



May 23, 2022

Mayor Enander and Members of the City Council  
City of Los Altos  
1 N. San Antonio Road  
Los Altos, CA 94022

Re: Council Meeting May 24, #7 Establishing a Below-Market-Rate (BMR) Waiting List

Dear Mayor Enander and Members of the City Council:

The League of Women Voters has long monitored the BMR programs in both Mountain View and Los Altos as we believe that inclusionary units, also known as BMR units, are an important method for producing lower-income housing. We also support all-affordable housing developments, but we believe that inclusionary programs are helpful in dispersing lower-income households throughout the community. Over the years we have looked to Alta Housing, formerly Palo Alto Housing, for guidance, as the City of Palo Alto was one of the first jurisdictions in California to have a BMR program; as a result, Alta Housing has much expertise in administering such programs.

We have often criticized the priorities that Los Altos has for its BMR program. We support the #1 priorities, which include preferences for school district and City employees as well as first-responders. We understand that Alta Housing has been especially successful in finding homes for school district employees. The other priorities are unusual; we believe they should be dropped, giving the second priority to those who work in Los Altos, a much more common preference. The lower level priorities are particularly out of place as the new Housing Element requires the City to affirmatively further fair housing.

We would favor the changes advised by Alta Housing to create consolidated and centralized wait lists for both ownership and rental housing, rather than leaving that up to individual properties. We believe it is difficult for households to monitor ads for newly available units. Once people have signed up, they should be informed that they are on a waitlist and where in the waitlist they fall. We are concerned that if apartment owners/managers keep their own waitlists for rental units, we cannot be sure that everyone is treated fairly. The ability to rent a

BMR is a wonderful opportunity, and the City needs to feel confident that all the rules are being followed. We understand that making these changes may cost the City additional funds.

We are concerned, however, that the outreach that should have been done to reach all the potential school district employees as well as others who might qualify under the top priority has not been done, nor are we confident that adequate outreach has been done to target lower-income employees in Los Altos. Part of the problem may be the extremely vague contract the City has with Alta, part may be due to changes in City personnel, or to others who committed to helping with the outreach and failed to perform. We suggest the contract be rewritten, depending upon the Council's decision about priorities, with specific outreach requirements that Alta must fulfill.

(Please send comments related to this letter to Sue Russell at s [REDACTED] )

Karin Bricker, President LWV of Los Altos Mountain View

cc: Gabriel Engeland      Laura Simpson      Jolie Houston      Nick Zornes