



January 18, 2023
General Public Comment

Caltrans Properties Present a Remarkable Opportunity for Affordable Housing



Amid the housing crisis, we urge the City to redevelop vacant, decrepit Caltrans properties into affordable housing instead of turning them over to private owners.

The State has given South Pasadena a historic opportunity to add affordable housing to its neighborhoods. Under State law, the City gets to buy at least 20 vacant Caltrans properties at the very low prices Caltrans paid in the 1960s (think: under six-figures). In exchange, the State law requires that the City facilitate their conversion to housing affordable to low- and moderate-income renters and buyers. This new affordable housing stock will benefit rent-burdened low- and moderate-income South Pasadenans, workers in the South Pasadena economy like teachers, public servants, and retail employees, young people just starting their careers, and seniors who live on fixed incomes, among many others.

There are seven (7) historic properties and 13 non-historic properties located throughout the City. Under State law, non-historic properties cannot be sold at market rates, and must remain affordable for the next 45 to 55 years (depending on whether they are rented or owned). The City is allowed to sell the seven (7) historic properties to private buyers at market rates, so long as it builds three (3) affordable units for each house within its borders.

Some City Council Members and 710 freeway fighters have advocated a position that would violate State law. They want South Pasadena to buy and sell all 20 vacant Caltrans homes to private owners, kicking the can down the road as to development of new affordable housing later.

We urge the leadership of our City to embrace, not rebuke, the opportunity presented by the vacant Caltrans houses. Their conversion to affordable housing is an opportunity to:

- Create income-diverse neighborhoods;
- Increase the racial and ethnic diversity of our City and schools;
- Further fair housing by integrating affordable housing rather than concentrating it along transit corridors;
- Add density to residential areas to meet environmental and housing goals;
- Create a broader sales tax base;
- Add to the vibrancy, resilience and dynamism of South Pasadena.

The City should explore innovative options for using vacant and historic Caltrans properties to expand affordable, such as:

- Redeveloping the lots into duplexes, triplexes, and quads;
- Dividing lots into smaller parcels for redevelopment in furtherance of recent State law changes;
- Creating ADUs or Single-Room Occupancy units; and
- Creating both affordable rentals and ownership opportunities for condominiums or cooperatives.

For too long, South Pasadena has privileged single-family houses over multifamily housing – part of a long-held pattern that has locked low-income people and people of color out. It is time for South Pasadena to be part of the solution to the region’s related crises of skyrocketing housing costs, homelessness, and overcrowding.

Signed,

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