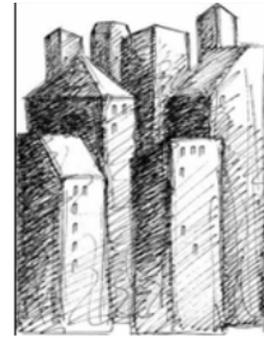


(The following letter appeared in the Voices section of the Santa Barbara News Press on Sunday, October 24, 2010, and is posted by permission.)

## **WHAT'S THE PLAN? Santa Barbara City Council just a vote away from higher density if General Plan update is approved as it currently stands**



Cathie McCammon

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Allied Neighborhoods Association, representing a number of city neighborhoods, has been following Plan Santa Barbara for the last six years. Make no mistake, this plan will affect you and every resident of our city.



What is our immediate concern? The answer is simple. The city is attempting to force increased density on us. Increasing our current density is just a vote away.

The City Council will be meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday to vote to approve the General Plan Update, which will serve as the blueprint for our future for the next 20 years. Council members will be considering a plan that contains dramatic increases in the intensity of development.

Allied is urging the council not to accept the proposed high-density hybrid for Plan Santa Barbara. Allied urges readers to call, e-mail and write the City Council members now to tell them we do not need to increase density or change the zoning.

We want to keep our traditional slow growth and live within our existing resources. We want to keep the character of our city and not end up looking like Santa Monica. We don't want our historic resources to be threatened and dwarfed by big, bulky buildings.

What has happened is that the City Planning Commission (with the exception of former Mayor Sheila Lodge ) already has approved an up-zoning (density increase), of up to 45 units per acre for the base zoning. This means more than doubling the number of units in multi-family projects.

Allied supports the current zoning, which allows 12-25 units per acre.

However, the situation only gets worse with additional proposed incentives for even more units. Rental and projects built by employers for employees are to be allowed a 50

percent density increase. The city's own reports show this would permit up to 68 units per acre. Allied opposes 68 units per acre as too high a density for Santa Barbara.

On top of this, there are even more incentives for adding more density contained in the city's Affordable Housing Policies and Procedures. For example, depending on economic conditions, the city could require additional inclusionary bonus units. Plan Santa Barbara would add another 10 percent to the existing 15 percent increase required now for "workforce affordable" units. Workforce affordable housing is defined as housing for those earning approximately \$120,000 per year.

If you are getting confused by all of these numbers, you are not alone. Allied has continually asked what is the actual number of units that can be built if a developer chooses to use all of the available incentives. Satisfactory answers have not been forthcoming.

We also question just how big and bulky these new projects could be. We think this is an important question and we have not been given satisfactory answers.

City staff and the Planning Commission say not to worry, that the units in these high-density projects will be smaller. These units are referred to as "affordable by design."

We also are told these new units will result in less congestion because the occupants will have fewer cars than what is currently the case and so less land will be devoted to parking. Parking for these units will be "unbundled," which means residents will have to buy their parking spaces separately from the cost of their units.

We think the possibility is high that there will be unintended consequences of these proposed policies. Rather than lessen congestion, they may create even more as people drive around looking for on-street parking.

Where these units will be located also is unclear. Downtown? Milpas Street? Upper State Street? The industrial area? We don't know. The Planning Commission has looked at six different iterations of the potential development map.

Allied is concerned that higher density along with some of the other policies being proposed will result in a drastically changed character for Santa Barbara.

Tourism is the No. 1 source of funding for our economy. People come here because we have a unique city. Santa Barbara is known worldwide for its historic character. Will people still want to come if our historic resources are overwhelmed by high-density superstructures? Will they like even more congestion and fewer parking options?

We are not opposed to affordable housing. Current zoning already allows for award-winning affordable projects like Garden Court and Casa de la Fuentes. These projects show that our existing policies work.

We believe that many of the proposed changes in Plan Santa Barbara, while purporting to produce more affordable housing, will not do so. There is no guarantee of affordability with many of the proposed changes.

What exactly does "affordable by design" mean? Smaller does not necessarily equate with cheaper in an area like Santa Barbara that attracts residents from all over the world. What we see is an attempt to allow private developers to squeeze too many units into a limited land area with limited resources.

While we believe that density is a key issue, there are many more issues and proposed policies we are concerned about. Many of these will have negative impacts on our city, our neighborhoods and our residents.

Allowing reduced standards for second dwelling units ("granny units") will affect our single-family neighborhoods. Allowing an increase in the acceptable level of noise for outdoor living space and building closer to Highway 101 than state law recommends will reduce the quality of life for our residents.

We are not opposed to some changes to update Santa Barbara's General Plan, but they should be focused changes, not a complete transformation.

Over-building will result in Santa Barbara becoming like many other crowded cities. We do not have the land, water or road capacity to supply housing for everyone who wants to live here. We need to retain the very qualities that make Santa Barbara a livable community.

We urge readers to check out Plan Santa Barbara's website and the City Council agenda staff report on Plan Santa Barbara. See for yourself what is being proposed. Now is the time for residents to speak out if they don't like what they see and say: Stop, don't ruin our city. It is up to each of us to protect our city's future.

The author is president of Allied Neighborhoods Association.