



**Access to Affordable Housing and Health Outcomes
Testimony before the San Leandro City Council
by Alexandra Desautels, Policy Analyst
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My name is Alexandra Desautels and I am here on behalf of the Alameda County Public Health Department to talk about the health impacts of affordable housing and transit oriented development, highlighting the potential impacts for San Leandro residents.

I will start by discussing the need for affordable housing in San Leandro.

- According to the San Leandro General Plan (2001), there is a definite lack of affordable housing in the city. The median priced home in San Leandro is affordable to only about 20% of its residents. The rental market is unaffordable to many San Leandro residents as well, 39.4% of which are renters. The authors of San Leandro's Housing Element estimate that a family of four – with two working parents and two school aged children – would have to spend 41% of a \$52,000 annual income to rent a typical 3 bedroom unit in San Leandro. As of the last census, almost half of San Leandro's residents have an income below \$50,000. The situation for homeowners and renters has contributed to the fact that nearly **a quarter of San Leandro residents are overpaying for their housing**, defined as putting over 30% of income towards housing.
- The evidence shows that there is a need for affordable housing. The question I am here to answer are what are the potential health consequences of a lack of affordable housing:
 - When households begin to spend more than 30% of their income on housing, affording other goods and services can prove difficult. Unaffordable housing can lead to food insecurity and poor nutrition, as well as make childcare, health care

and prescription drugs unattainable. For instance, research shows that overpayment on housing is linked to inadequate nutrition, particularly among children.

- The stress due to a lack of affordable housing is associated with a greater likelihood of developing hypertension and lower levels of psychological well-being.
- A lack of safe, affordable housing can lead vulnerable residents to settle for substandard housing situations. Moldy walls, old carpets and pest infestation are all major contributors to the development of serious respiratory and skin infections.
- To deal with a lack of affordable housing, many households “double up.” Overcrowding is linked to respiratory infections, increased stress in poor academic outcomes.
- The ultimate lack of affordable housing is homelessness. Homelessness is linked to higher rates of mortality and increased morbidity due to respiratory infections and poor nutrition. In addition, homelessness has been linked to depression among children.

Meeting the housing needs of all San Leandro residents will help protect the health of the City’s residents most vulnerable to economic downturns and most at risk for poor health outcomes. Building such affordable housing as part of *Transit Oriented Development*, however, will not only positively impact the health of the residents of affordable units, but of all residents in San Leandro whose health is negatively impacted by air pollution.

- In Alameda County, those census tracts found to have higher exposure to air pollutants, such as here in San Leandro, are at increased risk for cancer and respiratory disease when compared with the rest of the Bay Area.¹ As a result of the higher exposure, San Leandro has 50% more Asthma-Related hospitalizations than the county-wide average.² Long-term exposure to air

¹ ACPHD

² ACPHD

pollution leads to higher rates of illness and premature death³. Shorter-term exposures can make allergies, asthma, and chronic bronchitis worse⁴. Air pollution can also affect fetal development, decrease lung function, and increase susceptibility to respiratory infection⁵.

- As cars are the number one contributor to air pollution, a reduction in driving is essential for improving air quality and reducing related illnesses in San Leandro. Research shows that transit-oriented development reduces driving. For instance:
 - A study of Santa Clara County's light-rail corridor found that TOD residents patronized transit as their predominant commute mode more than five times as much as residents countywide.⁶
 - An extensive study of the Bay Area showed that both higher density (number of households per acre) and compact design (size of the blocks in a neighborhood) significantly increased the probability that a resident in those neighborhoods would take transit instead of driving.⁷

Finally, Transit-Orient Development promotes physical activity. Physical inactivity is linked with increased risk of coronary heart disease, colon cancer, and diabetes, and is also a risk factor for overweight, which puts people at greater risk for type 2 diabetes, stroke, and other chronic diseases.⁸ Given that almost one in three children attending San Leandro schools was considered overweight in 2003 – the 4th highest rate of all County school districts – increasing physical activity rates is paramount for improving long term health outcomes in this City.

³. California Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment and American Lung Association of California. Health Effects of Diesel Exhaust fact sheet. http://www.oehha.org/public_info/facts/dieselfacts.html. (Accessed August 2008)

⁴ California EPA, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment and American Lung Association of California. Air Pollution and Children's Health. Fact Sheet. http://www.oehha.org/public_info/facts/pdf/kidsair4-02.pdf. Accessed August 2008.

⁵ Gauderman WJ, Avol E, Gilliland F, et al. The Effect of Air Pollution on Lung Development from 10 to 18 Years of Age. *N Engl J Med.* 2004;351(11):1057-1067. With correction from *N Engl J Med.* 2005;1276-a.

⁶ Gerston and Associates, *Transit-Based Housing* (San Jose, Santa Clara County Transportation Agency and the Santa Clara Valley Manufacturing Group, 1995)

⁷ R. Cervero. *Transit-oriented Development in the United States: Experiences, Challenges, And Prospects*, (United States Federal Transit Administration, Transit Cooperative Research Program, National Research Council, Transportation Research Board, Transit Development Corporation)

⁸ Task Force on Community Preventive Services. *The guide to community preventive services: physical activity*. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2001. Available at <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa>

- TOD has an added benefit of increasing opportunities for physical activity. Both national and local studies have found that dense, mixed-use neighborhoods significantly increase the likelihood of walking and cycling.⁹¹⁰

When considering this Transit Orient Development, please remember the potential health impacts, both in terms of promoting physical activity and improving the air we breathe. When considering the affordable housing units currently proposed as part of this transit orient development, please remember the health threats posed to your neighbors enduring housing stress.

The Alameda County Public Health Department is working to ensure the health of all County residents, but we need your help to make improved health outcomes a reality.

Thank you.

⁹ R. Ewing, T. Schmid, R. Killingsworth, A. Zlot, S. Raudenbush, "Relationships Between Urban Sprawl and Physical Activity, Obesity and Morbidity." *American Journal of Health Promotion*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2003): 47-57

¹⁰ R.Cervero and M Duncao, "Walking, Bicycling and Urban Landscapes: Evidence from the San Francisco Bay Area", *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 93, No. 9 (2003): 1478-1483