

## *Library plan key to solving housing crisis*

### **Guest Commentary**

#### **By Bonnie Lipscomb**

It's no secret we are in an affordable housing crisis in Santa Cruz. This is an issue that affects every corner of our community. We need housing for workers to live closer to their jobs in the city, reduce their carbon footprint and increase their quality of life. We need housing for young families with children who would like to be able to put down roots, and for seniors who would like to be able to live out their golden years in a place they've called home for decades.

The Library Mixed-Use Project is the key that unlocks the city's ability to build more affordable housing in Downtown Santa Cruz. It has been approved by the City Council to move forward, and it is within our reach.

The city has a deep commitment to and track record of success in developing mixed-use and affordable housing projects. Over the last 30 years, the city has built or financed more than 1,300 affordable housing units in Santa Cruz. In just the last 10 years we have completed projects like the Tannery Arts Center, a 100-unit, 100% affordable mixed-use housing project built on city-owned property.

In addition to the beautiful live-work spaces for artists on site developed by ArtSpace, the campus is home to 28 working studios, a theater, dance studio, gallery, cafe and the offices of Arts Council Santa Cruz County. The city led the renovation of the working studios and the current home of the Arts Council while the nonprofit Tannery Arts Center developed the Colligan Theater.

The city also partnered with For the Future Housing on two more affordable housing projects within the same time period, the 21-unit Riverwalk Apartments on Lindberg Street and the recently completed 41-unit Water Street Apartments.

The city is currently moving forward on an 85-unit mixed-use affordable housing project below the Metro transit center on Pacific Avenue, which also includes a new expanded downtown home for the Santa Cruz Community Health Center and Dientes, providing affordable medical and dental care for the greater Santa Cruz community.

Concerned community members have raised questions about the city's ability to finance the project including the affordable housing. The financial models for the library mixed-use project are sound. The Economic Development team has completed a number of feasibility

studies over the last five years, which can be viewed at our project website ([cityofsantacruz.com/mixeduselibrary](http://cityofsantacruz.com/mixeduselibrary)).

The affordable housing portion of the project will be funded by a variety of sources including the city's Affordable Housing Trust Fund, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, and available HOME funds.

Additionally, we currently have two state grant applications for affordable housing funding in the pipeline that will bring significant new revenue for the affordable housing component of the project. While funding affordable housing projects often involves complicated layering of many funding sources, in the larger context of a mixed-use housing project, it is often the most secure funding component of the project.

The Library Mixed-Use Project is the most fiscally responsible, equitable and sustainable approach the city can take to steward precious resources, especially during tough times. We can ensure equity and inclusion through a minimum of 50 affordable units, all of which will be set aside for low and very low-income tenants, and by serving the needs of families, teens and seniors through a modern library in ways unable to be achieved in a renovation of the existing site. And the new building will promote sustainability through best practices in urban design, green infrastructure and consolidated and shared parking that encourages pedestrian travel throughout downtown.

It is the city's responsibility to plan not just for the needs of residents today, but for the future needs of our entire community. The Library Mixed-Use Project provides opportunity for current and future residents, bringing a modern library to our downtown and anchoring families for a more prosperous future.

*Bonnie Lipscomb is Santa Cruz's Economic Development Director.*