

East Bay housing groups plan cost, climate moves

Carolyn Said, San Francisco Chronicle, 5-15-10

Facing mandates that they may no longer have the resources to meet, East Bay housing groups gathered this week to discuss how to reach new goals for affordable housing and climate change, even though the state has just raided their funding.

As part of Affordable Housing Week, several dozen representatives from nonprofits, government agencies and developers met at Berkeley's David Brower Center on Thursday to focus on a new law that could buttress their work and a funding loss that could undermine it, against the backdrop of a crippling economic recession.

On the one hand, SB375, a sweeping law that limits suburban sprawl as a way to combat global warming, encourages creative new approaches to land-use planning and transit-oriented development, something the housing advocates embrace.

Signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in fall of 2008, the legislation encourages infill growth near public transit to reduce Californians' car dependency and thus their greenhouse gas emissions. The law will be phased in over many years, but this year regional agencies must start setting goals for meeting it.

On a far less positive note, on Monday, redevelopment agencies throughout California reluctantly ponied up a total of \$1.7 billion -

35 percent of redevelopment funds - to help the state fill its budget gap, after losing a lawsuit protesting the transfer. Redevelopment funds are a primary funding source for affordable housing.

Fighting fund transfer

The agencies have appealed the court ruling, in a battle that could wind up in the U.S. Supreme Court.

"We are still confident we'll ultimately prevail," said James Kennedy, redevelopment director for Contra Costa County and president of the California Redevelopment Association, which is spearheading the appeal. "But if we don't, redevelopment as we know it in California as a resource to implementing affordable-housing mandates and projects, and for implementing smart-growth and SB375-style projects, will be nonexistent. The state will take every nickel we have if they get away with it."

Besides their litigation challenging the state, agencies are backing a November ballot initiative, Save Local Services (www.savelocalservices.com) that would preclude California from taking or borrowing local taxpayer funds in the future.

"We need to protect redevelopment resources," said Amie Fishman, executive director of East Bay Housing Organizations, which promotes affordable housing in Alameda and Contra Costa counties and co-sponsored the event. "Every dollar from redevelopment funds leverages \$3 or more in outside funding from state and federal sources that would not otherwise come into communities for housing people and providing services and amenities. By taking away local jurisdictions' ability to put in that local match, you deprive them of being able to leverage their dollars with that multiplier effect."

Climate concerns

As for SB375, affordable-housing proponents said they'd already been meeting many of its goals - in other words, they were green before it was cool.

"Urban infill is something nonprofits have been on the forefront of for many years before it became fashionable," said Susan Friedland, executive director of Affordable Housing Associates, which builds or rehabilitates low-income housing in the East Bay. "It's always been part of our mission."

SB375 will shift a big chunk of the region's planned future housing from the suburbs to the core, said Jeffrey Levin, housing policy and programs manager for Oakland. San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland will now be responsible for 38 percent of future allocation, up from 26 percent, he said.

"If we don't do this, we'll end up with more and more sprawl and more 'drive until you qualify,' " he said, referring to the mantra of workers seeking affordable housing far from job centers.