



Affordable housing hot topic at council

Inclusionary zoning would force developers to learn 'how to share'

By Kelly Rayburn, STAFF WRITER

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OAKLAND — The City Council took no vote on a host of proposed affordable-housing policies Tuesday, but its members were nearly unanimous in saying a compromise may be close at hand.

The city has been struggling with the affordable-housing debate for months, with advocates for aggressive new policies pitted against those who say too much too soon would hurt the developers the city relies on to provide housing for people of all income levels.

"I believe we are close," said council President Ignacio De La Fuente (Glenview-Fruitvale). "I believe there are a lot of proposals that are very, very close. I believe that refining those proposals and reaching some kind of compromise to bring it back is the only way we're going to be able to do this."

The council is grappling with a number of proposals that run the gamut from stricter rent control, spending more redevelopment money on housing, and placing a massive housing bond before city voters.

But two particular issues draw almost all the controversy. The first is a concept called inclusionary zoning, where developers are forced to include a certain percentage of affordable units in their projects. The second is what the city's policy on apartment-to-condominium conversions

should be.

Council members said they will work on resolving their differing opinions on the various proposals. The council could vote on a plan within the next several months, if not sooner.

If the council does not resolve its differences soon, housing activists may try to collect enough signatures to put an affordable-housing ballot measure before voters.

"If we don't do this, I wouldn't blame people for taking it to the ballot," said Councilmember Jean Quan (Montclair-Laurel). "And we're still living with some pretty bad legislation that came from the ballot."

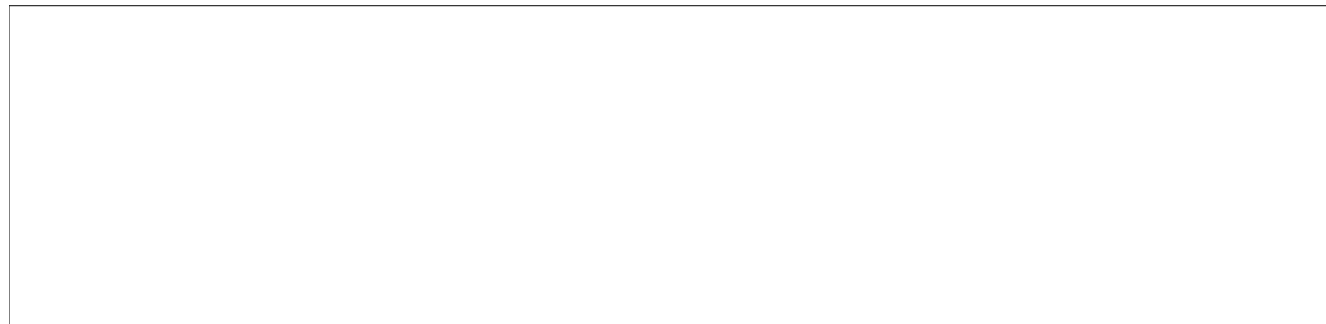
She mentioned California's Proposition 13 in particular. The 1978 ballot measure put a cap on property taxes, and many government officials say the measure severely restricted funds for municipal programs.

The housing debate always draws throngs of people to City Hall and Tuesday's meeting was no different. Some 103 people filled out cards to speak during the meeting period allotted to public comment.

James Vann of the Oakland Tenants Union praised Mayor Ron Dellums for his repeated statements that the city has the obligation to ensure people who currently live in Oakland aren't priced out. "Nobody has voiced that objective in 28 years," Vann said. "In 28 years, all policies on housing in this city have been dictated and driven by developers and it's time for that to stop."

Comments from people on both sides of the issue were often met with bursts of applause. At one point, some in attendance broke out with the chant,

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"Housing is a human right, housing is a human right!"

Carlos Plazola, a former De La Fuente aide who now runs Terra Linda Development, said the goals on both sides were not that far apart.

"The issue — the failure is, we started with the most divisive issue out front," he said, referring to inclusionary zoning, adding, "The reason it's divisive is it's based on the politics of punishment."

Councilmember Nancy Nadel (Downtown-West Oakland) took issue with the idea that requiring developers to include affordable units in their projects is "punishment."

"Inclusionary zoning is not punishment," she said. "It's an example of what we teach our children: how to share."

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