

Housing Position Statement

A great crisis facing the State of California is the dire shortage of affordable housing. Despite our nation's founding premise that we are all created equal and have equal rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, inequality has widened to an unsustainable chasm between the “haves” and the “have nots.” Strides towards a more perfect union have been made on civil rights, social security, and health care, but land use policies and practices have historically been used as a tool of exclusion, and many today perceive housing a commodity rather than a right or necessary infrastructure.

The AIA Central Valley believes that architects should help abate the affordable housing crisis by using their professional skills to build “neighborhoods for all” where housing affordable to a broad socio-economic spectrum is integrated at the scale of individual buildings and blocks. Since 2020 we have worked to advance the production of Missing Middle Housing that delivers multiple units on the same size lot as a single-family house and uses similar simple construction. It is an affordable-by-design solution that is generally attainable without subsidies to middle income households. It is not a new concept but is a traditional housing form as evidenced by the duplexes, flats, fourplexes, and cottage courts built throughout our nation prior to World War II.

Returning Missing Middle Housing to its traditional place in our housing inventory will make our neighborhoods more equitable and inclusive – but, by its nature, its development will be incremental and insufficient to counter the continuing rise in rents, house sale prices, and homelessness. Therefore, in the hope of scaling-up housing production, the AIA Central Valley is expanding its civic engagement efforts to include working to advance the transformation of the aging commercial strips that crisscross our region into mixed-use, mixed-income, transit-supportive neighborhoods; and working to advance the adaptive reuse of commercial office properties for housing.

- *Commercial strips were once where people cruised and where they went for whatever they needed. But today, people cruise online and much of this brick-and-mortar commercial space is under-used or sits vacant. Transforming commercial strips can radically quicken the pace of housing production without disrupting stable neighborhoods and in a way that supports sustainable methods of travel.*

- *Commercial office properties and the retail businesses serving them were largely abandoned during the COVID pandemic when many switched to working remotely. Post COVID, remote work or some hybrid pattern has become the norm, and it is clear that many workers are not coming back to their offices. Re-using these abandoned properties for housing not only addresses the affordable housing crisis but is a green solution since the embodied carbon used to construct these structures has already been expended.*

The affordable housing crisis impacts us all. It may be most visibly manifested by the homeless living on city streets, but even moderate-income households are moving out-of-state, from costly coastal cities to our region and out into the wildfire-urban-interface zone in search of housing they can afford; and, our younger generations are seeing the dream of homeownership slip from their grasp.

It is an all-hands-on-deck moment and the AIA Central Valley believes that, as architects, we have both the requisite knowledge and the ethical obligation to step up and do our part.