly wage of the bus drivers, custodians, special education assistants, cafeteria workers and other members of Local 99 of Service Employees International Union is \$25,000. The median rent for a newly listed one-bedroom apartment in L.A. County was \$1,619 in February, according to Apartment List — more than \$19,400 per year.

In a survey of about 3,300 members conducted by the union last year, about 10% of workers reported having been homeless at some point while working for the district. Nearly 30% reported being at “high risk” of becoming homeless.

L.A. Unified has recognized its workers’ struggles to pay for housing, and in the last several years has worked with nonprofit developers to complete three affordable housing projects across the district.

Those projects resulted in 185 units in complexes in Gardena, Hollywood and South L.A., more than 80% of which were leased to district employees. The district is also exploring the possibility of additional housing projects, said district spokeswoman Shannon Haber.

She said L.A. Unified “has led the affordable housing for employees effort in the state and until recently, the District was the only school district in California to do so.”

But the district’s housing projects reach only a limited number of workers, and each one has a wait list with more than 100 people.

Workers say the biggest effect would come from bigger salaries.

“The district is the second-largest employer in L.A. County,” said Blanca Gallegos, an SEIU Local 99 spokeswoman. “To address the issue of homelessness that everybody has been talking about, one way is to improve jobs and improve wages so that people working here in Los Angeles can live here in the city.”

The union is aiming to raise the average yearly wage of its workers to \$36,000 — a 30% raise plus an additional \$2 an hour for the lowest paid. The strike, which the union has said is meant to protest alleged unfair labor practices, ended Thursday with Mayor Karen Bass set to continue mediating the dispute.

Henry Argueta, 68, has worked for the district as a special education assistant since 2008. He is among the staffers who managed to secure a unit in one of the district’s affordable housing projects in Hollywood. Before that, he rented a small studio in Pico-Union that had been converted from a motel room.

“You could barely walk in there,” he said. “The heater was working, but there was no air conditioning at all. And it got really hot.”

His new place is a one-bedroom with air conditioning, heating, underground parking and a view of Sunset Boulevard. But his rent has gone up since he moved in three years ago. He now pays about \$1,300 a month — or nearly half of the \$32,890 he earned last year in his job with the district. He works a second job helping on political campaigns to make ends meet.

“I am very lucky to pay what I’m paying right now,” he said. But, he added, “it’s still not that affordable.”

Gary Payne, 59, a buildings and grounds worker at San Pedro High School, has worked for the district for about 10 years and earns just under \$20 an hour. He works full time, which puts him in a better position than many of his co-workers in the union who work only part time. Still, he said he had to move to Menifee in order to be able to afford a home.

His commute is 90 miles each way. He wakes up long before dawn and drives for Uber on his way to San Pedro, in order to help pay his mortgage and other bills.

“I’m pushing it,” he said. But he keeps going to ensure that he’ll be able to retire in a few years.

Martinez was in her 20s, working as a waitress and going to college, unsure about what she would do with her life, when a friend asked whether she would be interested in working at a school with kids with disabilities. She started as a volunteer and quickly fell in love with the job, she said. When she’s on campus she feels like a second parent to the kids.

“If they fall and they hit their knees, we hug them,” she said. “If they’re not feeling well, we know.”

She starts her work day early in the morning, supervising children on the school bus, which she started doing to earn extra pay.

“Those hours help a lot,” she said.

A few years ago, she started making aprons with pockets that are designed for school workers to keep their supplies — tissue, hand sanitizer, markers, keys. She scouts fabrics with prints of Dr. Seuss, Disney and other characters on sale at Walmart and sells them for \$13 each.

She makes ends meet with the help of her son, Leonardo Hernandez, 24, who also works for the district as a buildings and grounds worker. Hernandez has autism, and Martinez is glad that he found a job where he has the support and understanding of his co-workers. But she wishes she didn't have to rely on him.

“I want to be able to pay the rent by myself,” she said.

Before moving into the Huntington Park apartment where she now lives, Martinez lived with her brother at a house in South L.A. She had her own room then, she said. But there was a lot of violence in the community, and she felt she had to leave to keep her kids safe.

“Now we're just stuck here because everything went up and we cannot move,” she said. “We can't afford \$2,000 rent. That's just too much.”

On Wednesday morning, as Martinez and Hernandez got ready for another day of picketing, the thought of the income they were losing to the three-day strike weighed heavily on them. Soon, they would have to pay rent again.

“He's worried. I'm worried,” she said. “Hopefully it'll pay out.”

A 30% raise would boost her salary to more than \$41,000 a year. With that, she figured, she would be able to move.

“If we win, we'll probably be able to get out of here,” she said. “Get a place with three bedrooms at least.”

Martinez handed Hernandez a plastic container filled with eggs and potato to share with his co-workers and reminded him to take his gloves as he headed to his school site for a day of picketing in the cold.

She put on a purple poncho to guard against the rain, grabbed the food she had prepared and she and her daughter got in her car and drove to Florence Avenue Elementary, where she greeted her co-workers and began another day on strike.

Times staff writer Andrew Khouri contributed to this report.