

CENTER FOR CONTINUING STUDY OF THE CALIFORNIA ECONOMY

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DATE: January 25, 2016

TO: **PTC Members and Staff**

FROM: Stephen Levy

SUBJECT: Planning for More ADUs

I know that there are many details to decide in going forward with plans to increase the number of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in Palo Alto. And I have read some of the letters with concerns about these details.

My perspective is that while the number of new units may be relatively small compared to other pro-housing policies, the debate over ADUs is a part of the debate over the soul and character of our city going forward.

With the high housing costs, the shortage of new units and restrictions on what can be built, our city (and others) are becoming places where only long-time homeowners like Nancy and me or affluent newcomers can live.

Nancy and I could buy a house in 1977 that in similar circumstances today would be unaffordable for us.

We are losing our economic and social diversity as these costs prevent more and more people from living here and force others to move.

One response that does not involve public subsidy is to plan for and allow smaller units and ADUs are part of that solution.

We know from the growing acceptance of micro units that a variety of individuals and even couples find these spaces (which I believe are smaller than the ADUs you are studying) as attractive choices for cost and location—including the chance to reduce commuting time and car use.

Policies that support more ADUs help people I would like to see get a chance to join our community—perhaps a young teacher or police officer who we could not hire if they had to commute 90 minutes to find affordable housing. Perhaps a young tech worker whose job is in Palo Alto would find this an attractive choice and help our sustainability goals.

But ADUs also directly help two groups of existing residents.

They help families with aging parents. This can happen by providing a space for a caregiver but also by providing a space for a parent while his/her children and their family occupy the main house.

This is another piece of retaining the soul and character of Palo Alto as a family friendly city.

And ADUs can provide extra income for the primary homeowner. This might be the difference between being able to stay and having to move elsewhere.

So, please, when you get to the details I hope you emphasize two points:

--This discussion is about vision and character. That should come first

--And if the details become so restrictive that they will not allow many more units, I think this is time wasted. The ADU planning only makes sense to me, given the difficult challenges, if we are going to get a meaningful number of additional housing.

In this regard I would ask staff to make an estimate of how each restriction would affect the number of eligible places for new ADUs.