



SOCIAL POLICY FORUM

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

Homelessness

What needs to be done about homelessness?

Stop pointing fingers, build needed shelter

By Carolyn Cavecche

The increase of the homeless populations in cities all across Southern California has become a crisis for taxpayers across the region.

Access to public property, sidewalks, parks, trails, public centers is being denied due to legitimate safety and health concerns. This is tantamount to a taking of property from a property owner, in this case the taxpayers.

Over a decade ago the California State Legislature passed Senate Bill 2. It requires cities to identify in their housing element a zone or zones where emergency shelters are allowed as permitted use without a conditional use permit or other discretionary permit. Every city in Southern California has an area where an emergency shelter can be built. The state of California needs to get serious about enforcing the law that they passed and holding cities' feet to the fire. Cities need to stop pointing fingers at each other and build the required SB2 shelter.

Carolyn Cavecche is CEO and president of the Orange County Taxpayers Association.

We need to address homelessness among college students

By Judy Belk

One under-reported aspect is the number of homeless young people who are attending college in our region — at community colleges and Cal State campuses, even the UCs. It's remarkable to imagine how they balance classroom assignments on top of the burdens that come with living without steady housing. Having to arrive on campus early to use a gym shower; hoping to make a connection with someone who may let them sleep in an office instead of a car.

Yet we need them to succeed in higher education if our region is to thrive. We need educated, trained or certified young people for the jobs that drive our economic growth and provide the services we all depend on. Like health care.

Fortunately, there are successful model programs that are helping young people maintain housing and stay in school. Some are designed especially for young people who have spent time in foster care. Think about it.

Without access to year-round housing, if you've been emancipated from the foster care system, where would you turn when the dorms close for breaks? At UC Riverside's Office of Foster Youth Support Services, help with housing is just part of the assistance that's offered to help these young people thrive on campus.

Los Angeles-based Jovenes, through its College Success Initiative, offers a case-managed supportive housing program for homeless and foster youth enrolled at community colleges in East and South Los Angeles.

The California Wellness Foundation proudly supports the Office of Foster Youth Support Services, Jovenes and others. But private sector contributions from the philanthropic or corporate sectors aren't enough. Our resources alone will never be able to meet the need.

The public sector needs to step up. We will all benefit from the contributions these young people will make to our region. I've met them. They are motivated. They want to create change and to contribute to the health and wellness of their communities. We all should be investing in their future — because ours depends on it.

Judy Belk is president and CEO of the California Wellness Foundation.



FILE PHOTO: RICHARD VOGEL — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this May 30, 2019 file photo a homeless man walks along a street lined with trash in downtown Los Angeles.

We need local volunteers to step up

By Mike Soubirous

Society must first admit that chronic homelessness is mostly due to drug/alcohol abuse.

Many substance users are self-medicating due to past trauma, abuse or situation. A smaller portion of the homeless population is there because they do not take prescribed medications that help mitigate their congenital mental health disorders. They are unable to live a productive lifestyle because they self-medicate. These people need medication assistance/monitoring from county or state mental health departments.

The smallest homeless populations are those who have suffered some form of economic loss and ultimately wound up on the street. This group is fairly easy to help. Most are willing to accept offered services. The other two groups rarely accept offered supportive services. Understanding the truth about how these people ended up on our streets is paramount to mitigating homelessness.

Government has a huge part to play regarding laws, en-

forcement, policies and funding. However, our government cannot adequately provide the time-consuming social based partnering with the chronic homeless population that's sorely needed. There are not enough trained government professionals who can spend quality time with those who are drug addicted and self-medicate to escape past problems or abuse.

Until these affected homeless people develop a long-term trusting relationship with someone, there is little hope in getting the addicted person to accept help.

From their point of view, they have been mistreated, let down or abandoned by many from their past. They need someone to help them through their recovery process. Someone they can partner with. They know they can't do it alone. Our faith-based community, non-profits and other volunteers can be those partners.

We need an army of trained volunteers to mentor our addicted fellow humans who can't cope on their own. Government cannot provide this level of long-term support. Volunteers can.

Mike Soubirous is a member of the Riverside City Council.

Prevent families from falling into homelessness

By Gregory Bradbard

In addition to a focus on reducing today's on-the-street homeless, we also need to pay attention to the thousands of families living in overcrowded housing across Southern California. Families living in converted garages, garden sheds, or packed into a single bedroom present public health issues and other challenges for children.

For families struggling to maintain safe, clean housing, family stressors are elevated. Unstable housing and frequent moves have been shown to increase mental health problems, developmental delays, anxiety, and depression.

So, as we consider the overall housing crisis in our region, we should also be working upstream by ensuring families have adequate housing that equips children for future

health and self-sufficiency, reducing the pipeline of those who ever become homeless.

Although government and the nonprofit sector play a critical role in addressing homelessness and housing affordability, each of us as residents of Southern California need to be open to building quality supportive housing in our neighborhoods. Funding for affordable housing and supportive services is part of the equation, but overcoming community opposition for the development of new housing communities — including multifamily properties — is an essential ingredient to expanding our housing stock.

As local community members, we need to stand up and publicly support the creation of new quality housing that will meet the needs of the homeless who currently call our local sidewalks their home.

Gregory Bradbard is president of the Hope Through Housing Foundation and National CORE's Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships.

Enforce the law, private sector must provide help

By Tom Campbell

There is no constitutional right to camp on a street. Police should remove people who do and take them to locations with toilet, shower, heating and cooling features, and soup kitchens. Liberal cities have been hesitant to take this action out of fear of not ap-

pearing compassionate. However, letting the homeless camp in front of a business or residence is unfair to all who have to pass that way, as well as customers of the businesses and those who live in the residences. Private sector and non-profits can help with drug counseling, providing information on how to obtain skills needed for jobs, sharing information about available jobs, and providing soup kitchens at the centers.

Tom Campbell is a professor at Chapman University.

Remember that many who are homeless are from nearby

By Maria Salinas

What is missing in a lot of the public conversation regarding homelessness is an accurate perception about who these people are and many of the root causes of homelessness.

The most visible faces of homelessness tend to be those suffering from mental health problems and substance abuse, which negatively taints the way in which the general public feels we should be approaching the problem.

There is also the persistent myth that the majority of those on the streets are from elsewhere and choose to be homeless in Los Angeles because of the temperate weather, or are shipped here from other states.

While some are from our neighboring Southern Cal-

ifornia municipalities, a lot of these folks are simply our neighbors who have fallen into rough times.

Through the passage of measures that have dedicated funds to address the crisis, Los Angeles County has moved over 20,000 people into interim housing and approved thousands of additional supportive housing units. Without these resources, our homeless count for Los Angeles County would've been closer to a 28 percent increase, in line with our neighboring counties. The solutions are working, just not fast enough or to scale enough.

The government should stay the course on these proven approaches, while working in partnership with the private and non-profit sectors on housing growth across the board and economic opportunities to stem the tide of the newly homeless.

Maria Salinas is president and CEO of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.

Employment is just as critical as housing

Carrie McKellogg

California has begun to incorporate planning for livelihood-sustaining jobs into discussions of homelessness, but it is still an afterthought in a "housing first" model.

A more explicit set of initiatives are needed to combine jobs (in social enterprise), economic mobility (via education/training (in the workplace or in other settings), and affordable/subsidized housing in a context where subsidize rent is gradually withdrawn rather than a cliff which disincentivizes work.

Working people are able to contribute to their housing expense in an increasing share over time (and with flexibility as income fluctuates) if housing subsidy models can be more dynamic rather than fixed subsidies.

Much like the model of employing affordable housing residents in the upkeep of their properties, a similar social enterprise model could be expanded to involve homeless individuals in the construction of new housing (modular housing, ADUs, new residential development, etc.).

The construction trade represents a career pathway that is adaptable and open to people with barriers (like criminal justice system involvement) that could be scaled up using the apprenticeship model to create a pipeline of individuals with lived experience providing the labor pool for housing construction.

Wages paid represent individuals' ability to pay for an increasing share of their housing costs, as well as avoided costs of incarceration, public assistance, etc.

Carrie McKellogg is Chief Program Officer for the Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF).

Economic opportunity will be key component

By Adam Summers

There is certainly a good deal of overlap between the housing affordability and homelessness crises, particularly here in California, because financial issues are one of the leading causes of homelessness, and housing is typically one's greatest expenditure. But there are a number of other reasons people become homeless — including job loss, substance abuse, mental health issues, physical disabilities and medical emergencies, death of a loved one (particularly a head of household) and other family issues — so it is far from a perfect correlation.

According to San Francisco's 2019 survey of the homeless, for example, the loss of a job was the primary reason for home-

lessness (26 percent), followed by alcohol or drug abuse (18 percent), eviction (13 percent), being kicked out by family or friends (12 percent), and mental health issues (8 percent).

As a result, improving housing affordability (as well as other costs of living and making it easier for people to obtain sound employment) will significantly reduce homelessness, but it will not in itself solve the problem, just as focusing solely on substance abuse and mental health issues will not eliminate it.

This is why homelessness, especially, is such a difficult problem, and why steps must be taken in a number of policy areas — from taxation and regulation to housing to job growth and economic opportunity — to adequately address these issues.

Adam Summers is a Research Fellow at the Independent Institute.



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Housing

How can we solve the housing crisis?

Three hurdles to fixing the housing problem

By Jeff Montejano

Earlier this summer, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a \$214.8 billion state budget that included \$2 billion in new spending to address California's housing and homelessness crisis. While Governor Newsom and the state legislature should be applauded for their efforts, we must also acknowledge that California cannot spend its way out of the housing affordability crisis that has engulfed the state.

There are no quick fixes when it comes to alleviating the state's housing woes. California's housing crisis is the result of decades of legislative and regulatory actions at both the state and local levels which have constrained, and in many instances outright stopped new home construction. If measurable progress on housing affordability is to occur, there are several key legal hurdles which must be overcome.

First and foremost, there needs to be a serious effort by Governor Newsom and the state legislature to mend — not end — the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Signed into law in 1970, CEQA was created to ensure that certain environmental protections were in place with new development projects, such as housing. Despite its original intent, CEQA has evolved from a tool into a trap, ensnaring practically all new housing, regardless of how locally necessary or environmentally friendly.

From senior retirement communities to homeless shelters, hundreds of CEQA lawsuits have crushed sorely needed new housing proposals. CEQA abuse has become so widespread that based on a study by the law firm Holland & Knight, between 2012 — 2015, close to 14,000 housing units in the Southern California region (minus San Diego) were targeted by CEQA lawsuits.

Along with the need to reform CEQA, the state must also make significant changes to prevailing wage requirements for new home construction. Prevailing wage is essentially the average hourly pay for construction work within a specific geographic region, and it applies to a wide variety of trades including carpenters, electricians, and plumbers.

Under state law, home builders are required to pay prevailing wage on most low-income housing developments receiving public financing, thus leading to a substantial increase in costs. A report from the California Homebuilding Foundation found that prevailing wage requirements can mean as much as a 37 percent increase in construction costs, which equates to about \$84,000 for a typical new home.

To avoid adding additional hurdles to housing growth, it's imperative that any new prevailing wage requirement fully recognizes, with metrics, the economic realities of each geographic region throughout the state.

Finally, there needs to be an increased opposition against overly restrictive local land-use laws often adopted as a result of pressure by residents intent on stopping new housing. Approximately two-thirds of cities and counties in the state's coastal metropolitan areas have adopted growth control laws which severely limit new housing opportunities.

In those cases where new housing developments are approved, residents will often seek to curtail new home construction by placing "slow growth" or "no growth" measures on the ballot. Cities including Costa Mesa, Thousand Oaks, and Redondo Beach are among several Southern California municipalities that have passed voter-approved initiatives which effectively limit new housing.

There is only one way out of California's housing crisis, and that's to ensure that home builders can do business in a legislative and regulatory environment where actual construction can take place.

Jeff Montejano serves as CEO of the Building Industry Association of Southern California.



FILE PHOTO: STAN LIM — THE PRESS ENTERPRISE

This file photo from Feb. 13, 2015 shows new homes getting constructed at the Spring Mountain Ranch development in Riverside.

Reform planning processes, encourage private sector innovation

By Gary Painter

Let me start by stating the obvious. The institutions that control housing markets in California are broken, and the pain is widespread. Whether you live in Los Angeles County or in an exurban region like the Coachella Valley, the percentage of people facing rent burden has been increasing over the past decade.

Despite differing housing contexts, it is clear from numerous reports that there is a structural deficit in the number of units of housing available in the state, as housing production has fallen hundreds of thousands of units short of matching population growth. If housing markets were left free to respond to price pressures, this would not happen. However, housing markets are tightly regulated by a variety of planning processes that converge to restrict supply, including zoning and land use regulation.

Approach the issue as a problem of economic justice

By Shane Goldsmith

The issue of housing affordability can be tied directly to economic justice. Liberty Hill recently co-published a report entitled "Priced Out, Pushed Out, Locked Out: How Permanent Tenant Protections Can Help Communities Prevent Homelessness and Displacement in LA County."

This report describes how tenants across unincorporated

Los Angeles County are facing larger rent increases, higher rent burden, and more evictions than ever. With a population greater than one million, more than half of unincorporated L.A. County residents find themselves rent burdened — spending 30% or more of their income on rent. And the problem is growing.

While rents and costs of living have skyrocketed, wages have largely remained flat. Since the year 2000, median rent in L.A. County is up 32% while median renter income is down 3%. To afford the average \$1,791/month "fair market rent" for a two-bedroom apartment in

residential communities.

While there is significant need for public sector reform, the private sector also has a critical role to play in improving our regional housing market.

Two areas where private sector innovation is needed is in construction and in finance. Recently, a number of new models of construction materials have garnered attention as possible ways to make housing development more affordable. These approaches include a process for off-site construction and using alternative materials like shipping containers or 3-D printing. However, these new approaches continue to struggle to achieve the hoped for savings, in part, due to the interactions with outdated planning process.

The USC Price Center for Social Innovation recently produced a case study on Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) models that generate affordable housing units more quickly and economically than constructing new housing units. NOAH models rehabilitate aging units, such as old hotels or dilapidated apartment buildings, and importantly do not rely on government subsidies that tend to lengthen the

development process. To maximize this model, government must work with private developers and philanthropy to stack blended investment (blended finance) to finance these projects will be essential to achieve a healthy housing market.

It is essential to enact a portfolio of interventions to solve our housing crisis, and not focus on a single policy reform. Instead, we must collectively operate in a broader, comprehensive "social innovation framework" in which multiple interventions can be tested simultaneously, generating iterative learnings and catalyzing rapid change across multiple programs and policies affecting housing in the region.

This includes coordinated policies and programs that not only address homelessness and its causes, but also help expand affordable housing and housing for the region's workforce too.

Instead of looking backward to what the housing market was in the past, it is time to plan for the housing market our communities need for the next 50 years.

Gary Painter is a professor in the Sol Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California.

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To afford the average \$1,791/month "fair market rent" for a two-bedroom apartment in

L.A. metro, tenants in unincorporated L.A. County would need nearly three full-time minimum-wage jobs — a 115-hour workweek.

That's why Liberty Hill is standing with tenants unions and activists across the County to urge our Board of Supervisors to enact a permanent rent stabilization ordinance that prevents extreme rent increases and no-fault evictions.

We know addressing our housing crisis long-term will require building more housing. Yet we need immediate relief for families who are struggling right now. Fortunately, our board of supervisors has enacted a temporary rent freeze

and will consider a permanent policy this September.

Additionally, in more than seven other cities throughout L.A. County, tenant activists and organizers are leading rent control campaigns, building momentum, and winning. Inglewood just enacted a new permanent rent stabilization ordinance and Culver City recently passed a temporary rent freeze.

These successes have been years in the making and are the result of tenant leaders hard at work building power in their communities.

Shane Goldsmith is president and CEO of the Liberty Hill Foundation.

Change local government incentives

By Greg Devereaux

The factors leading to increased housing costs and their effect on affordability are discussed quite a bit, as are exhortations for government to provide programs that assist people or projects to address their needs.

However, there is little discussion regarding the fact that, given the wealth gap in the

country and state and the number of people living in poverty, government cannot afford to buy its way out of the problem. Nor is there much discussion about government's role in growing the economy and creating higher wage jobs and providing the education and training to perform them — which would also result in greater affordability.

Local government fees and charges to pay for infrastructure and services are often mentioned as adding to the cost of housing. This approach to funding these items is a direct result

of the restrictions on raising local revenues imposed by Propositions 13 and 218. Prior to these initiatives, local government could and did raise property taxes to pay these costs instead of passing them on to homebuilders and homebuyers.

The state construct for local government funding produces perverse incentives and inequality in funding. Property is taxed at 1% of its value, capped by Prop. 13, then voter approved overrides are added. Cities, the counties, schools and special districts split the money from the 1%. The amount that cit-

ies receive varies widely. In San Bernardino County it ranges from 1.75% to 38.8% of the 1%. Each city also receives one of the percentage points from the sales tax on transactions in their jurisdiction. This has led many cities to seek sales tax generators rather than housing.

Providing local governments, a share of income taxes from their residents and those working in their businesses would change the incentives.

Greg Devereaux previously served as CEO of San Bernardino County.

Debunking myths about new home construction

By Lucy Dunn

New housing is change for a community, and existing residents can be fearful of change as well as newcomers. But debunking the myths is important. For example:

▪ *Will my property values go down?* Not one study exists that building new housing decreases existing property values; in fact, some studies actually show the opposite.

▪ *Doesn't new housing cause traffic to worsen?* In fact, more commute into OC to work than

the other way around. Irvine's population doubles every day because it is such a strong jobs magnet. Traffic congestion and longer commutes occur when folks can't live near where they work, and when local leaders fail to plan. Houses are where jobs go to sleep at night.

▪ *Our city is "built out."* In fact, no city is "built out" unless, perhaps, they have no children and no jobs. Every city can repurpose aging strip malls and retail sites for modern uses, including housing.

▪ *Why can't our children just live in San Bernardino (or wherever)?* By state law, every city is required to plan for, and implement those plans for, growth in jobs and population. Sending "our children" and workers and teachers and

health care providers and firefighters to "San Bernardino" means greater commutes, traffic congestion, poor quality of life.

▪ *Why can't everything just stay the same?* Because innovation is happening every day, faster than imagined. Retail stores are giving way to online shopping. Entertainment preferences are different. The use of Uber, Lyft and other mobility technologies thrive in addition to a future of automated vehicles. An aging workforce remains, with retirees are living longer lives. Young families are relocating to more affordable areas.

We can plan for change — and implement those plans — or that change will plan us! State government needs to get

out of the way, streamline processes, develop environmental rules that are predictable, reward jurisdictions that are doing the right thing with new funding, and come down hard on those who choose to send their growth to others to deal with. Legislation is needed to limit ridiculous CEQA lawsuits that are used for contract leverage, not real environmental issues. Limit recovery in CEQA lawsuits to additional mitigation, not project "do-overs." Local governments must cut the red tape, plan, zone and mean it, allowing builders ministerial permit opportunities.

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