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As Adopted 10/7/09

## **RECOMMENDED HOUSING POLICIES**

### **“Square Table” Group**

*Following are recommended housing policies based on positions adopted by the League of Women Voters of Marin County, the Marin Environmental Housing Collaborative, and Community Marin, a planning document by the county’s major environmental organizations. The purpose of this paper is primarily for reviewing and commenting on the Housing Elements being prepared by Marin County and the 11 cities and towns.*

*A fundamental principle: environmental constraints and political realities limit how much growth Marin County and other jurisdictions can accommodate. Development has to be planned carefully to address and meet the needs of all sectors of our society and to minimize environmental impacts.*

*A definition: “affordable housing” in this document means housing for people with low and very low incomes and below, including seniors, individuals with special needs and the homeless.*

#### **Recommended Housing Policies:**

Recognize that Marin is part of a major urban area that is economically interdependent. Look for solutions to housing, employment and transportation issues in a regional context that will reduce regional vehicle miles travelled (VMT) and greenhouse gas emissions. Work with state and local legislators to explore techniques for developing and retaining below market rate housing. Establish an inter-jurisdictional planning entity within Marin County to address countywide planning issues.

1. Prevent sprawl and intrusion into environmentally sensitive areas: wildlife habitat; areas subject to wildfires, flooding, and earthquakes; and areas designated as priorities for conservation, open space, and agriculture. Accomplish this through such means as urban growth boundaries and other land use policies and regulations.
2. Encourage housing and mixed use in spaces above parking lots, shopping and other commercial centers, other infill sites, and through reuse of existing buildings for housing. Evaluate planning standards affecting parcels currently zoned for commercial use and low density residential and consider rezoning to high-density affordable housing, or mixed use.
3. Where appropriate, identify and rezone sites for higher density affordable housing. Create opportunities to establish or increase minimum densities for

affordable housing, possibly including some single family designated sites, commercial sites, and underutilized sites.

4. Promote increasing density and offer other incentives such as density bonuses, reduced parking and revised zoning requirements in infill locations to enable the provision of affordable housing
5. Coordinate land use and transportation planning. Locate housing near transit and other existing services, without impairing natural resources, in order to encourage walking, transit and bicycle use; to discourage the use of the private automobile; and to reduce vehicle miles traveled.
6. Reduce homelessness by providing opportunities for permanent housing, adequate shelter sites and services for the homeless.
7. Retain existing below market rate housing, including small homes in older neighborhoods. This may be done through zoning, deed restrictions, tax incentives, permitting of second units, and technical assistance. Work with the state and with local jurisdictions to establish procedures for retaining below market rate housing.
8. Establish procedures for maintaining and increasing rental housing stock and evaluate second units as an effective way of providing needed affordable housing, subject to environmental standards.
9. Explore strategies such as increasing funding for the county's housing trust fund, as well as establishing and sustaining other such funds in Marin cities and towns. Possible mechanisms for accomplishing this would be the use of the real estate transfer tax, fees from job-housing mitigation measures, impact fees on large homes, and inclusionary fees on small developments.
10. Establish and enforce limits on the size of additions to existing residences consistent with protection and efficient use of environmental resources, including energy, water, and building materials.
11. Increase the percentage requirements for below market rate units, with a minimum requirement of 20 percent. Reduce the project size threshold in inclusionary zoning ordinances. Require provision of below market rate housing on-site or off-site, or donations of developable land, rather than allowing in lieu fees. If in lieu fees are permitted, they should be adequate to cover the actual cost of developing affordable units.
12. Require developers of commercial properties to provide or fully fund an appropriate amount of below market rate housing within the county, related to the number of jobs created. San Rafael and the County have jobs/housing linkage

fees. Other cities and towns should adopt similar requirements; funds could be deposited into an inter-jurisdictional housing trust fund.

13. Establish a maximum house size in adopted County community plans and city general plans. Establish strict standards for floor area ratio, lot coverage, existing community character, bulk, mass, slope, height, accessory structures, garages, and design review that could limit size to less than the maximum. Make it clear that a maximum house size is not an entitlement.
14. All new development will incorporate energy and water conservation measures and green siting and building techniques. The use of “green” features does not override or replace the requirement to meet other policy conditions.
15. The County, cities, and towns should work cooperatively with other jurisdictions, non-profit housing, environmental and neighborhood groups to implement these programs within the county and should work with state legislators to implement such programs statewide.

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