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4 November 2022

Cotati City Hall
201 West Sierra Avenue
Cotati, CA 94931

RE: Comment on the 6th Cycle draft Housing Element

Dear Mayor Landman, Vice Mayor Harvey, Councilmembers, and Staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on the 6th Cycle draft Housing Element ("Element") for the City of Cotati ("City"). We recognize the heavy lift this process imposes on staff and appreciate their diligence in moving this process forward. We hope the comments shared below help strengthen the overall outcomes achieved during this period and we welcome additional opportunities to interface with staff or consultant to support this process.

Generation Housing is leading the movement for more, more affordable, and more diverse housing in Sonoma County. Together, we champion effective policy, sustainable funding resources, and collaborative efforts to create an equitable, healthy, and resilient community for everyone.

Strengthen Community Outreach

The draft is absent of any summary information indicating that key community stakeholders were engaged during the solicitation of community input. Government code 65583(c)(7) requires: "The local government shall make a diligent effort to achieve public participation of all economic segments of the community in the development of the housing Element, and the program shall describe this effort." The Element states that staff used a hybrid of in-person and digital platforms to facilitate community outreach and that these activities included "door-to-door canvassing and tabling at events including the Halloween Carnival, Holiday Shop-and Stroll and Cotati Farmers Market." What's more, the Element does not make any apparent mention of targeted outreach to lower income and special needs groups. This alone would likely constitute a violation according to the prescriptive requirements for community engagement outlined in the California Department of Housing and Community Development ("HCD") [Housing Element Completeness Checklist](#).

Accordingly, before submitting this draft to HCD, we strongly advise you to solicit additional input from various community organizations (including Generation Housing) and incorporate their comments into the Element with blue or redline edits. These organizations might include (but are not limited to): Legal Aid of Sonoma County, NAACP Santa Rosa – Sonoma County Branch, Greenbelt Alliance, Community



Action Partnership of Sonoma County, Los Cien, Catholic Charities and SHARE
Sonoma County.

Development Trends and Realistic Capacity

While the Element does provide assumptions of realistic capacity of 85 percent on vacant sites, it must provide support for these assumptions. As it exists currently, Table 12 (Development Trends, PDF Page 78) does not appear to accomplish that. The Element should demonstrate what specific trends, factors, and other evidence led to these assumptions. We recommend providing additional evidence, in the form of prior projects, that is representative of a trend for all developments at similar affordability levels in the City. The Element must provide more information for approved/pending sites that describes any necessary approval or steps prior to development, development agreements, conditions, or requirements such as phasing or timing requirements that impact development during the planning period. The Element must also evaluate the affordability of the project's units based on anticipated rents, sales prices or other mechanisms (e.g., financing, affordability restrictions) ensuring their affordability.

Processing and Permit Procedures

The Element must evaluate the processing and permit procedure impacts as potential constraints on housing supply and affordability. The Element should describe and analyze the total permit and entitlement process for a typical single-family unit, subdivision, and multifamily project. Descriptions should include typical processes required for single-family and multifamily projects and an estimate of total typical time necessary to complete the entitlement process. Please refer to the City of Santa Rosa's revised [HCD draft submission](#) (Table 6-7, PDF Page 192).

Policies, Programs, and Goals

Policy H-2.9: *"Continue to facilitate, and encourage, the construction of accessory dwelling units pursuant to the City's Accessory Dwelling Unit Ordinance, Cottage Housing Ordinance, and pursuit of "affordable by design" missing middle housing such as junior accessory dwelling units (JADUs) and cohousing."*

- + We recommend amending the language of this policy as it conflates several things that don't have direct association with one another by definition. Case in point, "Missing Middle Housing" is widely regarded in most housing circles as a housing typology that typically includes the following: small plexes, including Duplex (Side-By-Side + Stacked), Fourplex (Stacked), Courtyard Building, Cottage Court, etc. In fact, on PDF Page 6 the Element includes the "Missing Middle Housing" definition found on missingmiddlehousing.com. Affordable by Design can include cohousing (single room occupancy) and Junior Accessory Dwelling ("JADU") units. However, Affordable by Design can also include smaller 850 (<) sq/ft multi-family units as well. See the section below where we discuss workforce housing policy solutions for more information.

On PDF Page 26, "Missing Middle Housing" is referenced as including duplexes, triplexes, ADUs, and JADUs. Multifamily units as "Missing Middle Housing" is referenced in the Element under Program 2-4: Cottage Housing on PDF Page 50 **We strongly suggest reviewing the Element and ensuring consistency of the use of "Missing Middle Housing" in the document.** While the definition in the Element might

be open for interpretation, the examples on missingmiddlehousing.com clarify the true intent of their definition.

Program 2-4: Cottage Housing: *“Continue to promote the Cottage Housing Ordinance established in the 5th Housing Element Cycle to incentivize smaller units and increase the supply of missing middle housing including multiplexes, courtyard cottages, and other such housing types deemed “affordable by design” and allowable under the Cottage Housing Ordinance.”*

- + We recommend modifying this ordinance during the 6th Cycle to remove discretionary oversight by the City Council, and instead, allow by right development that conforms to the objective design standards found in the [Cotati City Code](#), section 17.42.125. This is in alignment with the spirit of the Prohousing Designation which you are seeking according to Program 3-6 (PDF Page 56).
- + We recommend modifying the ordinance to allow increased (or gentle) density in ALL single-family zoning districts. Specifically, we urge amending the ordinance to not limit a single structure to four attached units and to not limit massing by requiring reduced floor area on the second floor. Other options exist that can reduce the perceived size of these buildings without reducing the intensity of the size.

The ordinance seems generally problematic, as it appears that it would render most projects infeasible due to overly prescriptive requirements and unnecessary cost burdens. If the City wishes to secure the Prohousing Designation, then we strongly recommend they amend ordinances such as this to better enable more flexibility in design standard. Producing this type of “Missing Middle Housing” is incredibly cost prohibitive. Reducing barriers and allowing more flexibility in design is an absolute necessity to further the City’s goal of diversifying their housing stock to accommodate workforce families.

Program 2-6: Santero Way Specific Plan: *“In order to increase residential development in Moderate Resource areas and near amenities, the City will update the Santero Way Specific Plan to increase residential capacity within the Specific Plan area.”*

- + We recommend the City include a clear Quantified Objective for this program even though it is not being used to meet the RHNA. By including it in this Element, the City is committing itself to planning for housing on the remaining vacant (or non-vacant) parcels. Therefore, it is necessary in our opinion to be more forthright and clearer in the quantified objectives for the Specific Plan. We would also request the City consider moving forward with this update sooner than 2026.

Metropolitan Transportation Commission (“MTC”) TOC Policy

Not long ago, MCT adopted the landmark Transit-Oriented Communities Policy, which is designed to boost overall housing supply and increase residential densities in transit-rich areas; spur more commercial development near transit hubs served by multiple agencies; promote bus transit, walking, biking and shared mobility in transit-rich areas; and foster partnerships to create transit-oriented communities where

people of all income levels, racial and ethnic backgrounds, ages and ability levels can live, work and thrive. This new policy would require 25 units per acre and the elimination of parking minimums within a half-mile of the Cotati SMART station. If the City wishes to take advantage of certain transportation funding buckets, they should commit to a program in the Element that brings them into compliance with this policy during the 6th Cycle planning period.

Quantified Objectives

The Element is required by Government code 65583(b) to “estimate the number of units likely to be constructed, rehabilitated and conserved or preserved by income level, including extremely low-income, during the planning period.” While Table 5 (PDF Page 61) includes a table providing a summary of Quantified Objectives, it is unclear what specific programs will support these objectives due to the disaggregated nature of the table. To improve readability and support accountability, we suggest considering the following:

- + We recommend structuring your Element in a manner that is consistent with the structure utilized in the City of Santa Rosa’s [draft Housing Element](#). Please see Section 8 (Goals, Policies, Programs, Page 8-1) for reference.

Growth Management Ordinance

The City must provide further analysis on the constraint imposed by the existing Growth Management Ordinance (“GMO”). Stating that the GMO does not pose a constraint because “the City does not actively administer or monitor its growth management program” is not a sufficient reason to let it remain in effect without a program in place that explores amending or outright retiring the GMO. If the GMO is kept in effect, consider the following:

- + We recommend the City exempt affordable housing units from the allocation altogether.
- + We recommend the City adopt SB 10, which allows developments of ten or fewer units to be exempt from the GMO.
- + We recommend that the City increase the allowable annual allocation in order to avoid any possibility that a project is forced to develop in phases.

We maintain that the Urban Growth Boundary is a sufficient mechanism to reasonably constrain development. Any other constraint on growth is simply stifling the community’s economic development and cultural diversity or guaranteeing that a significant amount of the workforce must join the daily commute, adding to traffic and our greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, it likely shifts the burden of housing to your immediate neighbor, Rohnert Park. The Element notes on Page 72 that a concentration of Hispanic/Latino populations exist on the southern side of the City of Rohnert Park bordering Cotati. It’s possible this is a direct result of self-imposed growth constraints limiting the affordability, diversity, and overall level of housing available, which has been linked to known segregational planning practices.

Workforce Housing

We commend the City for committing to aligning with the spirit of AB 602 before June 30, 2023. We would urge the City take a step farther and commit to the adoption of the following two policies that would lower the cost of building smaller units, which could help bridge financing caps for both deed-restricted affordable units and affordable by design units, perfect to meet our 80-140 AMI workforce members' needs.

- + We recommend that the City extend its ADU fee structure to multi-family units of the same size; and
- + We recommend that the City adopt County of Sonoma's [residential unit equivalency](#) definition (see Table 8-3). Under this framework, a one-bedroom (<750 sq. ft.) dwelling would be classified as 0.5 of a density unit. Similarly, a two-bedroom (<1,000 sq. ft.) dwelling would be counted as 0.75 of a density unit.

Through lowering the fees associated with building smaller units while adopting a practical, common-sense density standard, the City can meaningfully help catalyze the development of affordable by design units capable of accommodating our struggling workforce population.

Rental Registry

The Element should include a program that focuses on developing a rental registry. This type of tool is desperately needed to support the identification and tracking of rental units, including units that accept Section 8 vouchers. It also can play a key role in helping pair those in need of affordable units with appropriate properties in the housing stock. We recommend the following:

- + Implement a rental registry within 30 months of the Housing Element adoption to help support workforce members of the community struggling to locate affordable housing.
- + Promote and advertise the rental registry across all available print and digital forums. Collaborate with local organizations such as Legal Aid of Sonoma County, Generation Housing, NAACP Santa Rosa – Sonoma County, and others in order to maximize community awareness of this tool.

Non-Profit and Agency Coordination

We appreciate the City's indication that it has formalized a relationship with the Housing Land Trust of Sonoma County ("HLTSC") to provide expertise and resale assistance for BMR units (PDF Page 30). We strongly support the work of HLTSC and would encourage the City to continue to further build on this relationship. Please integrate all comments and recommendations submitted by HLTSC into the Element.

We similarly appreciate the clear adoption of recommendations that were submitted by Napa Sonoma ADU in the early stages of the housing Element process. We strongly support their work as well and encourage the City to nurture and strengthen regional

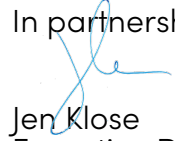
partnerships that will assist with scaling the development of ADUs and JADUs in our community.

Closing Remarks

Generation Housing remains committed to partnering with the City to meet both current and future housing needs. We thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the City of Cotati's 6th Cycle draft Housing Element and we look forward to reviewing a redlined version of the Element upon the completion of your revisions.

Please direct any questions or comments to our Policy Director Calum Weeks at calum@generationhousing.org.

In partnership,



Jen Klose
Executive Director | Generation Housing