

2021 Policy Proposals for the City of Los Angeles

Summary: Los Angeles was already in the middle of an extreme housing affordability crisis before the coronavirus, and the pandemic has exacerbated the housing insecurity and economic vulnerability of thousands of residents in our communities. Now even more families face the risk of homelessness. The solution is more affordable housing in Los Angeles—as quickly as possible. SCANPH proposes three practical solutions that could make a difference right away.

Delegated Authority

Background: In Los Angeles, every affordable housing development must be approved by the Los Angeles City Council for funding. Unfortunately, waiting for these approvals delays projects, often by a significant length of time, which slows down the building of affordable housing.

Proposal: The City Council should delegate its authority to the Housing and Community Investment Department (HCID) for the approval of funding commitments for standard affordable housing projects.

We propose that HCID staff be empowered to review and make decisions on affordable housing developments when the City investment is \$20 million or less. (This funding level should increase over time, such as 10% per year.) Cities like Santa Monica and West Hollywood already have delegated their authority to their housing and planning departments when it comes to approving affordable housing developments.

Benefits:

- This would remove a redundant and often lengthy step from the building process.
- The City would rely on the expertise of its trained HCID professionals who focus daily on the requirements and standards of building housing in Los Angeles.
- Building affordable housing will be faster—and will save the City money.
- And since time is money, this will also make building affordable housing cheaper in Los Angeles.

Site Plan Approval

Background: In the City of Los Angeles, site plan review is required for developments with more than 50 units, an arbitrary threshold. Site plan review can be a lengthy process that adds to the time and cost of building affordable housing.

Proposal: SCANPH proposes that the City Council eliminate site plan review for projects that are 100% affordable housing. We also propose that the City raise the housing unit threshold that triggers site plan review to 100 units for projects that are at least 50% affordable. In addition, affordable housing should have a by-right entitlement process that can be approved over the counter by Planning as long as the projects meet certain conditions.

Benefits:

- Building affordable housing in LA would be faster and cheaper, overnight.
- This change would cost the City nothing. By getting out of its own way, the City can streamline the process of building affordable housing and make it more efficient.
- This would encourage increased density in communities where it is appropriate, which would allow more people with low incomes to live closer to public transportation and job opportunities.

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2021 Policy Proposals for the City of Los Angeles, continued

Create an Affordable Housing Division

Background: Building housing in Los Angeles often takes a long time, in part because of how long it takes for a project to move through the City's entitlement and building permit approval processes. Affordable housing is in the same queue as market-rate housing, so affordable housing projects have to compete with market rate builders for the attention of the City's dedicated planning professionals.

Proposal: Los Angeles should create an Affordable Housing Division within Los Angeles City Planning. This Division would be dedicated solely to processing entitlements and environmental approvals for affordable housing projects.

LA's Affordable Housing Division should have CEQA/environmental expertise. Projects with at least 50% homeless units would be moved automatically to the top of the workload.

Benefits:

- Affordable housing in Los Angeles will have its own path to entitlement.
- By putting 50% homeless projects at the front of the line, those projects will move faster and builders will be encouraged to build more projects specifically for the unhoused.
- LA needs more affordable housing as soon as possible. By creating an Affordable Housing Division, the City will meet this moment's challenge by prioritizing and fast-tracking affordable housing. ■

The mission of the Southern California Association of NonProfit Housing (SCANPH) is to facilitate affordable housing development across Southern California by advancing effective public policies, sustainable financial resources, strong member organizations, and beneficial partnerships. For more information, contact Frank Martinez, Policy Director, at FMartinez@scanph.org.