

June 15, 2011

Planning Commission  
County of Humboldt

Re: Meeting Humboldt County's Need for Affordable Housing

Dear Commissioners,

This letter is submitted on behalf of a broad coalition of organizations to urge Humboldt County to implement the policies adopted in August 2010 that will allow the County to meet the needs of low- and fixed-income residents. It is imperative that the Housing Element be recertified by the state, and to accomplish that goal, we must work together to identify appropriate sites for multifamily housing. The coalition includes Housing for All, Healthy Humboldt, United Way, North Coast Veterans Resource Center, Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship [and many others]. We offer our gratitude to this Commission and to County staff who have worked so hard for a Housing Element that will benefit generations to come. We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Housing Element of the County's General Plan Update.

The cost of housing has increased dramatically in Humboldt County in recent years, and today average rent for a typical house is over \$1300 per month<sup>1</sup>. Young families, seniors, and much of the County's workforce need more safe, decent housing that they can afford. Our senior population is growing, and with cuts in pensions, lost retirement savings from stock declines, and budget cuts to senior services, the need for affordable housing will become even more critical. Seniors and people with disabilities striving to maintain their independence need safe, affordable housing close to transit routes, stores, health care facilities, and other services.

Humboldt County has fallen behind in meeting affordable housing needs. In the last housing cycle, the County failed to meet housing needs for low-income residents, yet overproduced housing for people with above-moderate incomes. The inventory of lots zoned for multifamily housing is now severely depleted. It must be replenished if we are to meet the housing needs of our young people, elders and lower income workers such as retail clerks, receptionists, bank tellers, dental hygienists, child care workers, and others who may not be in a position to purchase, or be interested in maintaining a single family home at this time.

Additionally, filling in areas with existing water and sewer with higher density development will prevent sprawl, and help to preserve our rural environment.

To ensure that the County can meet the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) Plan allocation for lower-income categories in the unincorporated area, we support the County's efforts to implement the policies to replenish the Multifamily Site Inventory adopted in the Housing Element in August 2010:

**Location and Characteristics of Multifamily Lots**

- The county shall create an inventory of lots suitable for affordable multifamily housing and allowed by right (no discretionary review is required), including any necessary rezonings to

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1 Humboldt Economic Index. May 2011. Page 2. Available on-line at <http://www.humboldt.edu/econindex/current.pdf> or <http://www.humboldt.edu/econindex/archive.htm>

R-3: Residential Multiple Family or RM: Residential Multifamily, which can accommodate a minimum of 120% of the County's fair share regional housing need for extremely low, very low and low income households pursuant to Government Code Section 65583 (c) (1) (A)... [H-P17, H-S19, H-20, H-IM-17, H-IM 18] Timeframe: January 1, 2011.

- Multi-family sites shall be considered suitable if they...can be provided with public water and sewer services within the planning period. [H-S19]
- The County shall Plan and support development proposals that locate multi-family uses along major transportation corridors, near transit stops, public services, recreation areas, neighborhood commercial centers and work opportunities. [H-P16]
- Locate residential development, particularly development affordable to those earning less than median income, near transportation corridors, transit stops, employment centers, schools and public services. [H-P11]

We the undersigned strongly support the County's efforts to identify adequate and appropriate sites for multi-family housing as part of the overall strategy to address the shortage of safe, decent housing that people can afford.

Sincerely,



Kermit Thobaben  
Housing For All



Jennifer Kalt, Director  
Healthy Humboldt Coalition



Christopher Murrietta, Call Center Specialist  
United Way of Humboldt/Del Norte



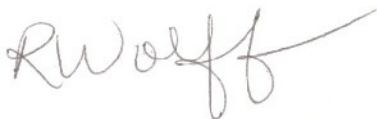
Rob Amerman, Assistant Site Director  
North Coast Veterans Resource Center



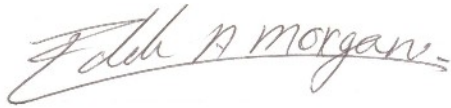
David Horwitz, Board President  
Arcata House



Ali O. Lee  
Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist  
& Vision Loss Services Coordinator  
Lighthouse for the Blind



Robin Wolff, Director of Social Services  
Humboldt Senior Resource Center



Eddie A. Morgan  
Project Coordinator for Senior Action  
Area 1 Agency on Aging



Ursula Osborne  
Co-Chair  
Social Action Committee  
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship



Jack Munsee  
Co-Chair



Chris Jones, Executive Director  
Tri-County Independent Living Center