

The Housing Solutions Group at CLU

By Matthew Fienup, Ph.D.

When it comes to housing in Ventura County, there is more common ground among individuals and interest groups than is usually understood. For one thing, there is universal appreciation for the beautiful natural environment and unique quality of life that has set Ventura County apart. At the same time, there is broad consensus that a [lack of housing](#) is causing [worrisome economic decline](#) in the region. The long term economic vitality of Ventura County depends upon adequate housing.

Common ground is a powerful incubator for new ideas and innovative solutions.

That's the premise of the Housing Solutions Working Group, a diverse group of stakeholders who have been meeting at California Lutheran University since mid-2017, to tackle the housing shortage head-on.

Members of the working group represent nearly the full political and economic spectrum of our County: advocates for housing of every kind (affordable, farm-worker, and workforce or market-rate housing), economic development groups, large employers (including two of the largest employers in the county), agricultural operators, individuals from the County's two major Universities, labor unions, social justice advocates, and even a prominent open-space conservation organization. In the words of one of our members, the members of our group "are not the usual suspects."

The goal of this diverse working group is to advocate for housing in a manner that is consistent with our shared values. In particular, the group is working to:

- Identify and implement creative solutions that are being used elsewhere, which can be implemented in Ventura County under existing land use policy
- Advocate for local policy changes that facilitate infill development and other reasonable new construction while maintaining open space and farmland



Following more than 6 months of work by the members of the working group, a couple of policy tools have emerged which hold real promise for Ventura County. Among the creative solutions that the group is currently pursuing are the use of a Community Housing Land Trust (following the model of Sonoma County) and implementation of transferrable development rights (following the model of Churchill County, Nevada and Naval Air Station Fallon). Each policy is already at work and creating value in other parts of the country. These are tools with a track record of creating value in communities struggling to balance growth and conservation. The beauty for our region is that we don't have to reinvent the wheel.



For more information about Community Housing Land Trusts, please read the following article by Steve Dwyer, which treats the topic in some detail. For more information about transferable development rights, please see [this article](#) in *Central Coast Farm & Ranch*.



To be clear, the Housing Solutions Group does not meet to merely *talk about* housing solutions. We are implementing these tools. A housing-related Community Land Trust (CLT) is in the works and we hope to have our first demonstration project slated within the next few months. Out of the working group, seeds have been

planted for a unique, formal partnership between the Ventura Land Trust (formerly the Ventura Hillsides Conservancy) and Naval Base Ventura County to support implementation of transferrable development rights (TDRs) using the Navy's Readiness & Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program. We are seeking to use the REPI program as a foundation for building a broader regional strategy that balances growth with permanent preservation of farmland and sensitive habitat. Both the CLT and the TDRs represent a policy breakthrough that is made possible in part because of the diverse range of interests, skills and expertise assembled in the Housing Solutions group.



The Housing Solutions group is also committed to creating a common voice that can be called upon when elected officials and other policy makers need a base of community support in order to approve reasonable housing policies and thoughtful, high quality housing projects.

The Housing Solutions group made its voice heard at a recent meeting of the Thousand Oaks City Council. As you can read about in the Measure E article below, Thousand Oaks City staff, at the direction of the City Council, developed a plan to shift approximately one thousand units of potential housing density away from certain areas in the City in anticipation of increased density in other areas. Of particular interest is concentrating any future development close to the 101-Freeway artery, a move consistent with the area's smart-growth principles. In early January, the decision to initiate the necessary General Plan amendments came before the City Council. For the first time in memory, the number of public speakers in support of staff's recommendation to increase the number of residential units available for development was greater than the number of speakers who opposed. Due in large part to the Housing Solutions group, supporters outnumbered the opposition 2 to 1.

Looking ahead, we are hoping to expand both the membership of the Housing Solutions Working Group and the slate of ideas that the group is working to implement. To get more information about the work of the group and about joining, please contact mfienup@callutheran.edu. We are excited to build upon the considerable common ground that is already proving to be the group's strength.



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