

# **FACT SHEET: “Pasadena’s Religious zoning Amendment proposal will severely hinder affordable housing on congregational land”.**



## **1. Pasadena’s Planning Department is proposing a zoning amendment that is supposed to allow affordable housing on congregational and, but it does not allow interested churches to do so. What is being proposed?**

The Pasadena Planning Department is recommending a zoning amendment that would rezone congregational land in commercial and public/semipublic zones (large properties) for residential use at 32 dwelling units/acre (du/a) with the development standards of the least restrictive adjacent zone. Research by The Arroyo Group shows that only three additional churches would be able to build affordable housing. Yet, none of these churches have expressed interest in affordable housing on their property.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. What would it take to make this proposed policy work?**

First, it would take just four more dwelling units per acre, from 32 du/a to 36 du/a. According to David Reyes, head of the Planning Department, adding just four more units per acre is “no big deal.” Second, it would still take adjusting the proposed development standards to the least restrictive adjacent zoning development standards but to development standards no less than the standards that accompany a 32 du/a designation. With this adjusted proposal, of the ten churches in Pasadena that have expressed interest, at least three will be helped, but with the Planning Department’s proposal none of these three will be able to provide affordable housing, according to the Arroyo Group.<sup>2</sup>

## **3. Are other cities doing this?**

Seattle, Sierra Madre and Yorba Linda have rezoned religious property for affordable housing. At least ten other So Cal cities (including Los Angeles) have placed rezoning religious property for affordable housing in their housing element and some are in the process of creating an ordinance.

## **4. Will affordable housing be built-in single-family neighborhoods?**

No, this policy applies only to PS zoned religious institutions and commercial zones, which are on major corridors. What The Arroyo Group and Making Housing and Community Happen (MHCH) propose is a modest policy that will help only a few congregations wishing to build affordable housing.

## **5. What is the problem that we are seeking to address with this proposed zoning change?**

The need for high quality affordable housing is desperate, as Mayor Gordo has stated. According the 2021 Homeless Count, 512 people in Pasadena are experiencing homelessness, According to the California Council of Government’s report, over 7,000 Pasadena renter households earn less than \$35,000/year and 70% of them pay more than half their income on rent. They are at risk of eviction and homelessness, as evidenced by

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<sup>1</sup> Urban planner Phil Burns of The Arroyo Group, with help from Max Ogden of Cal Tech, did this research. Phil Burns has spent the last two years researching religious properties in Pasadena and advising congregations throughout Southern California on how to have affordable housing built on their underutilized land. He is part of the MHCH Congregational Land Committee which consists of affordable an housing developer, a financial adviser for affordable housing, and other experts in this field.

the soaring demand for rental assistance reported by Friends In Deed. Over 700 PUSD students are considered homeless. The state has mandated that our city plan for 6,000 units of affordable housing in the next eight years. This rezoning policy, if properly crafted, could result in hundreds of affordable units to help meet this goal.

## **6. Why is this only for religious property?**

Exploring rezoning other institutional land for nonprofits like schools and hospitals is a worthy goal. But so far none have expressed interest, while many churches have. It took two years to research, create, and move forward a policy that would support religious properties. If other institutions are considered, it would needlessly delay rezoning religious land, and much needed units. Some churches are ready to move forward once zoning is changed. This policy would serve to undo years segregation by allowing beautiful affordable developments throughout the city. Congregations see this as a way to be better stewards of their land, which is often vacant most of the week. Furthermore, congregations already serve lower income residents with food pantries, housing homeless families in their building through the Bad Weather Shelter and Family Promise and helping in many other ways. Historically, religious groups have built hospitals, schools, and retirement communities. It is a consistent with their mission for them to supply housing for the community.

## **7. Are there examples of how this development can be done?**

There are plenty of recent examples of partnerships between congregations and affordable housing developers. Wesley Village in Garden Grove is one successful example of 100% affordable senior and family housing involving Garden Grove United Methodist Church and Jamboree Housing. The church entered a 60-year ground lease turning 2.2 acres of parking space into housing and offices that provide services for both residents and the community.

## **8. Can this help Pasadena meet state requirements for new housing?**

Yes, but only if the zoning is tweaked to 36 du/a with the development standards that accompany a 32 du/a designation. Otherwise, it is unlikely that any new housing will be produced.

## **9. Who will benefit from the affordable housing development?**

Congregations that have affordable or homeless housing units built with the support or sponsorship of the City must prioritize those who live and/or work in Pasadena as well as set side 20% of units for those who have been displaced in the past 10 years. Businesses benefit when our homeless neighbors are housed. Teachers, police, health professional and the environment all benefit when people can afford to live close to their work. The city also has significant economic benefit. Affordable housing brings millions of dollars of outside investment to Pasadena. Furthermore, our city requires that 20% of workers, 20% of contractors and 20% of materials be local. The 69 units at Heritage Square North brought in over 6 million in local investments from this 20-20-20 rule.

## **10. What if a congregation moves or closes?**

Congregations are reluctant to close their doors unless absolutely necessary. Those that must close usually prefer to leave affordable housing behind as their last act of service to the community. If that happens, covenants will ensure that the development remains affordable for 55 years or more.

## **11. What happens if this policy isn't passed, or if a policy passes that won't work?**

When churches go out of business and have no other options, they often end up selling their property to market rate developers. Churches will lose an opportunity to "finish well" by benefiting the community and Pasadena will lose an opportunity to have affordable housing built on.