

ATTN: Clerk of the Board
Supervisor John Gioia
Supervisor Candace Andersen
Supervisor Diane Burgis
Supervisor Karen Mitchoff
Supervisor Federal Glover

17 September 2022

Re Agenda Item D4: Measure X Housing Fund

In 2020, during the latest nationwide “racial reckoning,” the Board of Supervisors declared racism a public health issue. And so it is. As is poverty. And homelessness. Both of these predicaments have potentially synergized with systemic racism to tragic, generational, and unremitting effects.

Our country, our region, our county, is at an inflection point. The recently-released 2022 PIT count reveals harrowing rates of homelessness. A 35% rise in the county overall, triple digit increases in all three areas of the county, and astronomical rises in the cities of Antioch, Pittsburg, and Richmond, again, reflective of disproportionate harms to African Americans. *And* there is broad consensus that PIT counts woefully *underrepresent* the number of people experiencing homelessness. At the same time, emergency renter assistance funds are drying up, eviction moratoriums are being lifted, rents are skyrocketing, housing production is woefully under capacity and stymied by high costs, and shelter beds and transitional housing are grossly insufficient to meet the growing need. In Antioch last month on a single day, *14 evictions* were being conducted in *one rental property alone*.

In other words, homelessness, displacement, and housing insecurity are reaching crisis levels. We are, clearly, in dire need of deep, sustainable, affordable, supportive housing with robust renter protections if we are to preserve a county that offers resources and opportunities to people of *all* income levels and races and ethnicities.

For every 100 lowest income households, there are just 36 housing units available. And because only 1 in 4 qualifying households receives housing vouchers and those who do are routinely turned down by landlords and/or do not receive enough funds to afford our region’s high rents, most folks are now either spending an exorbitant amount of money to merely maintain a roof over their heads *or* are falling into chronic homelessness. In fact, most people who are homeless become so by merely missing a month or two of rent, which is happening all the more frequently given current data that shows that a shocking 61% of Americans are truly living paycheck to paycheck, with no emergency savings. This is causing both generational poverty and an entire subpopulation that is aging into homelessness, another extreme public health issue.

These statistics tell a story, but not the whole one. They omit two facts: (1) these injustices fall disproportionately on African Americans in particular and other racial/ethnic groups in general *and* (2) municipalities can act decisively and boldly to address them. And many have. The award

of Measure X dollars to support a housing fund in our county is a step in the right direction. And on that front, there are two comments in the community stakeholder meeting summary attached to this agenda that urge the program and its priorities in the right direction—that move us beyond reckoning to redress. First, we need a more explicit and actionable plan to close racial equity gaps. Second, we should implement a guaranteed income program to help lift people out of the poverty that causes homelessness in the first place (among other dire outcomes).

Housing first approaches and guaranteed income programs are neither novel, outlandish, nor unproven. The first has shown incredible results across the country and the second was championed by Martin Luther King, Jr. and recently revitalized by Stockton’s former mayor, to *overwhelmingly* positive success. In fact, there are now more than 100 guaranteed income pilots throughout the country and more being rolled out by the day. Many of these are in the Bay Area and other parts of California.

The unprecedented levels and types of assistance rolled out during the pandemic proved that direct cash payments and untethered mutual aid programs work. We need to sustain these. We can no longer deny the racial disparities at play in our lack of affordable housing, home ownership statistics, access to resources, and proneness to displacement, homelessness, and housing insecurity. This is our chance to put teeth into our “racial reckoning.” To acknowledge that systemic issues demand systemic solutions. I urge the Board to move swiftly, boldly, and decisively by (1) prioritizing considerations of racial equity in prioritizing projects and partners and (2) allocating funds from the innovations category to implement a guaranteed income program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Warm regards,

Rachel Rosekind
El Cerrito resident and business owner
District 1 Library Commissioner