

Affordable Housing vs. NIMBYism

NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) runs unchecked throughout the land. It is more obvious in areas like Santa Cruz with ever-expanding real estate prices, which I consider legalized yet immoral gambling.

by Linda Lemaster

In Santa Cruz County and the various cities within, affordable housing for blue collar workers, disabled people, and underpaid families can't be had without: (1) a long wait and demoralizing search; (2) a compromise with landlords; (3) substandard dwellings; (4) overcrowding; (5) unreasonable deposits; and (6) worst of all, NIMBY attitudes.

NIMBY runs unchecked throughout the land. It is more obvious in areas like Santa Cruz with ever-expanding real estate prices, which I consider legalized yet immoral gambling. I first noticed this NIMBY thing long ago in Santa Cruz when Twin Lakes Baptist Church moved away from Twin Lakes Beach.

The church left behind a lovely beach-side building which Mama Dawson and others wished to turn into much needed half-way housing for recovering drug and alcohol users. In reaction, the East Side Live Oak neighborhoods vociferously organized, hoping to avert the supportive

housing plan. Their amazing accomplishment was the collective yet inaccurate stereotyping of its would-be residents. They assumed their neighborhood would become overrun with thieves and unmentionably shady characters.

Such bigotry might have been more excusable 20 years ago. People back then didn't understand what is hopefully more obvious today. People in a clean-and-sober facility are obliged to live much more stringent, structured, cooperative, and neighborly lifestyles. Or they get evicted and lose their support system abruptly.

I feel there is no excuse for this head-in-the-sand attitude today. Most of us have relatives or friends who are or once were in a half-way house, hospital, board-and-care home, or mental hospital for observation. We all know those who have doubled up to afford child-care or rent, or who live in a co-op or school. And we all know people who felt they had to lie in order to rent or buy a place to live. (How many children do you have? income? how many students will live here?)

The NIMBY problem is not only alive and well, but it could even be said in some places that official housing and land use policies are dictated by rampant, unstated NIMBY assumptions. Sadly, our elected officials, department bosses, policy makers, consultants and so-called activists share these fears with their snooty neighbors.

After a certain point, "Not-in-my-backyard" translates into the more blunt: "I've