

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## Laird says he'll help fight housing mandates

By Mary Schley

AS PUBLIC officials contend with a state order to figure out how to accommodate 349 new residences in a 1-square-mile city that's largely built out, State Sen. John Laird said at a Carmel Chamber of Commerce luncheon Friday that he'd fight in Sacramento for "flexibility" in the housing mandates that many consider immutable. Some cities have argued with the state that their allocations identified in the Regional Housing Needs Assessment are unfairly high, and others have refused to comply with the demands, including Huntington Beach, which was subsequently sued by the California Attorney General's Office. And the consultant that concluded the state needs 3.5 million new homes by 2025 — a goal Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Legislature subsequently pledged to pursue — McKinsey & Co., has been accused of grossly inflating the estimate. According to USC researchers, the consultant used a per-capita calculation that resulted in the unusually high number. (Newsom subsequently reduced the statewide target to 2.5 million new homes to be divvied up between cities and counties.)



PHOTO/MICHAEL TROUTMAN, DMT IMAGING

Mayor Dave Potter (left), city administrator Chip Rerig and State Sen. John Laird discuss the state's housing mandates at a chamber of commerce lunch last week. To everyone's surprise, Laird said he thought there should be "flexibility" in the way the mandates are enforced in cities like Carmel.

### CLARIFICATION NEEDED

City administrator Chip Rerig, who engaged in a Q&A with Mayor Dave Potter and Laird that was facilitated by new chamber executive director Lance Wills at the May 12 luncheon, said this week that he was surprised by Laird's willingness to advocate for cities like Carmel and was

unsure of the senator's specific commitment. "I'm not sure what he really means by 'looking more closely at the numbers,'" Rerig said, adding that he would put a call into Laird's office to ask for elaboration. Regardless, he is "very supportive of their taking a more critical look" at the allocation of housing units the city is expected to make way for over the next eight years, according to state law.

Potter said having Laird, who has served in local governments as well as at the state level, advocate for the cities in his district could make a difference in Sacramento.

"They seem to have forgotten about us," he said, lauding Laird's "courage" for saying he would argue for flexibility in the housing numbers, perhaps by shifting some of them to other areas in the county. While the community doesn't "want to come across as elitist," it doesn't have the capacity for 349 new housing units without blowing up the zoning code and other local laws, Rerig said. "We welcome the discussion," since "349 might as well be a million in our little village."

Potter also observed that people are now building accessory dwelling units — which local jurisdictions are basically mandated to approve — that could help with the housing count, but they are not obligated to rent them out at affordable rates.

"We need to make sure these are deed restricted for affordability," he said.

## **HOMEWORK**

At the lunch, Laird criticized Sen. Scott Wiener, who represents the San Francisco area and has been a key player in drafting and passing housing laws that willfully erode single-family housing in favor of apartment buildings and other high-density developments. Bills he's drafted this year include SB 4, the Affordable Housing on Faith Lands Act, which allows religious institutions and nonprofit colleges to build affordable housing on their properties by right, even if local zoning prevents it.

Potter said he hopes Laird will follow through on his pledge to advocate for cities struggling under such state mandates and took heart in the senator's remarks that he would pursue opportunities for counties and cities to collaborate on their housing burdens.

"I think it's good of him to say he's willing to step forward and volunteer to help," he said. "He's in a position to make a difference on local control."

Potter also noted that in general, state legislators, including Laird, must stop endorsing legislation without considering its impacts on smaller communities.

“I think it’s not too late to un-ring the bell,” he said, regarding housing laws and allocations that include no reality checks or efforts to see if the new units can be reasonably incorporated into a community.

“I look to Gov. Newsom and wonder, ‘What are you thinking here?’ — that he would give us this mandate without seeing if it sticks,” Rerig said.

Regardless of what happens in Sacramento, Rerig said the ad hoc housing committee of council members Bobby Richards and Karen Ferlito is committed to the “homework assignment” of figuring out how, at least theoretically, the city could accommodate so many more homes.

The committee’s next meeting is set for 5:30-7:30 p.m. May 24 in city hall on Monte Verde south of Ocean and online via Zoom, will focus on public and private sites that could be redeveloped with housing. “We’re not obligating any property owners,” Rerig said.



PHOTO/MICHAEL TROUTMAN, DMT IMAGING

State Sen. John Laird speaks to the Carmel Chamber of Commerce on housing and other important local topics last week.

Ferlito and Richards dubbed the effort “HOME,” which stands for “Housing Opportunities Made Easier.”

Highlights will include an overview of the state’s regional housing needs assessment and what constitutes fair housing, a discussion of potential sites for development, and potential revisions to city policies and programs. EMC Planning Group, the consultant hired to help with the effort, will participate in the meeting as well.

(For more information, contact principal planner Marnie Waffle at [mwaffle@cbts.us](mailto:mwaffle@cbts.us) or (831) 620-2057 or visit [homecarmelbythesea.com](http://homecarmelbythesea.com).)

Rerig also acknowledged the stranglehold that the lack of water has on building new housing and suggested Laird could help broker that, too.

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*PS: Also see page 22 for the Editorial and first Letter to the Editor on this topic.*