



Policy Statement:

Adopted: November 2013

Support for Conserving RH-1 Housing and Protecting Neighborhood Character

Introduction

The West of Twin Peaks Central Council (WTPCC) was formed in 1936 in response to a proposed charter amendment by the Board of Supervisors that would have changed the way residential zoning was implemented in our neighborhoods. The Council has a long history of fighting to preserve the character of the neighborhoods on the west side of San Francisco that are zoned primarily for Single Family Residential Housing: RH-1.

RH-1 neighborhoods in San Francisco are generally densely constructed with both attached and detached units that cover less than 75% of the available lot; at least 25% of the lot areas are preserved as backyard open space/green space. This provision to retain at least 25% of each lot for backyard gardens, in addition to the front and side setbacks provides a way for rain to be absorbed into the soil, rather than routed exclusively to the combined sewer and storm drain system, and significantly reduces the overall carbon footprint of San Francisco.

Support for Conserving RH-1 Housing and our Neighborhood Character

The WTPCC strongly supports the conservation of RH-1 housing, and has consistently opposed any legislation that would allow for the subdivision of RH-1 housing units into two smaller units for a number of reasons detailed below:

- Division of single-family units into, smaller units represents an anti-family policy since the vast majority of secondary units are quite small and remove considerable living space from the primary unit. This further reduces the amount of housing that is available for families in San Francisco (which is already one of the least family-friendly cities in the Bay Area with less than 1/3 of San Francisco housing occupied by families vs. 2/3 in neighboring cities).
- Division of RH-1 properties into two separate units often requires waiving the 25% open-space requirement. This will result in the Manhattanization of San Francisco. It will significantly reduce the amount of green open space available for trees and other plants and increase the “hard-scaping” of San Francisco; forcing more rain runoff into an already overwhelmed combined storm and sewer system.
- Division of RH-1 housing from one to two living units fundamentally changes the character of neighborhoods in direct conflict with the 1986 voter approved Proposition M that set as a “priority policy” that “existing neighborhood character be conserved and protected.”

- Subdivision of RH-1 units has not been proven to reduce the cost of housing, and will likely drive the price of family-friendly housing higher by reducing the already small stock of single-family units.
- Allowing the subdivision of RH-1 houses into double units would allow real estate speculators with deep pockets to price out regular home buyers competing for the small amount of RH-1 housing available. After conversion to double units, these properties will be sold at market rate prices, further reducing the available stock of family-friendly housing.
- Large extended families require a lot of space. There is no need to allow subdivision of RH-1 housing in order to accommodate the need for families to expand their homes so they can house grandparents, siblings, extended family members or even room-mates. Adding a bedroom and bathroom for a family member, friend or other room-mate to live in your RH-1 home does not require creating a secondary unit. No zoning changes are required to support these scenarios.
- Even the innocent sounding “legalization of existing secondary units” could have significant unintended consequences including:
 - **Rent increases.** Owners will want to see a maximum return on the cost of legalization, and will expect higher rents from “legal” units. This will adversely affect those most in need of affordable housing.
 - **Evictions.** Owners with illegal units that are occupied may choose to evict their current tenants before starting down the legalization path. This would allow them to adjust their rent to the maximum “market rate” before they offer it as a legal rental subject to rent control.
 - **Few conversions to legal status.** Many owners may choose to keep their unit in an illegal status for a number of reasons including:
 - Up-front costs in fees and capital improvements required to become legal.
 - Long-term costs in increased property taxes.
 - No easy way to convert back (i.e. to remove the unit in the future).

Summary

The West of Twin Peaks Central Council supports protecting the relatively small stock of family friendly RH-1 housing in the City, and strongly opposes any legislation that would allow the subdivision of RH-1 homes into two or more separate units, including the legalization of existing secondary units. While the need for affordable housing in San Francisco is great, the WTPCC does not believe that subdivision of existing RH-1 housing will help in providing the family housing that San Francisco needs the most. It will not result in an overall reduction in rent prices, and it will drive families from the City at an even faster rate.