



SOCIAL POLICY FORUM

What is it? » We've asked experts in Southern California for their idea on how to solve some of the biggest problems facing our region. For more responses, check out socialpolicy.org.

Homelessness

What about people with records and the mentally ill?

Create opportunities for integration of formerly incarcerated

By Gregory Bradbard

Clearly, additional resources and policies changes are needed to open the door to new opportunities for those previously incarcerated. Both landlords and employers are legally able to discriminate against those with certain criminal records.

As a result, individuals who have served their time and return to society wanting to create a new future for themselves often have little option but to return to the same neighborhoods and illicit activities that will welcome them back.

In contrast, the creation of a new path requires safe, accessible housing and employers willing to embrace these individuals as they take the first steps toward building a new future.

Additionally, nonprofit and government services that can help to prepare this population for their re-entry into society and create a seamless transition to housing, jobs and support services is absolutely essential.

Gregory Bradbard is president of the Hope Through Housing Foundation.

Reform the Lanterman Act to help the severely mentally ill

By Janice Rutherford

It's time to revise the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act, adopted in the 1960s in response to the climbing rate of involuntary institutionalizations of mentally ill individuals.

This law made it more difficult to force mentally ill people into treatment they say they don't want, but its unintended consequence has been to push many of those individuals into our jails and prisons and ultimately onto the streets.

We can help fix this by broadening the definition of "gravely disabled" — the standard set for involuntary institutionalization.

We need to continue respecting patients' rights, but at the same time, we can't close our eyes and allow people suffering from severe mental illness to waste away on our streets.

They need professional behavioral health services and wrap-around social services in supported housing.

In San Bernardino County, we are also adding employment services to help those who are more stable with their mental health to become more self-sufficient.

Janice Rutherford serves on the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors.

Families and communities must step up

By Rusty Bailey

Previously incarcerated individuals who are now in homeless circumstances continue to be a challenge for us as a city.

In the last point-in-time count we found over 27% of neighbors without homes were previously incarcerated. At the heart of the challenge, I believe, is what happens once these individuals are released from prison and back into our communities.

If their families or friends don't accept them back into their homes, they immediately become homeless. And when we fail to adequately prepare these individuals with the ability to reintegrate into society with job training, interview skills, a viable place for them to live and substantive rehabilitation, then unfortunately, not only are we allowing for them to face immediate homelessness, but with the failure of a warm hand-off, we are creating a situation where they will remain homeless as they fall back into their old ways.

Much policy work has been done to address those who are incarcerated but more work needs to be done to address how we reintegrate these individuals back into communities.

Rusty Bailey is mayor of Riverside.



FILE PHOTO: RICHARD VOGEL — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this May 30, 2019 file photo, tents housing homeless line a street in downtown Los Angeles.

Treat people before they become homeless

By Robert Ross

The civic conversation on homelessness is missing one key, critical element: our society

and our region are manufacturing homeless persons faster than our ability to house them.

The city of Los Angeles and L.A. County managed to newly house more homeless persons last year since these counts have been documented; but the number of people on the streets rose significantly anyway.

We will need to focus more intently on "going upstream" with our homelessness strategies: expanded community-based mental health supports and drug treatment, wrap-around services for foster care youth "aging out" of the system, and careful, coordinated discharge planning services for people released from

jail — too many newly released persons from county jails are being released right into homelessness.

We have got to pinch the homelessness pipeline upstream.

Robert K. Ross is president and CEO of The California Endowment.

Recognize that homelessness has various causes

By Susan Shelley

What's missing is a disaggregation of the "homelessness" problem into distinct categories with unique causes.

In the 1960s, California adopted the Lanterman-Petris-

Short Act, which provided for the involuntary commitment and treatment of a person who is a danger to himself or herself or others or who is gravely disabled.

The definition of "gravely disabled" included being unable to provide for the basic personal needs for food, clothing or shelter. Disabling mental illness must be recognized and people must be helped, not cynically used as a justification for

wasteful tax increases or proposed public works projects.

The problem of substance abuse cannot be helped by enabling addicts to conceal themselves in tents on the streets and other public spaces. Before any public, private or nonprofit entity can help, that option has to be withdrawn.

To the extent that people are on the streets solely because they can't afford to live anywhere, a combination of

housing assistance and job opportunities is the rational solution, and because job opportunities come from businesses, it would be helpful for state policies to encourage hiring and to create the conditions that allow businesses to succeed in California.

Susan Shelley is a columnist and editorial writer with the Southern California News Group.

Deal with the downsides of criminal justice reforms

By Mike Morrell

Since 2011, Democratic leaders in Sacramento have pushed changes onto the justice system that have let an

estimated 60,000 felons out of prisons and jails and into our communities.

Many of these individuals leave custody struggling with mental health challenges and substance abuse. With these early releases, the state lacks adequate tools to connect them with treatment and services. Additionally, many refuse help or shelter when they are forced to stop drug use — and as a result, end up back on the streets where they continue their drug use.

Previously, many offenders could be offered the option to either enroll in treat-

ment or spend time in jail for their crimes, but the reduction of certain crimes under Proposition 47 to misdemeanors, such as theft of up to \$950 in private property or felony drug possession, limits those interactions. A police chief in my Senate district shared with me that one individual has been in and out at least 40 times.

Essentially, they get a ticket for each offense and the system becomes a revolving door with no consequences and with little hope of stopping the cycle —

which needs to happen to improve both the lives of these individuals and the safety of our communities.

I would argue that many of my Democratic colleagues likely hear similar concerns from their local officials. It will take an honest assessment of these circumstances and the consequences of laws passed over the last decade if California is to begin changing course in this area.

Mike Morrell serves in the California state Senate.

Address mental health and addiction, but build affordable housing too

By Manuel Pastor

Certainly, part of the homeless problem is connected to

mental health, addiction and other issues, and that requires specialized efforts, including supportive housing that can connect people with services. But some of those problems are actually exacerbated by spells of housing instability and the data suggest that there are increasingly num-

bers of the homeless for whom economic drivers are the main factor.

So while we need to address the chronic homeless, we need to build affordable housing, expand rent stabilization ordinances (including anti-eviction protections) and insure that the positive developments

from our local investments in rail do not result in gentrification and displacement that will worsen our problems.

Manuel Pastor is a professor at the University of Southern California. He directs the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity.



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Housing

What do local governments need to do?

Understand value of affordable housing

By Alan Greenlee

California is experiencing a housing affordability crisis as we face a staggering deficit of 1.4 million homes that are affordable to low-income Californians.

Undeniable contributors to this deficit are the long-standing and deliberate slow growth strategies that have stifled home production state-wide over the last 40 years.

We collectively — community by community — dug ourselves into a hole, i.e. a massive deficit of supply, and both the public and our corresponding representatives in local and state government share the blame for restricting housing production.

Many such policies are imposed by local governments in the name of preserving community character, which has inevitably led to criticism of local land-use control. But we cannot forget that government intervention also can positively spur development.

Government's role through market interventions can be devised to meet local sensibilities while still increasing residential development in locations that can handle additional density, such as transit-rich areas.

We can hold local governments accountable and still preserve aspects of local control that allow communities to stay true to their needs and unique circumstances.

Moving forward, a shared sense of responsibility can facilitate cooperation on housing production and thwart blatant failures to plan or zone for housing.

Local control should continue to be fairly scrutinized as a deterrent on production and we should not shy away from policy measures that propose punitive and/or incentive-based approaches to facilitating development.

The stakes are too high to take local control off the table.

It's worth reminding all stakeholders involved that affordable housing is a public asset that reflects a strong partnership between the public sector and developers like SCANPH members; we invest in and operate housing developments for our communities because collectively we understand that it serves the public interest to have safe, stable homes that are affordable to lower-income people; therefore, there is a mutually cooperative relationship between the government's responsibility to facilitate these affordable homes and developers' capacity to build them, as we are partners in meeting this societal need and creating vibrant communities.

Alan Greenlee is executive director of the Southern California Association of Nonprofit Housing (SCANPH).

Focus on building out, not up

By Joel Kotkin

No doubt some local governments have reflected anti-development bias.

But the real solution is not one that should come from edicts from Sacramento.

Housing production needs to be focused on areas outside the urban periphery, where prices tend to be lower, and also take advantage of such things as the coming tsunami of redundant retail.

Conversations with local leaders suggest changes both in the ever-mounting regulatory requirements and tax reform that might allow cities to garner benefit from new housing.

Right now they depend mostly on retail sales and often regard new housing as a cost rather than a benefit.

Joel Kotkin is the R.C. Hobbs Presidential Fellow in Urban Futures at Chapman University in Orange and executive director of the Houston-based Center for Opportunity Urbanism (www.opportunityurbanism.org).



STAFF FILE PHOTO—THE SUN/SCNG

Respecting property rights is key

By Adam Summers

I think most people can sympathize with those who oppose new developments to “preserve the character of the community.” After all, they got in when housing was more affordable, land was more plentiful and there were fewer people around, and they understandably want to maintain the good deal they got.

But it is a misnomer when

these antidevelopment activists are described as NIMBYs (not-in-my-backyard types), for it is not just their backyards they want to control, but everyone else's as well. If someone has acquired his property legally, whether a homeowner in a single-family home or a housing developer with a large tract of land for a proposed development, he should generally be able to do with it as he pleases, so long as he does not cause actual harm by creating a nuisance (i.e., putting a manufacturing plant spewing noxious chemicals in the middle of a residential neighborhood).

The “I got mine, and to heck with everyone else who may come afterwards” attitude is not only grossly unfair, it is a violation of private property rights. You do not get to protect your property rights while violating someone else's. At least, that is the way it should work. But too many local governments have imposed zoning and other restrictions that have infringed upon property rights and severely stifled housing development, thus substantially increasing housing prices and pricing many out of neighborhoods or even entire cities.

Neighborhoods change all the time, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. But just as we cannot force businesses and residents to move in and revitalize deteriorating communities, we should not be able to prevent people from coming to thriving communities.

Eliminating government restrictions and respecting the property rights of all is the best way to satisfy the wants and needs of everyone.

Adam Summers is a research fellow at the Independent Institute.

Streamline building processes

By Mike Morrell

Local governments should have discretion to work with residents on enacting housing and development policies that consider a range of factors, one of which could be preserving community character.

Many cities exercise too much control, making the approval process unnecessarily tedious

and enacting fee structures that are prohibitive to building.

In some parts of the state, local permitting fees can add as much as \$150,000 to the price of a home before it is even built.

While nationally, the trend has been to see these fees decrease, in California they rose 2.5 percent between 2008 and 2015. These costs make housing more expensive and get passed onto builders and homebuyers.

In light of the recent attention on the housing shortage, it would be preferable to see local governments take initiative

to reassess their internal policies on their own — weighing the merits of each to determine if they prevent more housing from being built altogether or put housing that does get built out-of-reach price wise for many buyers.

One piece of the problem that should be addressed at the state level is abuse of state environmental laws. They can delay projects as much as three to seven years. On average, a three-year delay could add \$67,000 to a home's price with a seven-year delay adding over

\$200,000.

A bill I authored, Senate Bill 384, would streamline the judicial review part of the litigation process involving new housing developments. It is similar to laws enacted in recent years to pave the way for building of new sports arenas. Despite the governor's claim in his 2018 State of the State Address that he wants to see the state enact such a law, Democrats in the Senate blocked its passage.

Mike Morrell serves in the California State Senate.

Don't trample over local control

By Greg Devereaux

There are many reasons that more housing isn't being built in the state — the abuse of CEQA, market economics, the lack of middle-income jobs that pay enough to support mortgages, development impact fees that were an unanticipated consequence of Proposition 13,

state laws and policies that discourage building up instead of out, added costs from requirements such as solar on every home, and the lack of enough skilled construction workers, just to name a few.

Our approach to governance in this country is based, in large part, on the precept of local control and the ability of people in defined geographic areas to decide, through the ballot box, to form cities or petition the states to form counties.

The people who do so in order to have greater control of the resources, services and land uses in those areas. Taking that right away from them is not the answer.

If we want more housing built in the state I would suggest that, instead of trying to regulate it into existence, the Legislature should incentivize local jurisdictions by providing them with a portion of the state income tax paid by the people who live or work in their communities.

Much as the reduction in property taxes brought about by the passage of Proposition 13 put local jurisdictions in the sales-tax business, resulting in what has been referred to as “cash-box” zoning, a share of the income tax would prompt them to put efforts into zoning and actions that would support the creation of housing and jobs.

Greg Devereaux previously served as CEO of San Bernardino County.

Reduce local barriers, costs to build

By Lucy Dunn

Local elected officials are representing the views of their community — most of whom al-

ready have their homes. But the bigger “local control” issue for builders is housing fees which can add \$200,000 or more to the price of a home — fees for inspections, parks, art in public places, affordable housing, stormwater, studies, numerous programs cities don't have funding for, and for any ameni-

ties above and beyond what a development might need.

The “sticks and bricks” to build a home are the same for the most part — be it Texas or California — but the fees and delays in building can double the price of a California home.

If a builder has to meet company financial goals, they'll

choose another state over California to build their product.

Cities need to reduce fees, plan for and zone property to accommodate growth, and allow for building in areas zoned.

Lucy Dunn is president and CEO of the Orange County Business Council.