

Menlo Park opposes governor's affordable housing plan

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MENLO PARK -- Menlo Park's mayor sent a letter to state legislators this week opposing the governor's new affordable housing proposal, saying it "goes against the principles of local democracy."

The state's 2016-17 budget, adopted June 15, includes a trailer bill that was a compromise between Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature. It calls for \$400 million in funds to be set aside for affordable housing projects and would make it easier for developers to build affordable housing by essentially allowing them to bypass local reviews. The funds will be appropriated later this year once the Legislature approves a version of Brown's "by right" zoning proposal.

City staff issued a report stating that the "by right" proposal, titled the Streamlining Affordable Housing Approvals bill, would remove the Planning Commission and City Council from the review process for affordable housing projects. They called for the City Council to join the League of California Cities in opposing the trailer bill. Palo Alto also issued a letter of opposition.

"Eliminating opportunities for public review of these major development projects goes against the principles of local democracy and public engagement," Mayor Rich Cline wrote.

He lambasted the state for eliminating funding for affordable housing in the 1980s, even as the state budget "has flourished in recent years" and blamed it for trying to bypass environmental regulations, such as the California Environmental Quality Act.

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"If there are issues with such laws, then they should be addressed in a straightforward fashion as opposed to structuring proposals that pretend they don't exist," Cline wrote.

According to an October 2014 report on affordable housing by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, it costs \$287,932 to build one affordable unit, meaning \$400 million could be used to build roughly 1,390 units statewide.

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