



SB 634 – ‘Opportunity’ Housing

SUMMARY

SB 634 defines “Opportunity Housing” as housing that is relocatable, non-congregate, and reserved for households making below 50% Area Median Income (AMI) including people experiencing homelessness. The law will clarify and expand existing laws to provide that Opportunity Housing (“OH”) meets existing building code standards for temporary housing, provides by-right provisions, and makes available vacant public land without demonstrable uses within 5 years. SB 634 also tasks the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) with reviewing health, safety and fire standards to ensure high quality OH and reduce unnecessary construction costs.

BACKGROUND

California has fewer housing units which are affordable and available to households earning below 50 percent of AMI and the highest rate of unsheltered homelessness in the United States. Despite concerted efforts to increase housing production, California’s budget, land, and zoning limitations inhibit sufficient permanent housing construction in the near term while an estimated 45,000 housing vouchers are going unused each year leaving federal resources on the table. As a consequence, California’s homeless population of 115,000 people experiencing homelessness will continue to grow without a radical change in the way we approach housing production.

As California rightfully invests in more permanent affordable and supportive housing, an innovative approach to sheltering people experiencing homelessness has been gaining momentum: non-permanent housing communities built on vacant land using emergency building codes, or “Opportunity Housing.” This burgeoning new solution is cost-effective, rapid, and scalable. To date it has primarily been used as non-congregate shelter, yet OH is equally applicable for acutely low-income housing. This model could provide a rapid, cost-effective way to immediately address homelessness and broader low-income housing needs while more housing is under construction.

PROBLEM

There is a massive amount of vacant public and private land that sits idle as it either has no planned use within the next five years or is unsuitable for permanent housing construction. While land sits idle, it is a squandered resource that could be converted into what our state desperately needs: more low-income housing. Further, California has almost 45,000 unused housing vouchers that are being wasted due to insufficient numbers of affordable housing units and landlords unwilling to accept them.

California needs a cost effective, rapid solution to put a roof over the heads of our unsheltered neighbors in a safe, secure and locking unit while permanent affordable housing is under construction.

SOLUTION

SB 634 would encourage the development of Opportunity Housing by defining OH and clarifying and expanding existing laws pertaining to its development. The bill will define Opportunity Housing as housing that:

- Is not permanently affixed to the parcel and is relocatable;
- Is non-congregate;
- Is reserved for target populations, including very low income households and people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;

SB 634 creates a use by-right to develop Opportunity Housing in all zones and allows Opportunity Housing developments to use the California Building Code Appendix P regardless of a declaration of a housing crisis. Further, it makes available excess public land that does not have demonstrable uses within the next 5 years. The bill also requires this type of housing to meet standards provided in California Building Code Appendix P, allowing the housing to be built faster and cheaper. SB 634 requires HCD to explore possible changes to Appendix P to reduce unnecessary construction

costs while ensuring Opportunity Housing is built to high quality standards. By doing so, SB 634 will make productive use of land that would otherwise sit vacant as our neighbors live on the streets. The longer people languish on the streets, the less likely it is they'll be able to return to self-sufficiency. With the development of Opportunity Housing, we finally can rapidly and cost effectively build the massive amounts of low-income housing our state desperately needs, while providing dignity for those most in need.

SUPPORT

Bay Area Counsel (Co-Sponsor)
Dignity Moves (Co-Sponsor)
SPUR (Co-Sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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