

April 13, 2019



Community Connects Around the Topic of Housing

The community of Pacifica has indicated interest in the issue of housing for several years. Reflecting the community's interest, the City Council's 2019 priorities include supporting housing affordability and security. In addition, the City is beginning the process of updating its General Plan, Local Coastal



Program and developing a new Sharp Park Specific Plan. To support these efforts, local leaders in Pacifica have been actively engaged with *Home for All*, a county-wide collaborative of local governments, schools, businesses and nonprofit organizations addressing housing challenges in San Mateo County by convening the community, sharing information and promoting innovation.

The City of Pacifica applied for and was awarded a grant by *Home for All* to explore new approaches to community engagement on the topic of housing. The goal is to reach a broad cross-section of Pacifica, including people who may not normally attend City meetings. The City reached out to teachers, small business owners, faith communities, and others to hear their concerns about housing and invite them to a community conversation. The outreach also included an [online survey](#)¹ which asked community members to reflect on their experiences with housing.

The first community conversation was held on the morning of Saturday, April 13 at the Pacifica Community Center with the goals of developing shared understanding about how the current housing situation affects the community and identifying priorities, values and principles that can guide the City's upcoming planning efforts.

Over 100 people attended. Of those, 85 community members were participants in the facilitated dialogue, including longtime residents, business owners, and people who work in Pacifica but do not live in the city, representing a range of life stages and experiences. Members of the Pacifica City Council, Pacifica Planning Commission, Jefferson Union High School District Board of Trustees, and County Supervisor Don Horsley attended as listeners. Participants expressed appreciation for the mix of people, while also hoping to have an even more diverse mix in the future. After a welcome by Mayor Sue Vaterlaus and Planning Director Tina Wehrmeister, the meeting format alternated between two short presentations by Pacifica Senior Planner Christian Murdock and table discussions supported by trained facilitators.



¹ <https://tinyurl.com/yysxnh93>

I. Discussion #1 about housing challenges and what people value about Pacifica

The [first presentation](#)² provided an overview of the regional housing shortage facing Pacifica and all cities in San Mateo County, plus background information about demographic trends in Pacifica and local housing costs. Following the presentation, the first table discussion focused on two questions:

1. How does the issue of housing affect you and the people you know in Pacifica?
2. As we think about Pacifica's future, what kind of community do you want to live in?

Many are Affected by the Cost of Housing

Numerous community members, as well as online survey participants, described how the lack of quality housing they could afford was having a direct negative impact on their lives and the lives of their family and friends. Several attendees noted that their children had already moved elsewhere, while others expressed concern that their children would not be able to return to Pacifica due to the cost of housing. Others voiced concern about the loss of long-time neighbors as well as teachers from local schools, and the difficulty of keeping small business employees and owners from being pushed out. Some noted overcrowding and unsafe living conditions as people try to adapt.



- *“Between rising population, rising property values & rents, and bits of Pacifica falling into the ocean, I know lots of people who have been displaced or are in danger of being displaced.”*
- *“I am losing the ability to continue to live in the community I grew up in with the people I grew up with. I want to stay but I can’t.”*
- *“We pay more than 50% of net income for rent and probably can’t hold on much longer.”*
- *“My children can’t afford to stay here.”*

Broadly Shared Community Values

The discussion about hopes for Pacifica's future surfaced several broadly shared values. Many community members said that they valued Pacifica's diverse population and the strong sense of community. Residents wanted Pacifica to be a community with economic, racial and age diversity, a place where families with young children can happily coexist with seniors aging in place. Several of the participants were explicit in their desire to avoid becoming a city that is only affordable to upper income families or certain age groups.

- *“I want more children in Pacifica; a place where our children and teachers and middle class can afford to live.”*
- *“I would rather have a lower home value than lose our diversity.”*
- *“I want to live in a healthy, caring, compassionate community that cares for and loves one another. Everyone matters! One’s net worth is not their self-worth.”*
- *“A place where housing is affordable for all throughout their life span.”*

² <https://tinyurl.com/y3h5jge7>

Participants also celebrated Pacifica’s beautiful natural environment and expressed a strong commitment to remain an environmentally sustainable city with protected open spaces. Some felt that value could be retained while addressing housing challenges: *“It’s important to preserve the coastline and open spaces, but I would definitely like to see an increase in total housing units.”*

The topic of reducing traffic congestion came up during almost all of the table discussions. Participants hoped that Pacifica would retain its warm and welcoming ambience and become even more walkable with additional arts, activities and “vibrancy.” Community members value Pacifica’s sense of safety and some were concerned that the increase in homelessness and/or people living in vehicles might undermine that. Many attendees spoke about the need for more types of businesses and employment options. A commenter in the online survey wanted to ensure sufficient resources to support existing services: *“We don’t need more housing, what we need is more businesses so we collect more taxes to support what we already have.”*

II. Discussion #2 about housing options in Pacifica

Pacifica will soon begin its General Plan, Local Coastal Program, and Sharp Park Specific Plan planning processes, which will serve to create a “road map” for Pacifica’s future development. These plans will help the community decide how land can be used and what type of housing it will allow.

The second presentation summarized possible approaches to increasing housing options in Pacifica. The second table discussion focused on these questions:

1. Which of these housing options seems promising based on our community’s needs?
2. How else can our community work together to address our housing needs?

Reactions to Housing Options

One option that generated much discussion was expanding the use of Accessory Dwelling Units, or ADUs, which are small homes built in basements, backyards, or garages of single-family homes. Some wanted to see the process for creating an ADU streamlined. Many community members were interested in promoting the development of “infill” housing within the existing urban areas of the city. Several residents also expressed interest in shared housing opportunities, such as co-housing and home sharing. Parking was also a significant factor in many people’s thinking about housing.

Other potential ideas that came out of the conversations were to establish safe parking sites for people living in RVs, to pursue responsible development of the Quarry site (including housing), and to build more workforce housing. The topic of tenant protections surfaced a range of perspectives, as well. Several wanted to make sure that new ADU’s and rentals were affordable.

Housing Options to Consider

Participants were given information about a range of housing options, including:

- **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs):**
A smaller unit added to an existing home
- **Infill development:** Building homes on smaller pieces of land in areas already zoned for housing
- **Mixed-use housing:** Buildings that include space for housing and other uses, such as retail, office space or restaurants
- **Home sharing:** Renting unused rooms to families or individuals, including through organizations like HIP Housing
- **Workforce (employer) housing:** Homes that are affordable to people who work in the community and close to their jobs

- *“I think the ADU option is very promising for Pacifica because we are so heavy in single family dwellings.”*
- *“We need to be helping those in transition to stay and safe parking for vehicle/RV residents.”*
- *“We need infill with added density, and mixed live/work development.”*

Overall, many participants plus comments from the pre-meeting online survey embraced creation of new housing as a key strategy in promoting a diverse, affordable community that protects what makes Pacifica special. On the other hand, a few of the survey participants were less optimistic about housing options: *“While I realize housing is an issue, our town simply does not have enough buildable land to reduce this problem very much—ocean on one side, state and county protected land on another and not much in between.”* There was widespread interest in improving transportation options into Pacifica to offset any congestion impacts from new housing. *“Transportation does not solve housing, but you can’t solve housing without transportation.”*

“This type of meeting is so good for the community.”

– Participant

How the Community Can Work Together

Many people demonstrated interest in housing with smaller units, tiny homes, different types of communal housing and “affinity” housing and other creative solutions. There were calls to understand what innovative solutions other communities have used, especially for workforce housing.

Several also said that the community needs to come together with “more meetings like this.” People expressed appreciation for the opportunity to sit down with their neighbors and have a friendly, productive conversation about community values and actions to confront the housing challenge. Ratings on the meeting format were very positive and broad agreement from participants that they gained useful information and new perspectives.



Many attendees wanted to attend similar meetings in the future and to get more people involved in Pacifica’s upcoming General Plan and related planning processes.

III. Next Steps

- A second community conversation about housing will occur on **Tuesday, May 21**, from 6-8:30 pm at Ingrid B. Lacy Middle School, 1427 Palmetto Avenue. This dinner conversation will focus on housing solutions identified at the April 13 community conversation and how they may work best in Pacifica. The conversation will provide an opportunity for both new participants and those returning from the first event to further explore these options.
- Outreach is ongoing to reach broadly into the Pacifica community. All community members are invited to help spread the word about the May 21 community conversation. Bring a friend!
- Pacifica will soon begin its General Plan, Local Coastal Program, and Sharp Park Specific Plan planning processes, which will serve to create a “road map” for Pacifica’s future development and help the community decide where and what type of housing it will allow. More information is available at planpacifica.org.