



March 9, 2020

Pasadena City Council
City of Pasadena
100 North Garfield Avenue
Pasadena, California 91101

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 CITY CLERK
 CITY OF PASADENA

RE: Zoning Code Amendments to Update Regulations for Single-Room Occupancy

Dear Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council:

Pasadena Heritage commends the Planning Department staff for a thoughtful and thorough report on Pasadena's Single-Room Occupancy (SRO) Ordinance. These suggested revisions mark a critical step in addressing California's continued housing crisis, as well as towards furthering our goals toward sustainability. SRO units are, by design, more affordable and more environmentally friendly than larger studios or one bedroom units.

While other cities are designing new solutions to address affordability, it is a privilege that Pasadena has the option simply to revisit and revise a building typology that has proven efficacy. In the early 20th Century, when Pasadena saw exponential population growth, SROs emerged as an important tool to house the City's working class. Between the years 1900 to 1930, Pasadena's population exploded from a modest 9,117 to 76,086, a 735% increase over those three decades. It is no coincidence that SROs emerged in this age to expand housing options. Perhaps our best reminder of the role of SRO buildings in Pasadena's history is Julia Morgan's YWCA building, completed in 1922 during this same period. We believe that by revisiting these older existing lessons in housing, we can deal with modern issues.

Revising and encouraging SRO construction in the Central District can help Pasadena concentrate workforce housing jobs close to jobs and transit. Pasadena Heritage concurs with the findings made by the Planning Commission and believes that eliminating parking minimums for SRO buildings is critical. The Central District is serviced by three reliable Gold Line (L) stations, multiple bus lines operated by three separate transit agencies, and has high walkability and bikeability. It is an ideal place to locate housing options for transit users, but high parking minimums in TOD areas actually encourage more driving. We do believe there is some need for parking, as well as for safe and practical drop-off and delivery space, but have seen too many new residential buildings in the Central District that are simply overparked. These buildings compound traffic within the City and, due to their bulky and inelegant parking garages, make the streetscape less pedestrian friendly.

We also suggest a reasonable parking maximum be applied for new SRO buildings in the Central District. We suggest that each unit, regardless of income or affordability level, have a maximum parking requirement of .75, and a minimum of zero. What does this mean for a 40 unit SRO building, for example? It gives the developer a choice of providing between zero and 30 spots, depending on what the market demands. A building directly adjacent to the Gold Line may choose a lower number of spots, while one further away approaches the maximum. This option would help mitigate the visual and environmental impacts of new construction.

Furthermore, we believe that there should be no distinction in parking between affordability levels, such as is written under current code. Many blue-collar and working class jobs in our current age require a car to access different job sites. Conversely, white-collar office and tech jobs are located in urban cores, or allow employees to work remotely. It is inaccurate and unfair to say that low-income residents should ride public transit and that market rate residents should have cars.

Pasadena Heritage supports this ordinance, and is excited to see how it unfolds. Can SROs be expanded out of the Central District in the future? What is the ideal ratio of housing to parking in these buildings? What other affordable housing strategies can we incorporate into our planning process? We do not see SROs as a "silver bullet" solution to affordability problems, but they can provide short term solutions for at-risk residents, young professionals, or students. We hope these updates to the City Code on behalf of SROs can help, in some small part, to alleviate our housing crisis while allowing for targeted, sustainable growth.

Thank you for considering our concerns and recommendations.

Sincerely yours,



Susan N. Mossman
Executive Director



Andrew Salimian
Preservation Director

cc: David Reyes
Andre Sahakian