



PETALUMA COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL GENERAL MEETING:
Co-Sponsored by the Sonoma County Commission on Human Rights
January 29, 2018, Petaluma Regional Library, 100 Fairgrounds Drive, Petaluma, 94952

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:
6:01 PM by Chair, Rabbi Ted Feldman

1. WELCOME

- Chair, Rabbi Ted Feldman welcomed attendees, and briefly explained why and how PCRC was formed – to create and foster a unified voice. With that, he asked Faith Ross, PCRC Coordinating Committee member to read the organization’s Mission Statement.
 - ✚ **MISSION STATEMENT** *“The mission of the Petaluma Community Relations Council is to serve as a coalition of individuals and groups, promoting the values of respect, appreciation and understanding of diversity among all people in our community. By fostering positive human relations, we identify and confront discrimination, respond to the needs of our community, and serve as a source of information and advocacy.”*
- Chair, Feldman next introduced members of PCRC’s Coordinating Committee who were present: Phyllis Tajii, John Kennedy, Marjorie Helm, Faith Ross, Elece Hempel, Lou Zweier and Erica Stuart

2. PRESENTATION:

- Chair Rabbi Feldman introduced members of the panel, who addressed a broad range of topics that included poverty, Petaluma’s shelterless population, affordable housing and urban development.
 1. **“James,”** who was asked to share the challenges he and others face when it comes to housing, introduced himself saying, “Homeless. I am homeless.” Speaking before a room filled to near capacity, he asked attendees if they recognized him. He said he arrived in a suit, so that maybe they would hear his voice. In preparing for the forum, he said that he couldn’t decide if he should talk about the reality of homelessness or the successes some can achieve despite harrowing odds. He chose to address the agony, frustration and constant grief countless suffer. “Homelessness,” he said, “is a very serious problem – some label it an epidemic.” He went on to say, “They may be your neighbors, your friends, your relatives.” He added that disaster can strike at any time, to anyone, for any number of reasons; and it doesn’t take much for someone who has lost everything to hit that “slippery slope.” James was eloquent in his effort to articulate his deep concerns about how society responds to the most unfortunate, asking members of the audience, that even with their best of intentions, “Please consider your solutions as abject failures.” He pulled no punches, refusing to sugarcoat a devastating trend in our society, emphasizing that unless one has suffered a similar experience, one can’t truly understand what’s at stake; emphasizing the need to make a concerted effort to recognize the diverse and innumerable needs of many struggling with poverty.
 - To underscore James’ narrative, Chair Feldman, introduced Mike Johnson, COTS CEO, who, like James, experienced homelessness and the humiliation of being ostracized for “being poor.”
 2. **Mike Johnson** expanded on James’ story, underscoring the stigma associated with the sudden loss of one’s livelihood. “I didn’t grow up in generational poverty, I entered it through a series of events.” He described the gradual degradation one experiences as a process of giving up humanity in order to survive. “You learn to quickly prioritize,” and in time, during your struggle to survive, “the public becomes your mirror – you eventually start to believe what others see – deprivation and worthlessness.” In time, he added, “You lose your identity, which is more severe than losing a home. You enter a class that has no class, and become an object of disgust, pity and fear.” Like James, he challenged those listening to truly embrace “diversity,” asking them, “How do we celebrate diversity, when we decry affordability?” The stigma attached to homelessness and poverty, he explained, persists, and that society tends to be more welcoming of wealth and status. He asked participants if by diversifying economic standing in the community, “Do you honestly believe crime goes up? Do you believe the level of education is diminished?” When it comes to social strata, Mike said, people tend to be unwilling to share space with others who are not like them. “We are not as inclusive or broad minded as we would like to think.” He noted that the disparity is particularly

bad in Marin and Sonoma Counties. Mike ended his address by urging Petaluma to do more, and be more accepting of affordable housing. “Affordable housing can enrich a community, not drag it down.”

- Chair Feldman next introduced Jane Hamilton with Rebuilding Together Petaluma.
 3. **Jane Hamilton**, whose organization, utilizes volunteers to repair homes for low income homeowners at no cost, said that Rebuilding Together Petaluma tackles 60 projects a year and serves 120 residents annually. Those served earn less than \$30,000 annually. Some clients earn less than \$17,000, and others less than \$11,000. Volunteers fix roofs, furnaces, make critical and urgent repairs, like plumbing and flooring. She shared one example where a Petaluma resident, living in subsidized housing, suffered a stroke, is confined to a wheel chair, and unable to access areas of his multi-level home. She enlisted a team of volunteers from construction companies, who fashioned an accessible design by raising floors inside his home, allowing him greater mobility. She cited another example where a Vietnam Vet’s home was infested with rats. The immediate health risk was addressed quickly, she noted, but clearly there were other issues to be addressed. An outreach plan was put into motion, bringing in professional assistance from Adult Protective Services, Veterans Administration and In-Home services providers. Jane counted 600 active volunteers who make-up Rebuilding Together Petaluma – 150 of those volunteers have specific skills that are needed for major projects. She repeated that all work is done free of charge. She said that Rebuilding Together Petaluma relies on Community Development Block Grants and corporate donations to help defray costs associated with the work. She ended by noting that Rebuilding Together Petaluma works year-round, with two “big volunteer days,” held in October and April. She invited anyone interested in participating to contact her organization.
<http://www.rtpetaluma.com/>

- Chair Feldman next introduced Elece Hempel, Director of Petaluma People Services Center and Coordinating Committee member of PCRC.
 4. **Elece Hempel** spoke in depth about Community Development and Fair Housing issues, specifically resources offered to both tenants and landlords. She said the goal of PPSC is to provide “well sheltered, safe and social supportive housing.” She said the challenge is listening to each other, and realizing that not all solutions are a fix-all, she said, “Solutions have unintended consequences, and it’s imperative that we not only listen but keep our eyes and minds open to all ideas, like, for example, partnering with the city to provide rental assistance.” She said that her organization has successfully helped 1,000 people find housing through rental assistance. Another idea includes “Share Sonoma,” initially created in the wake of the October fires, but continues as a source to help confront Petaluma’s housing shortage. During a previous PCRC public meeting, immediately following the October fires, Elece spoke at length about the SHARE Sonoma model. Through Petaluma’s expanded SHARE program, her agency set up call banks, and through proper vetting, was able to secure immediate and temporary long-term housing for displaced people and their families. Petaluma People Services received 2,000 calls from Petaluma residents, who offered room in their homes, summer vacation homes and granny units. She noted PPSC was able to accomplish this by simply applying the same model it created for senior citizens. “Shared model for Seniors works with those displaced.”
**PCRC November 1, 2017 report, Critical Disaster Relief full report: <http://petalumacrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Petaluma-CRC-General-Minutes-11-1-2017.pdf>

- Chair Feldman recognized dignitaries attending the forum: Vice Mayor Mike Healy and Council members, Teresa Barrett, and David King. Then he introduced the next panelist, Sue Catsellucci, Housing Coordinator, Housing Division, City of Petaluma.
 5. **Sue Castellucci** shared the complexities of developing affordable housing and the challenges of keeping pace with demand. She said the City of Petaluma is an entitlement jurisdiction under the Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG), through Housing and Urban Development. Grant dollars are intended for projects and programs serving low-income seniors, persons with disabilities, and households with housing needs.
 - ✓ HUD’s web site shows dollars the City of Petaluma Received from CDBG during a 5-year period:
 - 2017 -- \$347,465.00
 - 2016 -- \$344,211.00
 - 2015 -- \$326,163.00
 - 2014 -- \$328,342.00
 - 2013 -- \$322,092.00
** <https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/petaluma-ca/>

Sue explained that funding helps finance affordable housing development and housing related services for populations in need, including the elderly, shelterless, and people with disabilities. Meals on Wheels also benefits from CDBG. CBDG funding also helps support Rebuilding Together Petaluma and COTS Mary Isaac Center. But

she said, the dollar stretches only so far, and as much as Petaluma wants to increase its affordable housing development, the tasks are challenging.

She noted that Petaluma began facing a myriad of economic problems after the dissolution of redevelopment agencies in February of 2012. Up until that time, Petaluma could count on funding for affordable housing projects like Logan Place, a 66-unit development offering one to three-bedroom apartments for households with small incomes, and Kellgren Senior Apartments that offers 49 units.

She said the city recognizes that the need for more affordable housing is serious, but without funding from redevelopment monies Petaluma is struggling.

She explained that if a developer is unable to allocate a certain number of units to be sold, or rented for below market rate, that developer typically offers the city what is called, "in-lieu of" fees to help finance affordable housing prospects elsewhere.

She ended by saying that the issue of affordable housing is complex, made even harder by virtue of that fact that competition is stiff as Petaluma continues to compete for federal funding that is far below the city's needs.

➤ Chair Feldman next introduced Sonoma County Supervisor, David Rabbit

- 6. David Rabbitt**, whose district covers Petaluma, Cotati, a portion of Rohnert Park and the unincorporated communities of Penngrove, Two Rock, Bloomfield, and a portion of the unincorporated community south of Sebastopol, described the current housing shortage as a "Crisis on steroids, and a lot of our own making." He said that it's incumbent that Petaluma focus on an integrated housing model, and urged the city to begin action now. By 2040, he noted, the population growth in the Bay Area is expected to increase by 2-million. "How do we accommodate for that?" He said the number of people forced to live elsewhere in order to finance affordable housing, continue to suffer because what little they can save is spent on daily commutes to cities in which they work, but cannot afford to live. He said that it's imperative that cities focus on development that address both housing and traffic.

He noted that the October fires exacerbated the crisis, adding that it's vital that we mitigate damage by realizing what we must do to both recover from the disaster, and work on long-term solutions now, not later. The demand for housing has outpaced supply.

He expanded on that by sharing a current initiative focused on regional housing implantation via legislative, regulatory, financial and market-related measures.

CASA Committee to House the Bay Area, which he described as a multisector, blue-ribbon initiative, draws together diverse interests to identify methods to ensure housing affordability, and generate political consensus to implement them. He said CASA includes a broad-base of stakeholders, led by a Steering Committee and Technical Committee, that will develop a Regional Housing Implementation Strategy featuring a range of legislative, regulatory, financial, and market-related measures. He added that CASA is addressing the region's housing needs at all income levels. It's not the sole solution, he added, but it's a sound start. As noted on CASA's web page, <https://mtc.ca.gov/our-work/plans-projects/casa-committee-house-bay-area>

"CASA brings together leaders from across the Bay Area to build an actionable political consensus around increasing housing production at all levels of affordability, preserving existing affordable housing and protecting vulnerable populations from housing instability and displacement."

➤ Chair Feldman introduced Gabriela Orantes, who works in Petaluma, but cannot afford to live in Petaluma.

- 7. Gabriela Orantes**, North Bay Organizing Project (NBOP) said she is more than familiar with commuting. She's been doing it most of her life. She was part of the inner-city district transfer program, where she attended school in Marin County because her parents worked there. She said she started commuting at the age of 4, when enrolled in Fairfax Day Care services. She continued her daily commute to and from school until she was 18. She still commutes from her home in Rohnert Park to Petaluma, because she cannot afford Petaluma's rent. She noted that the average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment is \$2,012; \$2,331 for a 2-bedroom, and \$2,938 for a 3-bedroom. If a family is able to find housing, she said they keep silent about needed repairs out of fear of being evicted. She emphasized that the city must address the reality that landlords are summarily raising rents and issuing eviction notices without reason. An example of families being evicted happened in Petaluma when the building was

purchased by an investor, who increased rent on below-market-rate units. She said tenant protections must be established as rent increases and evictions continue. One such proposal is Just Cause Eviction that would require landlords to show legal and justified cause for evicting a tenant.

- Chair Feldman opened the floor for questions from those in attendance, and introduced Kamala Brown, who works with Indivisible Petaluma and North Bay Organizing Project (NBOP), to assist in facilitating that segment of the evening's program.

A number of questions were raised with regard to available housing, affordability and rent hikes. Petaluma resident and business owner, Naomi Crawford, who also represents One Petaluma, asked Gabriela if she wanted Just Cause Eviction legislated in Petaluma. In response, Gabriela said this one idea that should be proposed and said NBOP is urging residents to show up at the next city council meeting on February 12, 2018, and ask that this be placed on the city's agenda.

Maggie Fishman, Santa Rosa Junior College, Board of Trustees President, asked Elece Hempel if she could expand on what SHARE is doing for the several hundred students who lost their homes in the October fires. Elece Hempel called on SHARE Sonoma County Executive Director, Amy Appleton, to address the question. Amy said talks are underway with Sonoma State University and Santa Rosa Junior College about providing housing assistance to those in need of shelter – specifically dormitory housing. She also said that the idea of placing students in permanent dormitory units would be a program ultimately run by students. Since the fire, Amy said SHARE has found 100 shared homes so far, which included securing long-term housing for a family of eight. To afford the housing, she noted that SHARE has also developed a “Sweat Equity” program, whereby tenants work 15 hours a week, cleaning, running errands, providing companionship, etc., in exchange for reduced rent. For more information on the services PPSC provides log onto <http://petalumapeople.org/wp-content/uploads/SHARE-Sonoma-County-2016.pdf>

Another audience member raised the subject of inclusionary housing, noting that even though developers, with 10 or more units, are supposedly **REQUIRED** to either sell or rent a percentage of the units at “below market rate” (BMR) that is affordable to low or middle-income households, they're paying an affordable housing fee instead. The latter seems to have become common.

Sam Tuttleman, a Petaluma resident and advocate, who played a critical role in drafting the “It Won't Happen Here” declaration formally adopted by the city's Council last year, questioned city leaders about inclusionary housing, saying that 184 units are under construction on the North River, and there are no affordable units. “Why is that okay?”

He was referring to the North River Apartment project, under development in downtown Petaluma's historic district, that will include 2 buildings, with a mix of 11 studios, 80 1-bedroom and 93 2-bedroom apartments, with estimated monthly rents ranging from \$1,600 to \$3,000.

In lieu of offering a percent of those units at “below market rate” (BMR), the developer is reportedly paying roughly \$650,000 to the Petaluma's affordable housing fund.

He challenged city leaders to do more than just rely upon funding from “in-lieu of” fees.

Members in the audience expanded on the disparity arguing that in-lieu fees might provide a band aide at best, but don't solve the housing shortage problem. The demand, as noted by Supervisor Rabbitt, has outpaced the supply.

Tuttleman challenged city leaders to seek more ways and opportunities to do more for residents – which also includes Petaluma's working-class. The dissolution of redevelopment dollars is not an excuse, he said.

Tuttleman noted that Petaluma is fast becoming a city of exclusive high-end real estate, where many who live and work in Petaluma are being squeezed out. He echoed Mike Johnson's comment about Petaluma's apparent inability to embrace inclusion, by focusing more on gentrification, where anything that doesn't resemble upper-middle class taste, doesn't belong. This trend, he said is spoiling the city's character and historic charm, and above all, its long-standing sense of community. He ended by saying that Petaluma is on the brink of becoming barely recognizable.

- ❖ In its own CITY OF PETALUMA 2015-2023 HOUSING ELEMENT ** report, city leaders published the following information:

“The Housing Element of the General Plan is unique in that it is the only chapter which requires outside review and certification by the California State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and is on a state-mandated time frame. Therefore, the Housing Element often is seen as a “stand-alone” document. Petaluma’s existing Housing Element was certified in 2009 and has resulted in expansion of the City’s affordable housing units and programs, increased housing choice, revitalization of existing housing and neighborhoods, and more energy efficient housing.”

“REGIONAL HOUSING NEEDS ANALYSIS: *Housing Element law requires local governments to adequately plan to meet their existing and projected housing needs including their share of the regional housing need. Housing element law is the state’s primary market-based strategy to increase housing supply and choice. The law recognizes that in order for the private sector to adequately address housing needs and demand, local governments must adopt land use plans and regulatory measures that provide opportunities for housing development. HCD is required to allocate each region’s share of the statewide housing need to regional Councils of Governments. For Petaluma, that is the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). The ‘fair share’ which evolves is based on state population projections and regional population forecasts used in preparing regional transportation plans. ABAG developed a Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) assessment allocating the region’s share of the statewide need to the cities and counties within their jurisdiction.*

The goal of RHNA is to:

- *Increase the housing supply and the mix of housing types, tenure, and affordability in all cities and counties within the region in an equitable manner;*
- *Promote infill development and socioeconomic equity, the protection of environmental and agricultural resources, and the encouragement of efficient development patterns; and*
- *Promote an improved intraregional relationship between jobs and housing. The RHNA process requires local governments to be accountable for ensuring that projected housing needs can be accommodated.*

The process maintains local control over where and what type of developments should occur in local communities while providing opportunity for the private sector to meet market demand.”

** <https://cityofpetaluma.net/cdd/pdf/HousingElement.pdf>

- Chair Feldman thanked the panelists and members of Sonoma County Commission of Human Rights, as well as attendees who participated in the forum, which was meant to bring together residents and city leaders to discuss and learn, and inspire participation in future open channels of discussion and work. He said the nearly two hour forum clearly showed that there is much work to done. He then invited members of the public as well as community leaders to work in partnership and collaborate with the newly created “Housing Activist Coordinating Committee,” sponsored by PCRC and facilitated by PCRC Coordinating Committee Member, Elece Hempel.

Those who want to play a role in this new organization are invited to contact Elece Hempel at elece@petalumapeople.org, or Chair Rabbi Ted Feldman at tedf@petalumacrc.org

Meeting adjourned at 7:49 PM