

June 21, 2010

Dear Community Members:

As many of you are aware, the City has been undertaking community outreach and discussions regarding its Housing Element. We have heard from dozens of residents expressing dismay at potential land use changes of properties. We have received many questions and requests for more information.

Due to this community apprehension, the City will be taking a hiatus for a period of time while we conduct more research, provide information, and return with a more comprehensive communication effort prior to any decision making. At this time, we are putting any decisions on the Housing Element by the Planning Commission or City Council on hold for a number of months.

It is important to remember that the Housing Element is a component of the City's [General Plan](#). By State law, Novato's Housing Element must demonstrate that the City can accommodate its identified housing needs for all income levels over the next five years in order to be certified. This "housing need" is the number of housing units assigned to Novato by the Association of Bay Area Governments ([ABAG](#)) through the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) process. A "certified" Housing Element ensures that the City can receive certain regional and, in the future, state funding for streets and infrastructure improvements. The City cannot ignore this state mandate, but we do want to make sure that we fully understand the choices, options, and avenues open to the City Council and community.

During this hiatus, staff will be doing the following research and preparation.

Web Site – As a first step, City staff will be preparing a number of pages on the City's web site [about the Housing Element](#) to assist with transparency and sharing of information. We will be posting all letters and emails from the public, answering questions submitted, and providing additional background information and resources.

E-mail Distribution List – City staff is building an email distribution list for ongoing communication regarding the Housing Element. Please feel free to sign up for updates regarding the Housing Element via our [e-notification system](#).

Research – City staff will research how other communities are meeting their obligations and also talk further with staff from ABAG and the State.

Public Workshops and Community Outreach – Prepare a series of workshops/meetings to educate ourselves on the problem, the options and constraints as a community, and examples of possible solutions. The specifics of this outreach program are still being determined. We may decide to invite a representative from the State or ABAG attend. We may include examples of successful affordable housing projects. We may have a segment on crime and affordable housing to understand their relationship in our community.

Currently, there is a high level of rumor, misunderstanding, and misinformation floating in the community on this issue. There is also an extremely high level of fear and anxiety. We are hopeful that by taking more time, we can increase our knowledge and enhance the respect for different perspectives that may still be held.

City staff's job is to ensure there is a shared understanding of the facts and issues so that policy options can be evaluated. It is not to sell a solution. Issues like this are never easy. Yet, part of what makes Novato a special community is due to a community that is engaged and cares deeply. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we move through this community dialogue.

Sincerely,

Michael Frank
City Manager