

August 6, 2024

Costa Mesa City Council
77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

Re: Townhouse Projects in General

Let me say that townhouses are great as a housing type! We all think of them as great “starter homes.” They can line streets with charming front doors and stoops, pack in more families than single-family homes can, and look and feel like dignified places to live in.

But the townhouse projects that we’re seeing now are very different from traditional townhouses in two major ways.

1. Deep lots that had been originally platted for agrarian, commercial, or industrial use are becoming available for housing. Now you have townhouses that *don't face the street*, but are within the lot, facing parts of the site that are not the street.
2. To be spatially efficient, garages—which traditionally were either not provided or took vehicular access of a real, midblock alley—are now scooted *under* each townhouse. The garages now take up the ground floor of each unit and push the living spaces up off the ground.

Why these projects are so bad:

- By cranking up the density on a site without clicking the building(s) up to more efficient types (multiple flats in one or more buildings), you end up with places that look and feel cramped.
- Since the garages are part of each unit (parking is never grouped in these projects), the site will necessarily be crisscrossed with driveways, leaving little room for respectable spaces, if any, for each interior townhouse to front. This results in the interior townhouses fronting awkward and narrow passages that are usually *disconnected from each other and from the public right of way*.
- While these projects often have the potential to create “more city” (as they should) by bringing new streets or paseos *into* or *through* a large site to enhance connectivity and create good new frontage opportunities—they rarely do. Instead of integrating into the city and contributing to its character, vitality, and civic pride, they end up effectively as private cul-de-sacs. The only “extension of the public realm” into these sites are networks of sterile driveways lined with garage doors.

- Because the majority of each ground floor is garage, the remaining space is mostly unused. It often masquerades as a “work space” for entitlement purposes, but is more often used for storage. The result is *dead ground floors*, with no visible life from the sidewalk, either inside or outside.

Why we keep getting these types of development:

- The International Residential Code (IRC) is much cheaper to build under than the International Building Code (IBC), but can only be used for houses, duplexes, and townhouses, while the IBC is more expensive to build under and must be used for everything else (flats).
 - ◆ **Solution:** Enable more housing types to be built under the IRC. [North Carolina](#) now allows tri- and quad-plexes to be built under the IRC. [California](#) is trying to allow up to ten units to be approved under the IRC. (State).
- Developers know that they'll get more for this type than for flats, especially when they can be fee-simple. California's construction defect liability laws discourage for-sale multifamily.
 - ◆ **Solution:** Revise state laws. [Here's](#) a recent Turner Report on the topic. (State).
- Buildings over 3 stories that are too far from the street need the hook and ladder to be able to reach them, requiring huge driveways and turnarounds that eat up lots of on-site space.
 - ◆ **Solution:** We do have to comply with a statewide code that to a degree may unintentionally preclude good design, but there is also room to make things work. Others make it happen—so can we. This requires that developers, our planning staff, and the Fire Marshal all be willing to be creative and flexible to achieve win-win situations. (State/City)
- Buildings with multiple flats over 3 stories need a second means of egress a certain distance away from the other. This effectively turns what might be a simple project into a double-loaded corridor building, which changes the whole design and affects floor plate efficiency.
 - ◆ **Solution:** [Assembly Bill-835](#) is paving the way for single-stair construction so we can one day build simple small buildings full of flats the way we used to, and the way the rest of the world still does. We need more building options than townhouses, garden apartments, and double-loaded corridors. This is currently a statewide challenge, but it will be a citywide challenge once the state code enables local amendments. (State/City).
- With the low density cap and high parking requirement, cities effectively ensure that townhouse projects are the only type of development that will pencil. (State).

- ◆ **Solution:** Reducing parking requirements is a start. But developers and lenders need to know that there is little parking *demand*, otherwise they will provide enough to kill design. We need to do our part to make car-lite living in Costa Mesa more viable. We need to be aggressive about this and clearly signal our intentions to the development community. Not only does so much parking degrade design, but it ensures that surrounding streets will be flooded with cars. Requiring undergrounding may resolve the former, but it will not resolve the latter. And it may also kill projects. We need to commit to a future with lots of people and *not* a lot of cars.

Conclusion

There are state and local forces that have converged and resulted in this bizarre new pattern of development that is popping up all over the city (there are now dozens!). There are some changes that we can and should make *discourage bad design without discouraging more housing*, and there are some things that are out of our control. But townhouse developers are going to propose townhouse developments. And there is no indication in any of our policy documents that we are not open for business for these designs. If we can recognize this type of development, articulate the issues we have with them, and provide standards that enable the same, or more amount of housing to be built *better*, then we might see better projects being proposed. Those that contribute to the character and vitality of the city.

P.S. A Note on Façade Design

We can't fault the architects for their designs because it's what we're asking for in our guidelines. There's a major disconnect (I believe) between what we *say* we want (as much variety as possible) and actual aesthetic preferences (simple regular boxes with big, regular, and deep windows, welcoming frontages, simple rooflines, appropriate transitions between the public and private spaces, and quality materials). We really need to update our guidelines. See [Get Your House Right](#) by Marianne Cusato for what I think should help inform updates.

From: [Evan Carey](#)
To: [CITY CLERK](#)
Cc: decision.makers@change.org
Subject: Costa Mesa City Council - Traffic Calming Devices Petition
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 12:19:01 PM

Dear Costa Mesa City Council,

I am supporting a petition called "Install Traffic Calming Devices on Iowa & California Streets in Costa Mesa Now" started by Evan Carey:

https://www.change.org/p/install-traffic-calming-devices-on-iowa-california-streets-in-costa-mesa-now?utm_source=supporter_emails_dm

You have been identified as a decision maker on this petition so I am reaching out to you for a response. What is your opinion about this petition? You can respond by replying to this email.

Thanks for reading,

Evan Carey
503-551-6579

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August 5, 2024

Submitted via email to: cityclerk@costamesaca.gov

City of Costa Mesa
77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

RE: Request for Continuation on Agenda Item 2 on August 6, 2024 Council Agenda

Dear Honorable Mayor Stephens and Council Members,

The Coastal Corridor Alliance (CCA), formerly Banning Ranch Conservancy, submits this letter after reviewing the August 6, 2024 Costa Mesa City Council agenda, specifically New Business, Item 2.

In short, CCA respectfully requests an eight week continuation of this item as it reviews the potential impacts to the recently protected Randall Preserve. The proposed Storm Drain Master Drainage Plan appears to be releasing storm water directly onto the Preserve.

CCA was deeply involved in the preservation of Banning Ranch, now called the Randall Preserve. We announced today the hiring of a consulting firm, Dudek, to survey the habitats, plants, and animals and write a Resource Management Plan that informs a Public Access Plan. This Drainage Plan has the potential to change the outcome or recommendations of these plans, due to possible impacts to future tidal wetland creation on the property.

Please reach out if you have any questions. I can be reached at (714) 719-2148.

Sincerely,

Terry M. Welsh, MD
President



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
Los Angeles River Center and Gardens
570 West Avenue Twenty-six, Suite 100
Los Angeles, California 90065
Phone (323) 221-9944 Fax (323) 221-9934

City of Costa Mesa
77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

RE: Request for Continuation on Agenda Item 2 on August 6, 2024 Council Agenda

Dear Honorable Mayor Stephens and Council Members,

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA), submits this letter after reviewing the August 6, 2024 Costa Mesa City Council agenda, specifically New Business, Item 2.

MRCA, titleholders of the Randall Preserve, supports CCA's request for an eight-week continuation of this item as CCA reviews the potential impacts to the recently protected Randall Preserve. The proposed Storm Drain Master Drainage Plan, specifically the work on Lines W7 and W8, can affect the release of storm water directly onto the Preserve.

CCA and MRCA are in the process of generating a Resource Management Plan that informs a Public Access Plan. The Drainage Plan has the potential to change the outcome or recommendations of these plans, due to possible impacts to future tidal wetland creation on the property.

Please reach out if you have any questions. I can be reached at (323) 221-9944 ext. 205

Sincerely,
Isabela Noriega
Project Manager in Park Development

From: [Cynthia McDonald](#)
To: [REYNOLDS, ARLIS](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [MARR, ANDREA](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#)
Cc: [CITY CLERK](#); [GREEN, BRENDA](#)
Subject: August 6, 2024 City Council Agenda Public Hearing Item 2 (Ordinance No. 2024-02 Amending Title 13 of CMMC to establish affordable housing requirements for new residential development projects)
Date: Friday, August 2, 2024 2:23:57 PM

Honorable Mayor and City Council Members:

With respect to Public Hearing Item No. 2, at the June 18, 2024 City Council meeting there were several comments about the confusion that went on at the April 2, 2024 meeting where an ordinance was initially passed by the City Council. I agree that there was much confusion.

While I appreciate the “exhaustive” discussions that went on between the City Council members, some of the Council Members' statements repeated what was said in prior Council meetings, including study sessions, that is, until the public comment period was closed. It was at that time the confusion ensued because of Council Member Harlan’s substitute motion that “turned this on its head.” When he presented his motion, it did not align with the prior comments by the City Council or the information in the Agenda Report.

Pursuant to the California Brown Act, decisions by governing bodies must be made in front of the public and the public must have the right to weigh in on those decisions. The decisions should not be arbitrary, and the public must receive as much information in advance so we can make educated remarks on the subject matter.

On April 2, the ordinance was changed extensively AFTER the public was allowed to comment. If there are any changes to the ordinance that are not contained in the Agenda report for Tuesday’s meeting, those changes by a City Council member need to be disclosed prior to the public comment period so the public can offer input before the entire Council makes its decision.

Further, if a Council Member goes sideways and decides to write new language to be contained in the ordinance, the public must receive the language at the same time that a majority of the other Council Members receive it (see California Government Code Section 54957.5(a)).

As pointed out by other members of the public, this item is too important to be on the consent calendar and if it goes to a second reading this Tuesday, I hope to see it on the regular agenda at the following meeting of the City Council.

Thank you for your consideration.

Cynthia McDonald

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From: [Dianne Russell](#)
To: [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [MARR, ANDREA](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [REYNOLDS, ARLIS](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#); [CITY CLERK](#)
Subject: PH # 2
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 8:43:16 AM

Dear Mayor Stephens and Council Members,
As a part of the Costa Mesa Affordable Housing Coalition and interested community member I have been advocating for a strong inclusionary housing ordinance for several years. What is needed is an ordinance that encourages the development of affordable housing. There are two steps that you can take tonight:

1. Lower the applicability threshold to 30 units so that *more developments across the city* will include affordable rental units.
2. Adopt in lieu fees that *match the cost of onsite production of the units required by the AHO*. Don't put your thumb on the scale to discourage the building of affordable homes by setting in lieu fees too low.

The consulting team has indicated that these proposals will work for our community. The demand for housing in Costa Mesa is great. We cannot build our way to affordability. The working people of Costa Mesa need housing. We need to maximize the opportunities to include affordable units.

Thank you,
Dianne Russell

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August 5, 2024

Mayor Stephens and Council Members
City of Costa Mesa
77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA

RE: The AHO Threshold should be 30 and In Lieu Fees should be \$19.50/Sq. Ft

Dear Mayor Stephens and Council Members:

According to the City's Housing Element, nearly half of Costa Mesa's residents are lower income, and most of these residents are paying unaffordable rents. Undoubtedly, Costa Mesa has an affordable housing crisis. What is in doubt, however, is our City Council's willingness to address this crisis effectively.

At the August 6 City Council meeting, you have one last chance to strengthen the Affordable Housing Ordinance (AHO) to ensure it will produce the affordable housing Costa Mesa needs. Will you do it?

Lower the Threshold to 30 units

The first choice you should make is to *lower the threshold* for when the AHO applies. The threshold is currently set at 50 rental units, which means only very large developments will include ANY affordable housing. You should lower the applicability threshold to 30 units so that *more developments across the city* will include affordable rental units.

You promised voters that Measure K would bring affordable rental housing to Costa Mesa. But if you leave the AHO applicability threshold at 50 units, most of the new apartments that get built along the commercial corridors south of the 405 will not include any affordable units. That's because many of the opportunity sites along these corridors are big enough only for **mid-size apartment complexes of between 30 and 49 units.**

These mid-size developments should include affordable units. Measure K voters expect them to! If you lower the threshold to 30 units, we will see affordable units incorporated into the new apartment complexes that will come soon to commercial corridors like Harbor, Placentia, Pomona, Whittier, 18th St., Randolph and Baker.

In Lieu Fees Should Match Onsite Production Requirements

The second thing you should do is follow your consultant's advice and adopt in lieu fees that *match the cost of building the affordable units required by the AHO*. Your expert has told you the right number is **\$19.50/sq. ft.** for developments with densities of 60+ units per acre, and **\$13.80** for lesser densities. Those are the in lieu fees you should adopt.

If you adopt lesser fees, you – City Council – will be telling developers not to build affordable units. If it's cheaper to pay the in lieu fee, that's what developers will do. Please don't put your thumb on the scale to discourage the building of affordable homes in our city.

If you truly care about creating the affordable homes thousands of Costa Mesa's lower income residents need, prove it! As they say, actions speak louder than words.

Respectfully,

Kathy Esfahani

Kathy Esfahani,

On behalf of the Costa Mesa Affordable Housing Coalition

From: [Rev. Dr. Monica Corsaro](#)
To: [CITY CLERK](#)
Subject: Affordable Housing Now PH 2
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 3:09:48 PM

Dear City Clerk,

I live and work in Costa Mesa. The high cost of renting apartments here is a crushing burden on our city's low income residents. I want you to make the Affordable Housing Ordinance stronger so that it will actually produce affordable apartments. In its current form, the ordinance is too weak.

Please do the following at your meeting tonight:

1. Lower the threshold for applying the new ordinance to 30 units so that more new developments will include affordable housing.
2. Set the in lieu fees at the level that matches onsite production requirements: \$19.50 per square foot for projects at 60+ units per acre, and \$13.80 per square foot at lower densities.

Respectfully,

Monica!

Rev.Dr. Monica Corsaro
Fairview Community Church
2525 Fairview Road, Costa Mesa, CA 92626
(church) 714.545.4610
(cell) 206.353.2637
www.ocfairviewchurch.org

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From: [Rev. Sian Wiltshire](#)
To: [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [MARR, ANDREA](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [REYNOLDS, ARLIS](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#); [CITY CLERK](#); [GALLARDO DALY, CECILIA](#)
Subject: Affordable Housing Units
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 2:57:00 PM

Dear Hard-Working City Council Members,

I live and work in Costa Mesa and love this city. But we are losing young people, low-income residents and even the middle class as it's getting too expensive to live here! This is happening all of the country. I invite you to consider taking a stand in this great city of ours that helps our housing crisis and allows for more affordable house. The high cost of renting apartments here is a crushing burden to so many of us. I make a good salary and yet I can only afford to rent and I am always looking for cheaper housing as my rent goes up significantly every year. I want you to make the Affordable Housing Ordinance stronger so that it will actually produce affordable apartments. In its current form, the ordinance is too weak.

Please do the following at your meeting tonight:

1. Lower the threshold for applying the new ordinance to 30 units so that more new developments will include affordable housing.
2. Set the in lieu fees at the level that matches onsite production requirements: \$19.50 per square foot for projects at 60+ units per acre, and \$13.80 per square foot at lower densities.

Respectfully,

Rev. Sian Wiltshire

[Rev. Sian Wiltshire: She, her, hers](#)
Orange Coast Unitarian Universalist Church
Costa Mesa, CA
www.ocuuc.org
714-556-2882, x302

Zoom ID: 393-157-9606

Zoom Link: <https://zoom.us/j/3931579606>

Please note that I don't check emails on Sundays or Mondays.

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From: [Steve Dzida](#)
To: [CITY CLERK](#)
Subject: Affordable Housing
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 5:00:13 PM

Members of the Costa Mesa City Council:

We NEED affordable housing. When you act at your meeting tonight, please do the following:

1. Lower the applicability threshold to 30 units so that *more developments across the city* will include affordable rental units.
2. Adopt in lieu fees that *match the cost of onsite production of the units required by the Affordable Housing Ordinance*. Don't put your thumb on the scale to *discourage* the building of affordable homes by setting in lieu fees too low.

This is the time to take at least a small step toward securing housing for our community at affordable rates!! Please don't let it pass.

Steve
Steven J. Dzida
1846 Kinglet Court
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

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From: [Betsy Densmore](#)
To: [CITY CLERK](#); [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#)
Subject: Inclusionary Housing Ordinance
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 12:26:01 PM

Hello,

I write as a business owner, a former board member of an affordable housing developer and a resident.

Costa Mesa has a housing shortage which affects everyone from young professionals to the working poor. Service workers that we need to sustain our businesses are choosing between over-crowded apartments, long, wasteful commutes or moving out of state. Folks who grew up here can't afford an apartment, never mind a house. And folks who have houses (and small businesses) depend on these workers for health care, retail and personal services.

Having a 50 unit threshold for requiring the inclusion of affordable housing does all these constituents a great disservice. Dropping the threshold down to 30 units or less would get us more housing a lot faster by including more, smaller sites. By setting this standard for all developers, we reduce off-line negotiations and back-room deals to get the housing we need. This standard is consistent with regulations in most neighboring cities. Developers understand the need and they know how to accommodate it.

Drop the threshold to back to 30!

Yours for a thriving economy,
Betsy

Betsy Densmore
Co-Owner: Great Mex Grill, LLC
Resident: 1006 Nancy Lane
betsydensmore52@gmail.com
949-500-2381

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." F.D. Roosevelt

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From: [patricia uchytíl](#)
To: [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [MARR, ANDREA](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [REYNOLDS, ARLIS](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#); [CITY CLERK](#); [GALLARDO DALY, CECILIA](#)
Subject: Low Income Housing
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 4:06:12 PM

Dear City Council Members,

I am a Costa Mesa resident. The high cost of renting apartments here is a crushing burden on our city's low income residents. I want you to make the Affordable Housing Ordinance stronger so that it will actually produce affordable apartments. In its current form, the ordinance is too weak.

Please do the following at your meeting tonight:

1. Lower the threshold for applying the new ordinance to 30 units so that more new developments will include affordable housing.
2. Set the in lieu fees at the level that matches onsite production requirements: \$19.50 per square foot for projects at 60+ units per acre, and \$13.80 per square foot at lower densities.

Respectfully,
Patty Uchytíl

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From: [Cesar C](#)
To: [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [MARR, ANDREA](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [REYNOLDS, ARLIS](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#); [CITY CLERK](#)
Subject: Public Hearing item 2 -- the Affordable Housing Ordinance.
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 3:37:32 PM

Dear Mayor Stephens and Council Members:

According to the City's Housing Element, nearly half of Costa Mesa's residents are lower income, and most of these residents are paying unaffordable rents. Undoubtedly, Costa Mesa has an affordable housing crisis. What is in doubt, however, is our City Council's willingness to address this crisis effectively.

At the August 6 City Council meeting, you have one last chance to strengthen the Affordable Housing Ordinance (AHO) to ensure it will produce the affordable housing Costa Mesa needs. We urge you to do so.

Recommendations;

Lower the Threshold on projects to 30 units

The first choice you should make is to lower the threshold for when the AHO applies. The threshold is currently set at 50 rental units, which means only very large developments will include ANY affordable housing. You should lower the applicability threshold to 30 units so that more developments across the city will include affordable rental units.

You promised voters that Measure K would bring affordable rental housing to Costa Mesa. But if you leave the AHO applicability threshold at 50 units, most of the new apartments that get built along the commercial corridors south of the 405 will not include any affordable units. That's because many of the opportunity sites along these corridors are big enough only for mid-size apartment complexes of between 30 and 49 units.

These mid-size developments should include affordable units. Measure K voters expect them to! If you lower the threshold to 30 units, we will see affordable units incorporated into the new apartment complexes that will come soon to commercial corridors like Harbor, Placentia, Pomona, Whittier, 18th St., Randolph and Baker.

In Lieu Fees Should Match Onsite Production Requirements

The second thing you should do is follow your consultant's advice and adopt in lieu fees that match the cost of building the affordable units required by the AHO. Your expert has told you the right number is \$19.50/sq. ft. for developments with densities of 60+ units per acre, and \$13.80 for lesser densities. Those are the in lieu fees you should adopt. If you adopt lesser fees, you – City Council – will be telling developers not to build affordable units. If it's cheaper to pay the in lieu fee, that's what developers will do.

Please don't put your thumb on the scale to discourage the building of affordable homes in Costa Mesa.

Cesar Covarrubias
Executive Director
The Kennedy Commission

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From: [Linda Tang](#)
To: [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [MARR, ANDREA](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [REYNOLDS, ARLIS](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#); [CITY CLERK](#); [GALLARDO DALY, CECILIA](#)
Subject: RE: The Affordable Housing Ordinance --P.H. #2
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 5:00:26 PM

Dear City Council Members,

As a mother of two young children, I constantly hear stories of other young families struggling to live and work in the same city that their children are attending school at. This is especially true for lower income working families in Costa Mesa. The high cost of renting apartments in Costa Mesa is a crushing burden on our city's low income families.

There is now an opportunity to address this issue and the City can create a more effective and impactful Affordable Housing Ordinance so that it will actually produce affordable apartments. In its current form, the ordinance is too weak. As the Council moves forward with the ordinance, I urge you to please implement the following:

1. Lower the threshold for applying the new ordinance to 30 units so that more new developments will include affordable housing.
2. Set the in lieu fees at the level that matches onsite production requirements: \$19.50 per square foot for projects at 60+ units per acre, and \$13.80 per square foot at lower densities.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Linda

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From: [S Forbath](#)
To: [STEPHENS, JOHN](#); [HARLAN, JEFFREY](#); [MARR, ANDREA](#); [CHAVEZ, MANUEL](#); [REYNOLDS, ARLIS](#); [GAMEROS, LOREN](#); [HARPER, DON](#); [CITY CLERK](#); [GALLARDO DALY, CECILIA](#)
Subject: The Affordable Housing Ordinance --P.H. #2
Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2024 4:22:14 PM

Dear City Council Members,

I am a lifetime Costa Mesa resident. The high cost of renting apartments here is a crushing burden on our city's low income residents. I ask you to make the Affordable Housing Ordinance stronger so that it will produce actual affordable apartments. In its current form, the ordinance is too weak.

I respectfully request that you do the following at your meeting tonight:

1. Lower the threshold for applying the new ordinance to 30 units so that more new developments will include affordable housing.
2. Set the in lieu fees at the level that matches onsite production requirements: \$19.50 per square foot

Best regards,

Susie Forbath

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