

Santa Cruz YIMBY Questionnaire

YIMBYs are excited to see your answers and work with you to build a more equitable and affordable community. YIMBY Action chapters across the country are fighting for an integrated and environmentally sustainable society where every person has access to a safe, affordable home near jobs, services, and opportunity.

YIMBY Action (yimbyaction.org) is active in multiple regions across the country and advocates for better housing policy at the local, state, and national levels. If YIMBY Action endorses in your area, you may see that endorsement referred to as both the YIMBY Action endorsement and the endorsement of an affiliated chapter (i.e. "Santa Cruz YIMBY").

Your answers will be made available to our membership during the endorsement process and may be posted on our website. We often use quotes from these questionnaires when promoting our endorsement.

We understand that candidates may be thinking about housing and land use for the first time, and we are happy to share with you our opinions and educational resources! If you have questions about anything here, please feel free to reach out to hello@yimbyaction.org or speak with a local member.

Additionally, we have collected introductory short videos, podcasts and articles that may help inform you about YIMBY perspectives on housing: <https://yimbyaction.org/2021/top-resources/>

Email *

manuforsupervisor@gmail.com

Your Name

As it will appear on the ballot

Manu Koenig

District you are running in

State, District, Any other relevant information

First District, County of Santa Cruz

Campaign Email

Best email to stay in touch about candidate forums, etc

manuforsupervisor@gmail.com

YOUR COMMUNITY: Is your district suffering from a housing shortage?

Hell yes

YOUR COMMUNITY: Are there policies that make it harder to build housing in your community that you would like to change?

Yes, one of my top goals in my second term is to greatly simplify our local zoning code (or have a popular vote to repeal it).

YOUR RECORD: Are there pro-housing policies or specific housing developments you have supported in the past that you would like to highlight?

1. Legalized tiny homes
 2. Established pre-approved plans for ADUs
 3. Supported increasing fee waivers for ADUs from 640 to 750 sqft
 4. Adopted Appendix M of the CA Building Code which changes the calculations for pipe-sizing in multi-family buildings to save builders money and save water
 5. Updated Subdivision Securities Ordinance to allow bonding and letters of credit
 6. Created a pilot composting toilet program to support more housing in rural areas
 7. Supported the simplest possible process for new state required septic requirements (again to support housing in the rural area)
 8. Supported the Sustainable Santa Cruz Plan that increases max residential density from 17 units per acre to 45
 9. Added additional language to the Sustainable Santa Cruz Plan that allows developers to reduce or eliminate parking requirements if they provide bus passes to residents
 10. As a METRO Board member have supported increased frequencies so that more housing projects are exempt from parking requirements
 11. Support the Housing Element where approximately 80% of the rezoning is in my district.
 12. Created Third Party Plan Check program so that building permit applicants can bypass long delays.
 13. Pushed our Planning Dept. to triple its own contracts with third party plan check services to eliminate the backlog.
 14. Supported Homekey projects on Park Ave and on Highway 9 (Veterans Village) - authored county commitment to building more housing for people experiencing homelessness in the unincorporated area.
 15. Supporting Behavioral Health Bridge Housing in my district
 16. Strengthened Tenant Protections ordinance to prevent discrimination against non-english speakers
 17. Strengthened Mobile Home Rent Stabilization Ordinance to maintain affordable housing for low-income and senior residents (1/2 of all mobile homes in the County are in D1).
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YOUR PLATFORM: Do you have a section on your website about housing?

Please Link. If not, tell us a bit about your perspective on housing in your state, region, and/or city.

I talk about it on my home page and will expand the section soon: <https://www.manuforsupervisor.com/>

Obviously, Santa Cruz County has not built the housing we need over the past decades and we are paying for it dearly now. When people say that we don't have the infrastructure to support more housing, I explain to them that it's the opposite: we don't have enough housing to support our existing infrastructure. The current residents (a population aging twice as fast as the rest of the state) are going to have a hard time paying for all the maintenance on our roads, sewers, water systems, schools and fire stations. Additionally, we need more housing for the public sector employees who keep this infrastructure running. The County is having a hell of a time hiring civil engineers, planners and other necessary positions - too many are sitting empty. 30% of all the City and County employees who work in water and wastewater are less than 10 years away from retirement.

We need to continue to make it easier to build housing. I appreciate all the new laws coming out of the state. It also shows just how many exceptions there are to the zoning code. I would like to see the state standardize zoning across all jurisdictions, including eliminating FAR, parking requirements, single family zoning and setback requirements. I think we can start by overhauling our zoning code here in Santa Cruz County.

YOUR YIMBY-NESS: Do you have a pro-housing quote or statement you think YIMBYs would love to hear?

Something for our promotions if we endorse you!

When people tell me that we don't have enough infrastructure to support more housing, I explain to them that it's the opposite: we don't have enough housing to support our existing infrastructure.

ENDING EXCLUSIONARY ZONING

American neighborhoods are defined by exclusion. Systems of [exclusionary zoning](#) ban [duplexes, apartments, subsidized affordable housing, student housing and more](#) in most "residential" areas. Excluding these types of homes keeps neighborhoods homogeneous and makes housing more expensive. Keeping the supply of housing low drives up housing costs, excluding people who are nonetheless an integral part of our community. "YIMBYs advocate for the end of this ban on apartments and other kinds of housing; we want to [end exclusionary zoning](#) (aka "upzone").

Upzoning is especially important in wealthy, high-opportunity neighborhoods where current zoning laws reinforce racial and class segregation.

YIMBY Action advocates for ending exclusionary zoning and legalizing apartments. Communities that ban apartment buildings in residential neighborhoods are exacerbating inequality, increasing sprawl and greenhouse gas emissions, and stunting their own local economy.

Would you fight to end single family home only zoning, ending bans on apartments and other types of housing in all residential areas? [Short Answer]

Yes, see my previous answers!

What kinds of housing would you like to see in exclusionary communities?

(Accessory Dwelling Units, Duplexes, Missing Middle Apartment Buildings, Subsidized Affordable Housing, etc)

all of the above

STREAMLINING PERMITS

Even where housing is technically allowed, complicated and arbitrary permitting can slow, shrink, or stop housing proposals. Complicated and arbitrary permitting creates opportunities for corruption to flourish, makes building housing take much longer and further drives up the cost of new housing. The process of endless hearings and appeals is [where we often see NIMBYs dominate](#).

Instead of following clear rules about what is allowed and what is prohibited, communities put individual housing proposals through the political wringer, with endless community meetings and hearings with unrepresentative groups of constituents. Often local Planning Commissions or even City Councils will vote on whether a housing proposal will get their permits, creating an arbitrary and expensive process that stifles housing.

Improving permitting is especially important in exclusionary neighborhoods. In those neighborhoods, [wealthy homeowners often weaponize the permitting process to block new housing in their neighborhoods](#).

Do you support “by right” permitting, where cities must make clear, objective zoning and building standards, thus allowing developers following these rules to build new projects without delay?

[Short Answer]

Yes, I think my record shows that I support this and I'm happy to introduce other ordinances that you suggest.

Is there a specific policy that stops or slows down housing permitting in your area that you believe needs changing?

It's a practice more than a policy but our planning department has been getting around the state's Permit Streamlining Act by just keeping our online submission portal closed. That way they don't have to "accept" applications and don't start the clock. This needs to end ASAP and I'm working with Supervisor McPherson to accomplish just that.

FUNDING SUBSIDIZED AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Most housing in the United States is “market-rate”. People or companies that own homes rent or sell them at a price where they can find a buyer. Even if housing becomes less expensive on the open market, there will likely always be people who can't find housing at a price they can afford.

Public funding helps provide housing for people with very low incomes, often known as Affordable Housing. There are many different kinds of funding sources and types of subsidized Affordable Housing, but all are falling far below the needs of our communities. YIMBYs believe that we must increase funding for income-qualified housing at all levels of government. Increasing funding for affordable housing is critical to creating a future of housing for all.

Do you support increasing public funding for subsidized Affordable Housing?

[Short Answer]

yes

What type of local subsidy for affordable housing should the municipality you are seeking to serve focus on by allocating resources? (ex: raise taxes, issue bonds, cut other spending, etc)

Our County is extremely limited because of the low share of property taxes we get (13% compared to 20% state-wide average). This chronic underfunding is why our roads and facilities are crumbling and in a 2nd term I will do everything I can to create a state-wide movement to change it. If I'm successful, the county will get approximately \$70M more per year of unconstrained funding. I'd like to take \$14 - \$17M of that (the amount we receive in permit fees) and just make permitting free. This eliminates the staff culture of dragging out permits so that we get paid more. The incentive shifts towards efficiency. It will also encourage more people to apply for permits. Moving the county to a "freemium" model - where we make money on the backend with re-assmenets and increased property values.

The County could also contribute limited funds to building housing for its own workforce. However, I don't believe that significant capacity exists within Santa Cruz County via new taxes to fund significant affordable housing construction. I think as far as funding construction goes that we need more state and federal dollars.

FEES AND BAD INCENTIVES

There are many ways we make housing more expensive and slow down decision-making. These policies range from excessive parking requirements to height limitations. Since many local governments have limited budgets and are disinclined to tax current residents, they often try to raise funds for public needs by charging fees on new housing projects, effectively taxing future residents who can't vote on these costs. These fees have a variety of names, such as "Inclusionary Fees", "School Impact Fees", "1-Percent-For-The-Arts", "Transit Impact Fees" and many more. These fees drive up the cost of building housing, ensuring that only the most expensive projects are built. They are "stealth taxes", paid by future residents. With added fees, housing for middle-income people is often prohibitively expensive to build.

In the long term, State and Federal Governments need to offer more help to local governments to fix these broken incentives. Cities need housing for workers and public funding to ensure transit and other infrastructure needs are met. We can't keep taxing something we need (housing) in order to fund all the other things we need. Reducing the fees we put on housing will make it more feasible for home builders to build smaller, less expensive new homes.

The California state Department of Housing and Community Development recommends that a municipality proposing any “inclusionary” ordinance that requires housing projects to set aside more than 15% of their units as income-restricted affordable units be supported with a nexus study that justifies the feasibility of the rate of affordability for developers. Do you plan to follow this recommendation? Please explain.

Yes, this conversation came up the other day at our Board Meeting when Supervisor Cummings proposed 20-25% inclusionary and I suggested that we wait for the nexus study and that I generally supported incentives rather than new requirements for affordable housing.

Fees we put on housing drive up the cost of construction, making new units more expensive. What are examples of this in your area?

permit fees, park fees, long delays for permitting that yield more interest payments on construction bonds

TENANT PROTECTIONS

As we pursue policies for abundant housing, YIMBY Action fights for development without displacement. The YIMBY movement is in many ways a consumer advocacy movement, representing the interests of people who want more abundant, affordable housing options near jobs and opportunity for all. We are renters, homeowners, families, parents, seniors, millennials, unsheltered, and more. Policies to build the housing we need must be coupled with policies to protect people living in the housing we have.

YIMBY Action supports policies like Right to Return, Tenant-Protecting Demolition Controls, Just-Cause Eviction Protections and more. We believe these policies can be well crafted to minimize negative impacts on the overall housing stock, while helping add more stability to the lives of at-risk renters.

What are common-sense tenant protections you support?

I support emergency payments to help keep people in their homes and avoid homelessness. I also support funding for legal services for tenants to avoid un-just evictions.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

More questions on community connectivity, homelessness, and mixed use housing.

What can your community do to improve public transit and other options for people to get around with less reliance on cars?

Improve our METRO! We're doing it - the routes running through Live Oak will now be the 1,2, and 3 lines and we expanded service 25%. I will be supporting our agencies initiative for an additional sales tax in Nov 2024 to fund further expansion of service to three 15 minute headways across mid-county.

We can also put in more smart lights so that when a bus approaches they turn green.

We can also continue to expand bus on shoulder service on the Highway. I will advocate for a true bus on shoulder/ dedicated right of way along the entire length of Highway 1, as well as bus-rapid transit boarding stations at highway intersections.

I think we could also create a transit funding district so that new development funds better transit. This would be more of a long term funding source.

As an elected official, have you voted against any affordable housing projects and why? If not currently in office, are there any projects that you would/have voted against?

No

Do you believe that homelessness can be solved with the production of more homes? Please explain.

Yes, 70% of our homeless population is from our county or the adjacent county, 90% is from California. This is a homegrown problem and it's due to lack of housing. You also see plenty of addiction and poverty in other parts of the country like West Virginia, but they don't have the homelessness problem because housing is cheap.

What are compassionate solutions to homelessness?

More temporary housing and safe parking solutions. I'm working on an ordinance that allows churches to have a number of temporary housing units like tiny homes or pallet shelters on their properties by right.

Building more housing will help ease the housing shortage and bring down housing prices. Dense, more walkable, more affordable communities will reduce carbon emissions, reduce segregation, reduce homelessness and build a better community. Do you agree?

100% One reason I'm so passionate about housing is that it's the primary way that we can address the climate crises.

In general do you support changing local housing policies to allow the construction of more housing at all levels of affordability, including both subsidized-affordable and market rate homes?

yes

This form was created inside of Yimby Action.

Google Forms