



California Master Plan for Aging Workgroup

Prioritizing Seniors in the Housing Element Process July 2022

Introduction

Santa Barbara County is in the midst of a senior housing crisis of growing proportions. Social service agencies and senior housing providers are currently trying to stem the tide of this crisis with a patchwork of services and supports, including emergency crisis response measures. These include responding to desperate calls for rental assistance, troubleshooting discharges from hospitals and care facilities with no place to send seniors, and managing long wait lists for memory, disability, and complex care.

How did we get here? In part, due to a rapid rise in our elderly population combined with a lack of affordable housing, affordable long-term and memory care facilities, and affordable care giving and other long-term care services. As stated in a recent CalMatters article, “factor in fixed-incomes and insufficient pensions (or no pensions), and you have an epidemic of suffering and expanded poverty.”¹

To mitigate the current stress on our seniors and to meet the needs of our aging population going forward, **Santa Barbara County must adopt a comprehensive plan to provide more senior affordable housing options.** A comprehensive plan would include market rate and affordable options for independent living, independent living with enhanced aging related services (such as Garden Court and the soon to be constructed Harry’s House), assisted living, assisted living memory care, residential care facilities, mental health residential care, and skilled nursing facilities.

Towards this end, the Santa Barbara Adult & Aging Network **recommends Santa Barbara County and each of the cities within the county prioritize affordable, accessible, and inclusive senior housing in their housing element planning process.**

Background

Santa Barbara County’s population is aging.

Currently nearly 16% of Santa Barbara County (SBC)) residents - 60, 097 - are over the age of 65 (2022 Census). Long-term growth forecasts indicate that the county’s population aged 65 and

¹ <https://calmatters.org/commentary/2022/02/californias-older-adults-are-being-stiffed-big-time/>

over will grow over 100 percent by 2060, compared to 28 percent population growth overall.² The proportion of persons aged 65 and over will be 25% of the overall county population³ and seniors age 85+ will grow by 144%.⁴

Retirement income is being outpaced by rising costs of housing, health, and care. Older and disabled adults are struggling to meet basic needs and as a result of shrinking affordability, are at the center of California’s housing and homelessness crisis. 27.8% of all households age 65+ in SBC are low to moderate income.⁵

The high cost of living in Santa Barbara County exacerbates senior poverty.

Seniors in poverty live in all parts of SBC and are not concentrated in specific neighborhoods. An elderly individual renting a one bedroom apartment needs \$36,036 per year to cover basic expenses,⁶ less than the combined total of the maximum SSI payment (\$9,965) and the median Social Security payment (\$12,589).

Aging is unaffordable for seniors who fall into the service eligibility gap.

40% of Santa Barbara County’s seniors are not economically self-sufficient (“poor” per the Elder Index \$28,000/year) but only 6% are below the federal poverty level (\$13,590/year) and qualify for aging related services.

Older adults need housing that is accessible and built according to ADA specifications.

Countywide, 31% aged 60 and over identified having a disability.⁷

Recommendations for Housing Planning

1. Prioritize older adults as a specific goal in Housing Elements and in Housing Element planning.

- Define “senior housing” more clearly to include requirements for accessibility and access to services.
- Zone for more senior housing options to meet senior needs as they progress through the senior housing care continuum, especially the urgent need for affordable assisted living, memory care, and housing options to meet complex needs.
- In Santa Barbara County, expand “By Right”⁸ zones in which senior housing with services is a permitted use.

² http://www.sbcag.org/uploads/2/4/5/4/24540302/age_characteristics_report.pdf

³ http://www.sbcag.org/uploads/2/4/5/4/24540302/forecast_2050_draft.pdf

⁴ http://www.sbcag.org/uploads/2/4/5/4/24540302/age_characteristics_report.pdf

⁵ 2022 Census

⁶ <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/programs/health-disparities/elder-health/elder-index-data/Pages/CostOfLiving.aspx>

⁷ http://www.sbcag.org/uploads/2/4/5/4/24540302/age_characteristics_report.pdf

⁸ https://housingtoolkit.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/by_right_right.pdf?1573176010

- - In commercial zones, expand permitted uses for licensed residential care, with conditional use permits for independent living as a by right use.
2. **Expand the use of the density bonus to increase the supply of affordable housing units for seniors that meet accessibility requirements** and are near public transportation, medical facilities, shopping, and caregiving resources.
 3. **Provide regulatory incentives for builders**
 - Add a regulatory “Fast-track” incentive for builders on senior housing projects (similar to SB 330).
 4. **Increase physical accessibility of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU’s) so that ADU’s are accessible to older adults and people with disabilities.**
 - Require that any ADUs above 450sq ft meet or exceed ADA Accessibility Standards.
 - Provide a building subsidy for ADUs of any size that meet or exceed ADA Accessibility Standards (an accessible unit requires: wider door, no stairs, grab bars, etc.).
 - Add a regulatory “Fast-track” permitting incentive for new ADUs that meet ADA Accessibility requirements.
 - Model Example: La Más Backyard Homes Project in Los Angeles.⁹
 5. **Permit parking reductions to incentivize more senior friendly housing.**
 - The State density bonus law (Government Code Section 65915 et seq) allows permitting parking reductions which can result in a better environment, lower costs, or both. Recommendations include owner/operator van transport and charging stations for mobility devices (e.g. electric bicycles and 3-4 wheeled outdoor devices).
 6. **Explore innovative housing models** such as micro units in urban areas, shared/inter-generational housing (San Luis Obispo County example, -[HomeShareSLO](#) ([smartsharehousingolutions.org](#)), and satellite Federally Qualified [Health Centers](#) (FQHCs) providing intensive mental health services with licenses for co-located clinics or mobile operations (Alameda County example).

⁹ <https://www.mas.la/affordable-adus>