

## Planning Commission should reject Carmel's luxury housing project unless it addresses affordable housing

Posted by [PW Staff](#) | Oct 17, 2017 | 0 |



*By Pablo Alvarado, Kimberly Douglas and Skip Hickambottom*

True or false: Pasadena needs more luxury housing.

The vast majority of Pasadenans believe that our city is being overwhelmed by luxury apartments and condominiums that are far beyond the financial reach of teachers, nurses and accountants, much less janitors, hotel workers, retail clerks and secretaries.

On Wednesday, Oct. 25, Pasadenans Organizing for Progress (POP!) and other community groups will be bringing residents to the city Planning Commission meeting to reinforce the need for affordable not large luxury housing like the one proposed by a San Francisco-based mega-developer called Carmel Partners. POP! urges all Pasadenans to attend the meeting at 6: 30 p.m. in the City Council chambers at City Hall, 100 N. Garfield Ave., and demand that affordable housing be included in any Carmel Partners development in Pasadena. It's the time to make your voices heard. Several years ago, Carmel purchased about 200 housing units from Fuller Theological Seminary that housed students and staff. Now Carmel Partners plans to replace those units with between 200 and 300 luxury apartments.

The Planning Commission and City Council have the power to influence Carmel's project. Last April, in fact, the Planning Commission postponed a decision on the Carmel plan and insisted that both Carmel Partners and Fuller meet with POP! and other community groups to discuss an

alternative to its proposed luxury housing development. POP! has made every effort to ensure that these meetings occur and has reached out to Carmel Partners so that the true housing needs in Pasadena are part of the solution in any proposal. Unfortunately, the joint meetings between Carmel, POP! and the community have not yet occurred.

Pasadena has among the highest rents and lowest rental vacancy rates of any California city, creating a severe shortage of housing for low-income and middle-class residents. Almost all the new housing built in Pasadena over the past decade has been expensive luxury apartments and condominiums. Typical rents for even tiny one-bedroom apartments — not big enough for families with children — are between \$2,000 and \$3,000 a month. Pasadena rents are about double the national average. Rents have risen much faster than local salaries and household incomes.

According to housing experts, families shouldn't pay more than 30 percent of their income for rent in order to have enough left over for basic necessities. But recent Census figures reveal that 54 percent of Pasadena households paid 30 percent or more of their income in rent. Even more troublesome, more than one-quarter (28 percent) of local households paid over half of their incomes just to keep a roof over their heads. These housing burdens have increased in the last decade. A whopping 94 percent of all Pasadena renter households with incomes below \$50,000 pay over 30 percent of their incomes for rent, while 54 percent of them pay over half their incomes in rent.

One consequence of this housing crisis is that many people who work in Pasadena can't afford to live here. Another is the declining enrollment in PUSD public schools, because rent increases are pushing families with children out of the city, which undermines the school district's financial health.

For years, city officials — including the City Council, the Planning Commission, and the Planning Department — have been approving luxury housing projects while doing little to protect renters from eviction or to help working families rent or buy a home. When it comes to choosing between big developers and everyday residents, POP, and Pasadenans in general, have a simple question to ask our local officials: Which side are you on?

It is time for City officials to restore some balance to Pasadena development. They can start by encouraging Carmel Partners to the drawing board so they meet with POP! and the community, and hammer out a reasonable compromise that will give priority to housing for Pasadena's middle-class and low-income residents and workforce.

Pasadenans Organizing for Progress (POP!) is a coalition of Pasadena-based organizations that emerged out of last year's successful minimum wage campaign. We strive to make Pasadena a more just, democratic and inclusive city. We invite Carmel and other developers to join with us to explore creative solutions to diverse housing needs as a means of caring about Pasadena and its community.

---

***Pablo Alvarado, Kimberly Douglas, and Skip Hickambottom are co-chairs of Pasadenans Organizing for Progress (POP!). Alvarado is executive director of the National Day Laborers Organizing Network, which operates the Pasadena Community Job Center. Douglas is a retired university librarian at Caltech and a member of the Pasadena Northwest Commission. Hickambottom is a civil rights lawyer and a member of the Pasadena NAACP executive committee.***