



DATE: April 26, 2017

TO: Andrew Thomas, Alameda Planning Director

FROM: Lisa Vorderbrueggen, BIA|Bay Area East Bay Executive Director  
For Governmental Affairs

RE: Draft Universal Design Ordinance

Dear Andrew:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Alameda's draft citywide universal design ordinance. I have circulated the draft among BIA|Bay Area members familiar with residential construction and real estate market in Alameda in addition to colleagues at the California Building Industry Association with expertise in universal design. Based on those discussions, I would like to raise a number of concerns.

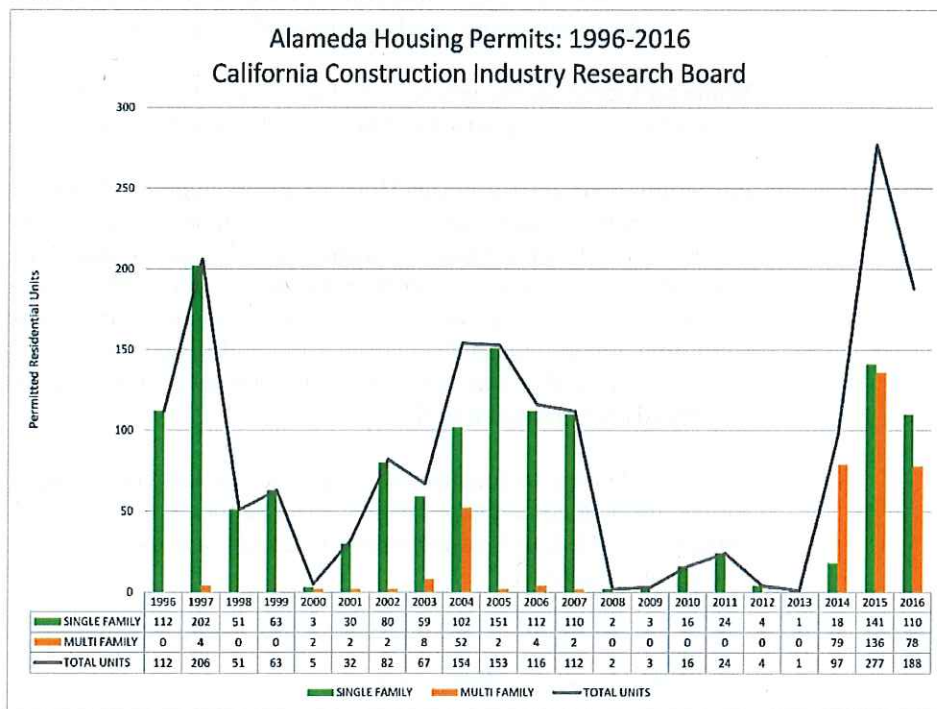
If Alameda were to adopt the ordinance as drafted, it would be the most stringent mandatory universal design regulation in the state of California.

With respect to the 100 percent "visitability" requirement, it adds tens of thousands of dollars in added costs to constructing new homes at a time when housing unaffordability is already at crisis levels in the San Francisco Bay Area. As an unintended consequence, it will also lead to fewer units being built per acre as developers shift to the larger footprints necessary to accommodate the universal design components on the first floor.

According to the California Building Industry Association, 80 percent of the single-family homes built in California today are two and three-story dwellings, which present significant design constraints to the inclusion of accessible path-of-travel and the inclusion of interior clear-space

requirements. The design constraints are far more significant in townhomes. The builders' two main options for accommodating the new regulations have serious drawbacks: Reduce densities to less than 18 units per acre or install accessible elevators. The first will yield fewer units and only luxury projects will be financially viable. The second adds about \$80,000 to the cost of each unit, which also drives up the price of the homes. The third unintended consequence is that mandating ground-floor living features favors single-story homes at a time when most communities are pushing for higher density development patterns that make more efficient use of public transportation and other public services.

Among our members' other concerns:



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- For flood damage protection, most jurisdictions require a differential of 24 to 36 inches between the street and the structure's concrete pad to allow for drainage. However, CBC Chapter 11A states that the slope of an accessible ramp cannot exceed 1-in-12. This means a builder will need at least 36 feet of ramp (not including 48" landings at the bottom, top and at changes in direction) to handle a 36" rise from the street to the front door. For a single-family house, this presents an enormous design challenge as most existing front yard and primary entry designs would fail to meet this standard. It also presents a significant marketing challenge for the builder, as most homebuyers will not want an entry way with a large ramp such as the one described here.
- The draft ordinance appears to expand the California Housing and Community Development Department's multi-family accessibility building standards (CBC Chapter 11A) into single-family houses. Was this Alameda's intention? If so, did the city intend to require all 125 universal design items listed in the chapter? This would represent a significant cost to the builders and homebuyers.
- With respect to the 30 percent requirement, builders would very likely have to toss out their model home designs and start from scratch. Access to the primary living level would almost certainly have to be done through an accessible elevator that can accommodate the clear space requirements for a wheelchair user at a cost of at least \$80,000. Combined with the other mandatory universal design features, the added costs would be significant.
- Homebuyers are generally disinterested in universal design features. For example, KB Home in Southern California offered up to 80 universal design options. Out of 10,000 units sold, only five buyers chose these options. Buyers are especially concerned about the impacts of universal design features on the resale values of their homes, especially that of highly visible wheelchair ramps and large accessible bathrooms.

While providing for the needs of the Bay Area's disabled residents is an important community issue, it must be balanced against the state's broad and serious housing shortage and affordability crisis.

Earlier this year, the California Housing and Community Development Department set aside pursuit of more stringent statewide universal design building codes following the release in January 2017 of "California's Housing Future," a major analysis which found that regulations and overly restrictive building codes account for a share of the increased housing costs and have an impact on affordability. Just how bad is it in California? See the attached chart prepared by Bankrate.com, which shows that California not only ranks dead last in affordability behind Hawaii and New York but by large margins. Put another way, for every \$1,000 increase in the cost of a home, another 15,000 California households are priced out of the market.

We urge Alameda to consider more targeted and less costly ways to provide residential accessibility for the disabled community. While well-intentioned, the proposed universal design ordinance will significantly drive up housing costs and make home ownership less attainable at a time when it is already at crisis levels.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Vorderbrueggen".

Lisa Vorderbrueggen  
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Attachments and Links

"Housing Affordability: First Time Home Buyers," Bankrate.com  
"California's Housing Future," January 2017, <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/policy-research/plans-reports/docs/California's-Housing-Future-Full-Public-Draft.pdf>



# Housing Affordability: First Time Home Buyers

Chart produced by Bankrate.com

<u>Rank</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Total Score*</u>
1	Iowa	40.32
2	Utah	40.16
3	Minnesota	39.61
4	Kansas	38.11
5	Missouri	38.10
:	:	:
:	:	:
:	:	:
46	Mississippi	24.56
47	Louisiana	23.96
48	New York	23.12
49	Hawaii	20.16
<b>50</b>	<b>California</b>	<b>13.67</b>

\*Total score based on: (a) Housing affordability  
 (b) Job market for young adults  
 (c) Housing market tightness  
 (d) Credit availability  
 (e) Homeownership among millennials