



September 6, 2017

To: Corvallis City Council, City Manager, Community Development Director

From: Laura Lahm-Evenson, President, League of Women Voters of Corvallis

Re: Implementation of Recommendations of the Housing Development Task Force

Since the 1960s, the League of Women Voters of the U.S. has advocated for housing as a basic human need. The position of the League of Women Voters of Corvallis is that the City and County should aggressively support the development of low income housing units.

Currently, this aggressive support appears to be lacking. The League of Women Voters of Corvallis urges the City Council to make achievable housing a priority now. This would be consistent with views expressed by a majority of the Council's members in a priority-setting work session on August 10. Specifically, the Corvallis League is dismayed by the lack of urgency in the implementation of recommendations from the Housing Development Task Force (HDTF) whose report was accepted by the City Council nearly 11 months ago.

The stated goal for the Task Force was:

“The City will analyze policy and programmatic tools suggested by the 2014 ECONorthwest Housing Policy Options Study, including funding/resource requirements, and **by December 2016, select and implement** strategies to facilitate creation of additional transitional, low-income, and workforce housing. ...” [*emphasis added*]

The HDTF began its work in June 2015 to “draft and propose for City Council approval the scope, process, and timeline necessary to achieve the goal”.

The HDTF report, completed in September 2016, was accepted by City Council October 17, 2016. Council moved expeditiously to enact a Construction Excise Tax (CET) (November 7, 2016), one of the many specific short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations coming out of the HDTF. Having completed its work, the HDTF was dissolved and further work on the HDTF recommendations was moved to the City's Housing and Community Development Advisory Board (HCDAB).

The HCDAB's first meeting to take up the HDTF recommendations was December 21, 2016. The HCDAB was not prepared to take on this assignment and has had a difficult time addressing the task force recommendations with the limited time and support available to them. The HCDAB has worked on eligible uses and related policies for the CET but has yet to finalize and forward them to City Council for adoption.

The other two areas being addressed by the advisory board are HDTF recommendations concerning a temporary waiver of System Development Charges (SDCs) and policies on

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). The HCDAB has not endorsed a waiver and has not discussed ADUs in depth and is, in fact, revisiting the utility of each of the HDTF recommendations.

On April 13, 2017 a staff memorandum to HCDAB enumerated 7 steps the Advisory Board could follow in order to implement HDTF concepts. There are no timelines attached to these steps, but the document refers to “the next several years.” Several of the enumerated steps would duplicate work already completed by the City Council and HDTF.

Let us be clear: The League supports public discussion and input on major city policy changes. However, every delay in creating and implementing incentives for construction of more achievable housing (a better descriptor than affordable housing) compounds the problem. If Corvallis wants to be a city with diversity and wants to attract and keep younger, creative families, it needs to take active steps to make those goals a reality. Delays in housing construction mean lost revenue to the city as individuals and families who would choose to live in Corvallis must instead choose to live elsewhere due to affordability and supply issues. These families and individuals will shop elsewhere, enroll their children in schools elsewhere, pay property tax elsewhere, and engage in civic discourse and community involvement elsewhere. In addition, as they continue to commute in to Corvallis from elsewhere, they will continue to raise the carbon footprint for everyone in the region.

Our research has told us that, given a choice, builders prefer not to work in Corvallis, and those that do rarely build achievable housing. Incentives could begin to change that. Our city could demonstrate to the community that we are serious about adding achievable housing by encouraging builders for that market. As a related matter, both the Land Development Code and permitting processes need to be simplified and made more efficient and cost effective to encourage builders to select Corvallis.

We urge the Council to immediately implement the first three recommendations of the HDTF:

1. Implement a Construction Excise Tax and re-invest the proceeds in achievable housing;
2. Loosen Accessory Dwelling Unit restrictions;
3. Create System Development Charge waivers, offsets, reductions, even temporarily.

The remaining package of recommendations from the HDTF should be considered together to stimulate achievable housing in Corvallis. Considering them piecemeal and sequentially is ineffective. The HCDAB should not review in detail each recommendation of the HDTF, repeating its work, but instead should refer the recommendations to the Planning Department for implementation strategies to be designed.

We detect no sense of urgency within the city to address the very critical need for achievable housing. We urge the city to be bold and adopt a can-do attitude. To demonstrate its commitment, the Council should adopt specific timelines now and direct city staff to guide the implementation of the HDTF recommendations within that timeline. Final implementation should follow in a timely manner. This effort demands an aggressive schedule, as the current approach simply is not working. If the Council does not put its weight behind this effort, achievable housing will continue to be pushed down the road as a multi-year, business-as-usual planning process. It does not have to be, and should not be, that way.