



*"Jobs, Homes & Individual Rights "*

August 27, 2008

Ms. Jill Geist, Chairperson  
Board of Supervisors  
Humboldt County  
825 Fifth Street  
Eureka, California 95501

Subject: 2007 Annual Report

Dear Chairperson Geist and Members of the Board:

Thank you Jill, for placing the 2007 Annual Report on this week's Board meeting agenda. We appreciated the opportunity to comment.

This letter documents and expands on our comments made to your Board on August 26, 2008:

- 2003 HOUSING ELEMENT
- 2007 ANNUAL REPORT
- RECOMMENDATIONS
- CONCLUSION

## **2003 HOUSING ELEMENT**

- 1 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.1b:  
*"The Planning Division shall make available at the public information counter of CDS a GIS computer that will enable developers to identify real-time mapped constraints to housing development."*

The GIS is currently available as an interactive tool on the County's website. Michael Richardson is a wizard at using GIS. The information it provides to those involved in updating the County's land inventory for the 2009 Housing Element, has proven to be a valuable and powerful tool.

- 2 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.1e:  
*"The Planning Division shall develop materials for the Department's website that clearly show the existing vacant and underdeveloped land inventory, including thematic maps, graphs, and tables documenting development potential and constraints on a parcel-specific level."*

The GIS is currently available as an interactive tool on the County's website. The information is continually being verified and updated with the assistance of those in the private sector with "on the ground" working knowledge of the individual parcels.

In addition to the information noted above, it should be acknowledged that the County's entire website is a much used and appreciated tool.

- 3 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.1g:  
*"The Planning Division shall develop development timing procedures as part of the General Plan Update process that link updates of the Housing Element to infrastructure improvements and other development timing initiatives to ensure an adequate supply of housing to meet the County's future housing needs."*

HELP believes having adequate infrastructure to meet the County's future housing needs is a crucial aspect of the planning process, one that will require creative, costly, and extensive infrastructure improvements.

- 4 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.2b:  
*"Inventory sites owned by the County that are presently not used or underutilized and research the potential for selling them to a non-profit housing developer or for-profit developer for the construction of new housing affordable to very low income persons."*

HELP supports this program and encourages the County to make its surplus sites available to non-profit and for-profit developers. It is our understanding that government-owned land does not qualify to be listed on the Housing Element land inventory. If this is true, there would need to be a program outlined in the new Housing Element to transfer title of the site(s) involved, to the developer(s) following an open bidding competition.

- 5 2003 Housing Element Program, Item 1.2d:  
*"The County shall assist in the development of housing for very low income households by reducing Planning Division fees by at least 50%, minimizing site improvement standards where consistent with public health, safety and welfare, and fast-tracking approval for up to six (6) housing projects per year that make at least 20% of the new units affordable to very low income households for 30 years or more."*

HELP believes this program is a viable way of assisting the development of very low income housing. We would encourage the County to implement this program and report its progress and results in the Annual Report.

## 2007 ANNUAL REPORT

6 We were unable to reconcile some of the stats in the Annual Report. It may be a result of a lack of understanding how the numbers were calculated. We found the references to “permitted” versus “constructed” a bit confusing.

7 Page 9, Item B:  
Item 1 *“Include a program-by-program status report relative to implementation schedule from each program in the Housing Element; describe actions taken to implement each program.”*

We believe this item describes the function of the Annual Report itself, and encourage the County to provide the status of the various programs prior to finalizing the Revised Report and submitting it to the State HCD and OPR.

8 Page 10, Item 1.16:  
*“The County shall annually compete for CDBG funds as a means of developing local communities including improvements to and expansion of sewer and water lines and facilities for community planning areas and coastal communities.”*

In order to progress beyond the short-term project-by-project approach to planning housing, we agree with the County that it will be essential to make some long-term investments in infrastructure. Every opportunity and option for capturing financing of County-wide infrastructure should be explored, including CDBG funds.

HELP would like to see NOFAs (Notice of Funds Available) be publicized when they become known, so that the public has an opportunity to provide input to Planning staff, the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors regarding priorities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Refer the 2007 Annual Report to the Planning Commission for at least a 30-day period before returning it back to the Board of Supervisors.

This would allow the public adequate time to review and comment on the report, and it is in keeping with page 14 of the Annual Report, item 6.4: *“The Planning Department shall provide notification of meetings adequate to insure public participation consistent with the goals of this program.”*

This would be consistent with the State OPR (Office of Planning and Research) guideline to: *“Summarize the comments of other boards and commissions on the general plan implementation.”*

- 2 Establish an Annual Report Working Committee which would include members of the public representing diverse community groups.

This would be consistent with Annual Report, page 14, Item 6.3: *“The County shall encourage the formation of citizen organizations to provide input on specific matters in a format consistent with the adopted policies and procedures.”*

This would be consistent with the State OPR (Office of Planning and Research) guideline to: *“Summarize the comments of other boards and commissions on the general plan implementation.”*

Pages 9 through 16 of the Annual Report identify over 100 programs to be accomplished. Some of the programs are well defined and are quantitative objectives, while others are more of a general nature.

HELP recommends that there be some prioritization of these programs established so that progress can be measured and reported effectively. This Committee’s mission would be to assist Planning Staff in the preparation of future Annual Reports, including the above-mentioned program-by-program status. We believe the benefits would be two-fold: 1) Bring better understanding of County activities, and 2) Assist County staff by providing input from the private sector.

- 3 Establish an Economic Development Working Committee which would include members of the public representing diverse community groups.

This is consistent with the State OPR guideline, Additional Content Item 3): *“Describe the jurisdiction’s strategy for: Economic development – Depending on the need of your jurisdiction, this analysis could include information on the ratio of jobs to dwelling units, tax revenues, demographics, census information, etc.”*

HELP believes such a committee could assist the County in stimulating and supporting economic development which would in turn create jobs and tax revenues to help pay for badly needed infrastructure and affordable housing.

- 4 Establish a Constrain Constraints Committee which would include members of the public representing diverse community groups.

The work of this committee would be supportive of the County’s goals:

Annual Report page 12, Item 3.3: *“The County shall reduce, or limit increases, in application processing fees, which adversely impact housing affordability.”*

Ms. Jill Geist, Chairperson 8-27-08, cont'd

Annual Report page 11, Item 3, Regulatory Constraints – 3.1: *“The County shall devise mutually acceptable means to meld the efforts of citizens and government to address the problems common to us all.”*

2003 Housing Element Goal 3.1: *“To assist in the construction of market rate housing by reducing government constraints whenever possible.”*

2003 Housing Element Policy 3.1.a: *“The County shall reduce uncertainty, risk, and delay in the planning, environmental, and permitting process through a commitment to targeted timelines.”*

Input from committee members and members of the public at large should be helpful in identifying ways to minimize regulatory constraints while maintaining appropriate County standards and procedures.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our input and make these recommendations.

Please call any time if you have questions or if we can assist you in any way. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the County in any manner you feel would be productive.

Respectfully,

Kay Backer, representing  
Humboldt Economic & Land Plan

cc: Supervisor Jimmy Smith, District 1  
Supervisor Johanna Rodoni, District 2  
Supervisor John Woolley, District 3  
Supervisor Bonnie Neely, District 4  
Commissioner Bruce Emad  
Commissioner Mary Gearheart  
Commissioner Richard Hansis  
Commissioner Thomas Herman  
Commissioner Scott Kelly  
Commissioner Sef Murguia  
Commissioner Jeff Smith  
Loretta Nickolaus, CAO  
Kirk Girard, Community Development Services Director  
Kathy Hayes, Clerk of the Board  
Sharon Lodes, Planning Commission Clerk

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