



**To:** Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

**From:** Culver City for More Homes

**Subject:** Agendize a Discussion of Exclusionary Zoning in Culver City

**Recommendation:**

Vote to instruct city staff to place discussion of Culver City's exclusionary zoning policies on the council agenda no later than June 14, 2021.

**Summary:**

Culver City was founded as a "whites only" town, and a key mechanism it has used to ward off non-white residents is exclusionary zoning: a suite of land-use policies designed to make housing prohibitively expensive in order to bar disfavored economic classes (and the races which comprise them). Exclusionary zoning is still legal in Culver City, and still shelters the largest, whitest, wealthiest portions of our residential land from construction of more accessible multi-family housing options (like apartments, quadplexes, and townhomes). This intentional housing scarcity has caused an affordability crisis now that Culver City has a yawning imbalance between the number of workers in town and the number of housing units available to them. It's damaging Culver City's economic and racial diversity, and it's also damaging the planet, consigning our workers to daily CO<sup>2</sup>-belching commutes from distant homes (for lack of local housing) and barring walkable mid-density neighborhoods which have higher rates of public transit usage than are found in single-family zones. In short, if we are to address our discriminatory legacy, remedy our housing shortage, meet our climate goals, and preserve what we love most about our town, Culver City must end exclusionary zoning.

**Background**

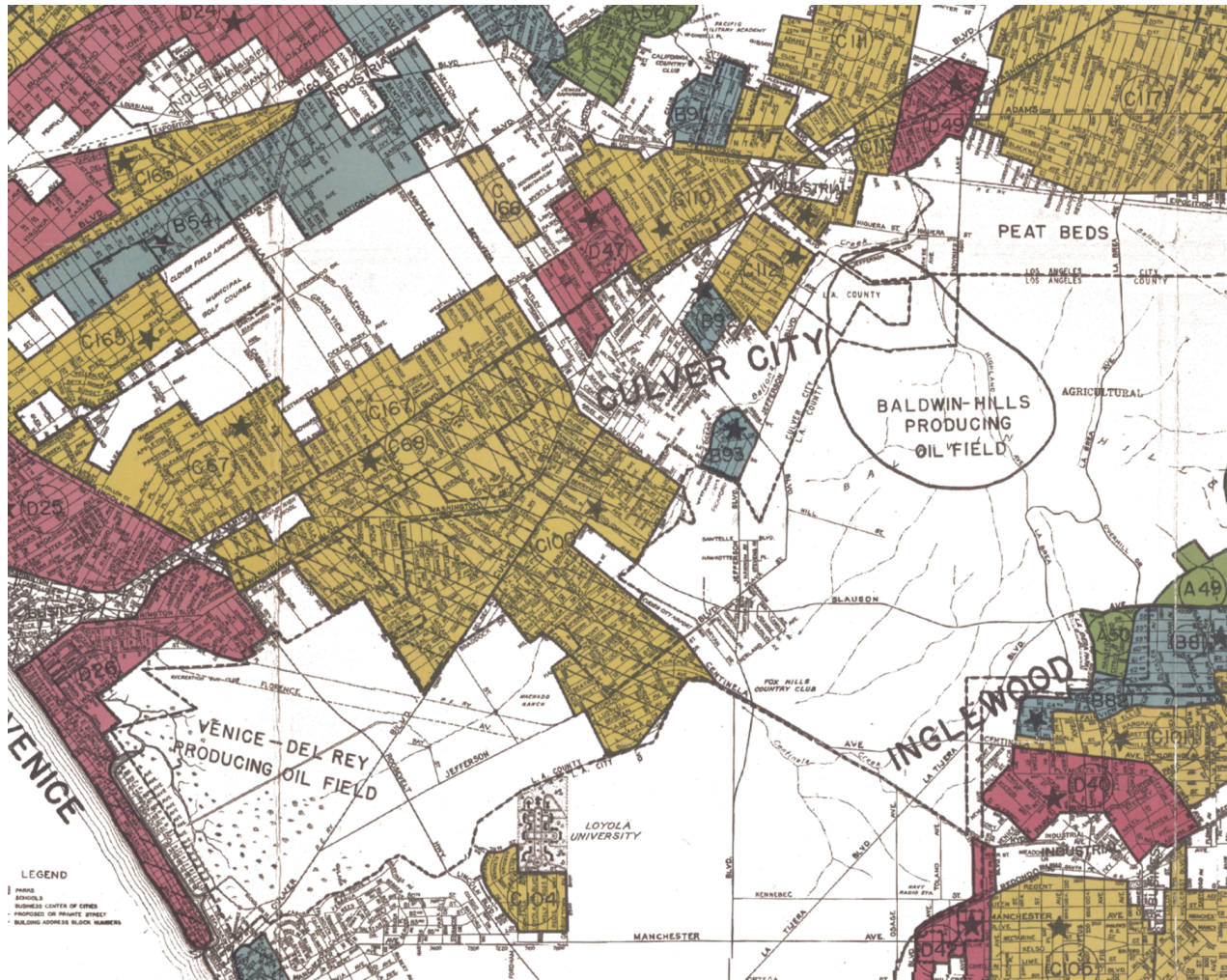
***Culver City's Racial and Economic Segregation, Exclusionary Zoning and Current Zoning***

Dating back to its founding, Culver City was marketed as a "model little white city."<sup>1</sup> The word "white" was intended to be both figurative and literal. Harry Culver's associate, Guy M. Rush, specified as much when advertising Culver City land opportunities, declaring: "Lots... restricted to Caucasian race."<sup>2</sup>

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color indeed found themselves barred from purchasing property in Culver City, due to Harry Culver's commitment to racially-restrictive property deeds and covenants. Culver then brought his commitment to segregationism to the Los Angeles Realty Board where, as Board President, he oversaw the finding that "Realtors should not sell property to other than Caucasian in territories occupied by them."<sup>3</sup>

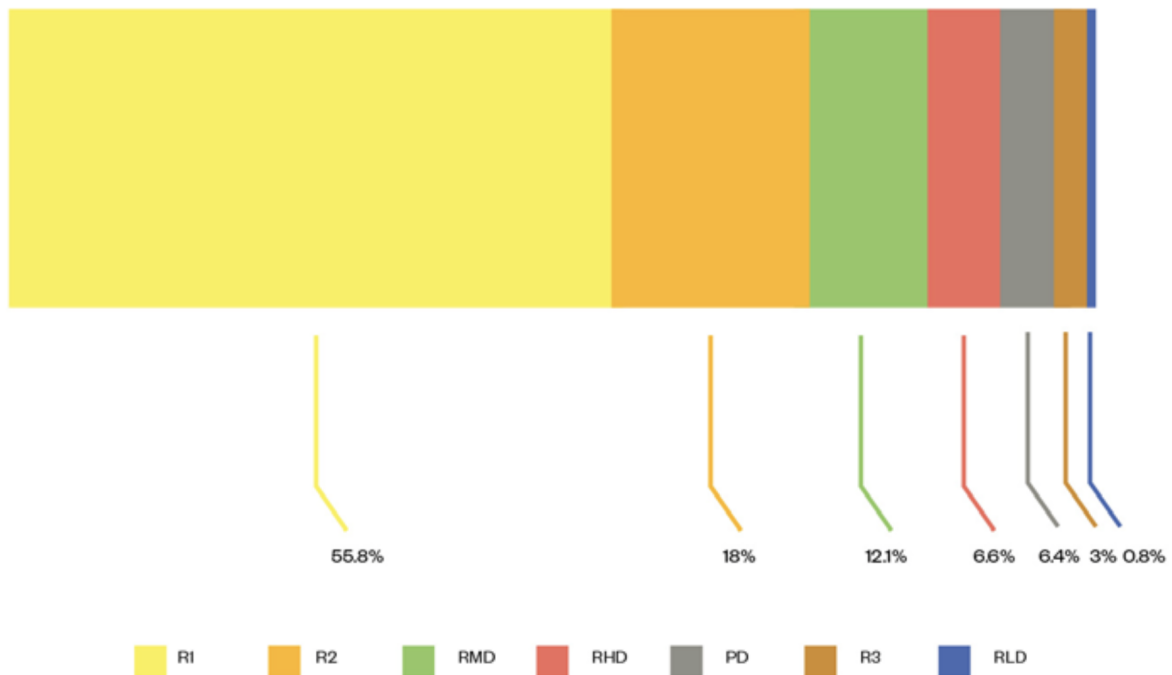
Though *Buchanan v. Warley* in 1917 outlawed explicit racially-restrictive zoning, the maintenance of Culver City's all-white "character" continued unabated and remained in effect via race-based deed restrictions (some of which exist to this day on residential property deeds throughout Culver City<sup>4</sup>). Moreover, Culver City, like other municipalities, availed itself of another discriminatory tool: exclusionary zoning. Harry Culver's embrace of exclusionary zoning was clear from the outset, with the 1913 announcement of his eponymous new town, which stated: "tract will be subdivided into about 250 large residence lots, each with proper restrictions."<sup>5</sup> Culver's reference to "large residence lots" was a simultaneous declaration of economic and racial segregationist intent. According to Richard Rothstein, author of *The Color of Law*, minimum lot sizes were "successful in keeping low-income African Americans, indeed all low-income families, out of middle-class neighborhoods."<sup>6</sup>

The anti-Black intent of exclusionary zoning has been similarly noted by UC Berkeley's Othering and Belonging Institute<sup>7</sup>, as well as the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority<sup>8</sup>, and, lately, even a US District Court finding in which Judge David O. Carter listed exclusionary zoning among the forces deliberately and intentionally "designed to segregate and disenfranchise communities of color."<sup>9</sup> What's more, the implicitly racial design of Culver City's own exclusionary zoning regime was noted approvingly in 1939 by the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), which assessed neighborhoods based on the "hazards" facing them, including "racial hazards," e.g., the more non-white residents in a neighborhood, the greater the hazard.<sup>10</sup> In Culver City's case, the HOLC—which typically referenced lot-size minimums and single-family zoning as on par with racial covenants in averting the "risk" of non-white ownership—determined that certain Culver City neighborhood restrictions requiring "minimum of 1000 sq. ft. dwellings" did indeed successfully serve to "protect against racial hazards."<sup>11</sup> As was done elsewhere, HOLC's racial evaluations were faithfully mapped out and utilized in Culver City to perpetuate segregationist land use patterns, designating the neighborhoods deemed most suitable for white homebuyers and eligible for favorable mortgage rates.

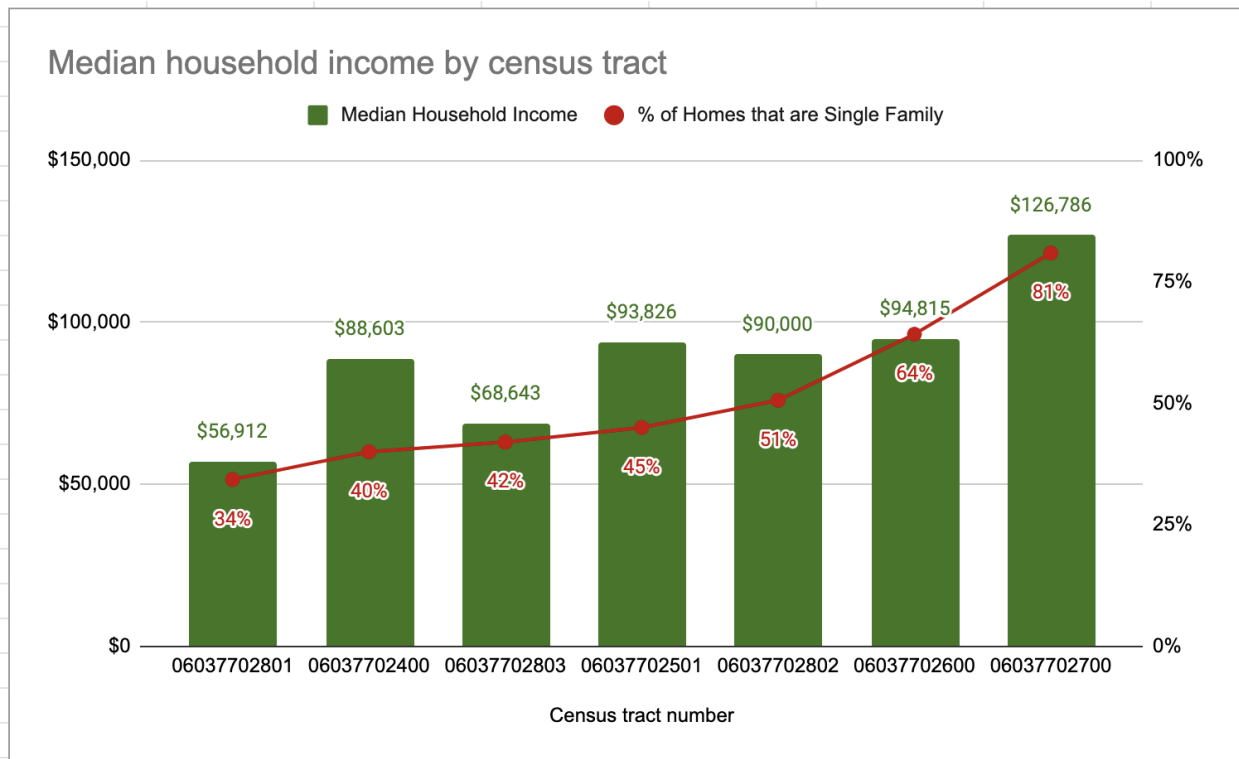


Though racially restrictive housing covenants were outlawed in 1948's *Shelley v. Kramer* (a decision which the Culver City Realty Board protested, to the point of endorsing a proposed constitutional amendment to overturn the ruling<sup>12</sup>) and redlining was barred by the Fair Housing Act of 1968, exclusionary zoning remains the law of the land in many cities, including our own. Here in Culver City, exclusionary zoning reserves 56% of our residential land for single-family homes exclusively, and a full 74% is zoned either R1 or R2 uses.<sup>13</sup>

Over half of Culver City's residential land is zoned for single-family homes.



Exclusionary single-family zoning acts as designed in limiting which economic classes can call which Culver City neighborhoods home. Indeed, while the Culver City census tract with the lowest percentage of homes that are single-family (34%) has a median household income of \$56,912, the census tract with the highest percentage of single-family homes (81%) has a median household income more than twice as high: \$126,786.<sup>14</sup>

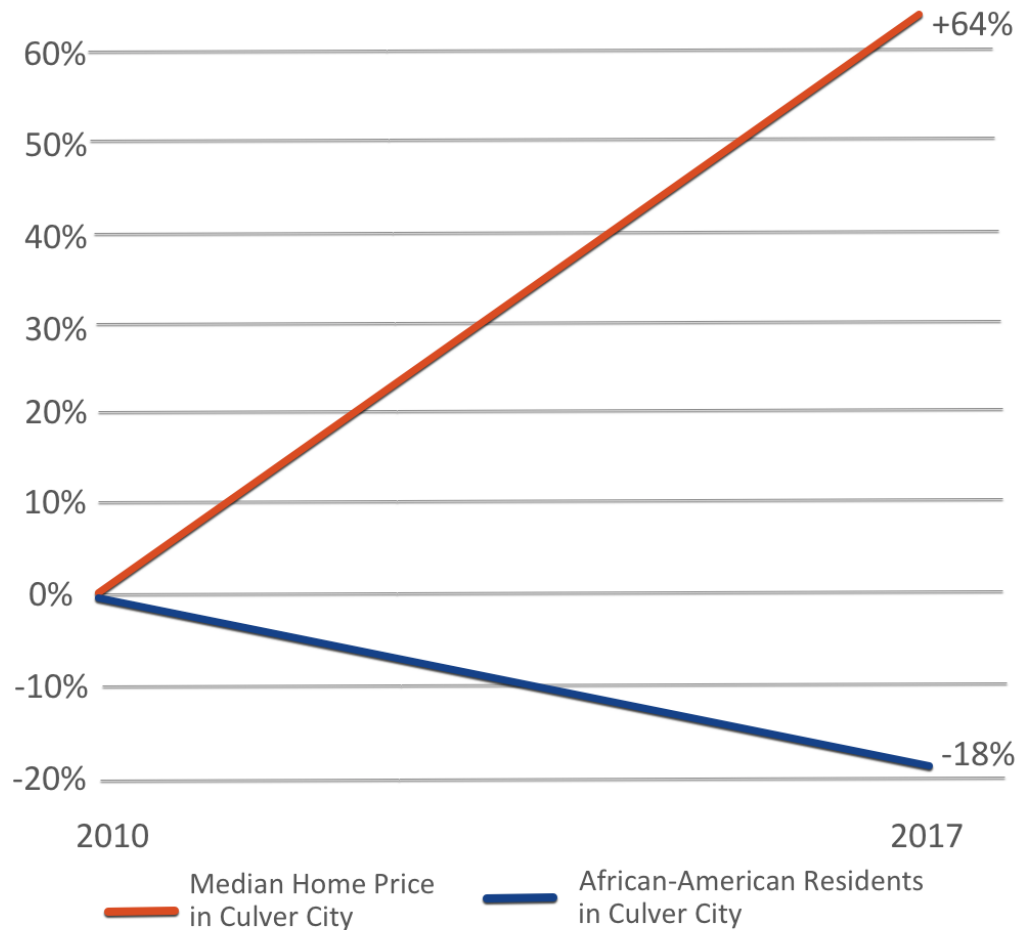


The gatekeeping is racial as well. The Othering and Belonging Institute found that a prevalence of single-family home zoning results in a higher percentage of white residents—to the detriment of non-white residents—as recounted in KQED’s “The Racist History of Single Family Zoning.”<sup>15</sup> By banning less expensive housing options in low-density, “desirable” places in Culver City, such as tri- and fourplexes, courtyard apartments, bungalow courts, and townhouses, the current zoning map ensures that less-wealthy, less-white families will be unable to live in most of our town. And true to form, while Black residents constitute 11% of the total population of Culver City’s multi-family areas (where white residents comprise 43% of the total), Black residents comprise just 3% of the total population of Culver City’s predominantly single-family areas (and where white residents comprise 53% of the total).<sup>16</sup>

Today, with the typical white family having eight times the wealth of the typical Black family<sup>17</sup>, such de-facto segregation in Culver City has become even more pronounced due to the city’s skyrocketing median home price. Note that the 64% inflation-adjusted increase in the price of the median Culver City home between 2010 and 2017 (from \$511,000 to \$836,000 in constant dollars)<sup>18</sup> has coincided with an 18% decrease in Culver City’s total Black population (from 3,694 to 3,042) over that same period.<sup>19</sup>

## Change in Median Home Price and Total Black Population in Culver City, 2010 - 2017

By Percentage (Home Prices Adjusted for Inflation)



Sources: BOC, Census, 2010; ACS, 2013-2017; CoreLogic/DataQuick, 2000-2018

Those phenomena are echoed in the exodus from Culver City of households earning less than \$75,000 per year, a cohort that made up 40% of the city's population in 2010 but is now just 25% as of 2019.<sup>20</sup> That loss of diversity-- both economic and racial-- has a direct and immediate impact on the quality of education that all Culver City Unified School District students receive, as student composition impacts the district's funding and its academic excellence. CCUSD now receives \$15 less per student from the U.S. Department of Education (Title 1) than in the 2015/16 year. Linwood E. Howe Elementary, for example, no longer qualifies as a Title 1 School, with its population of students on free and reduced lunch having decreased by 50% from 2012-2017.<sup>21</sup> As student bodies become increasingly homogenous, so too do their classroom and schooling experience, thereby limiting student access to perspective-taking, critical thinking, and deep reflection skill-building.<sup>22</sup>

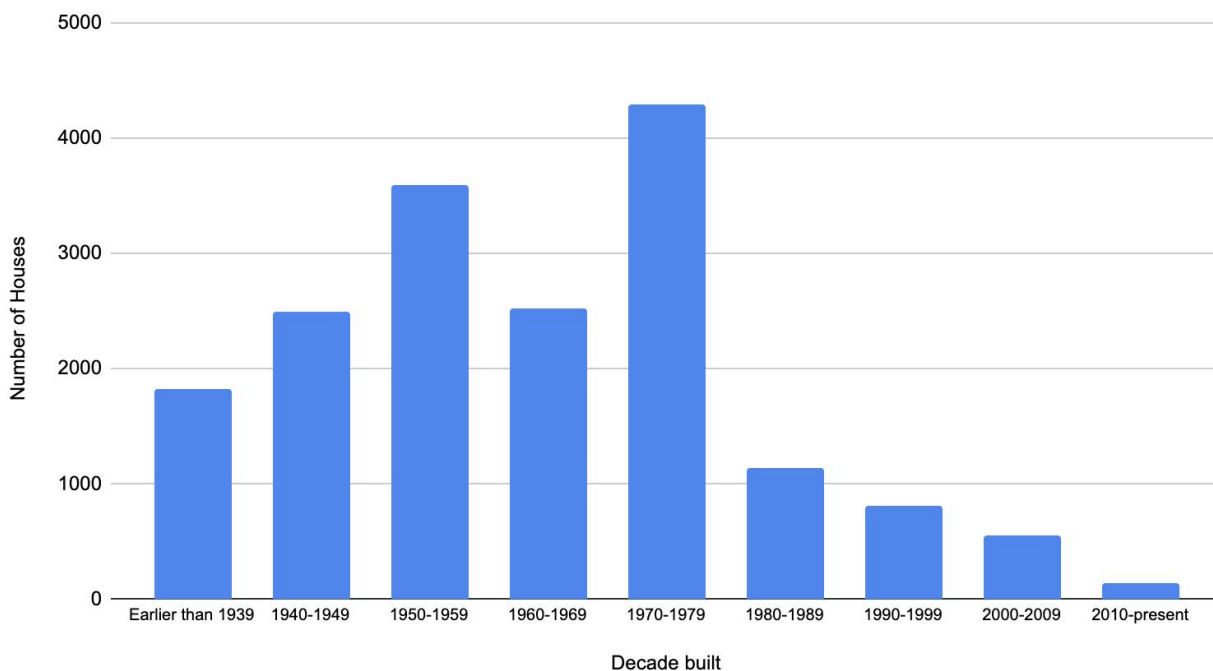


Of course, Culver City is not the only wealthy city segregating and displacing its less-wealthy residents and its residents of color (and in particular its Black residents), nor is it the only one that can trace its current segregation patterns to systemically racist systems. UC-Berkeley Professor Karen Chapple, an anti-displacement expert and director of the Urban Displacement Project, states that, in the Bay Area region, “the Urban Displacement Project has established a direct connection between the neighborhood designations by the HOLC and 75% of today’s exclusionary areas.” Thus, she says, the legacy of redlining and restrictive covenants, along with the continued presence of exclusionary zoning “continues to shape housing opportunity and perpetuate inequities today.” It should come as no surprise then that Chapple’s research concludes that reforming exclusionary zoning practices “has the potential not just to address the housing crisis but also to become a form of restorative or even transformative justice. There is no more important issue for planners to tackle today.”<sup>23</sup>

### ***Culver City’s Jobs/Housing Imbalance, its RHNA Obligations, and the Missing Middle***

The number of jobs in Culver City has grown dramatically in recent decades. While in 2002 there were 41,521 jobs in the city, in 2017 there were 60,036. Unfortunately, Culver City’s housing construction has not kept pace. For that same 15-year period in which Culver City added 18,515 jobs, it added a mere 243 housing units. This represents a record low for Culver City home construction, and stands in marked contrast to the city’s historic homebuilding rates (which crested at 4,297 units built between 1970 and 1979).

Number of Houses Built by Decade in Culver City



The result is a major drop in Culver City’s housing-unit-to-job ratio: from 0.42 in 2002 to 0.29 in 2017. By contrast, our Westside peer cities of Santa Monica and West Hollywood have housing/job ratios of 0.58 and 0.85, respectively.<sup>24</sup> The extreme numerical imbalance between the number of people that Culver City employs and the number of people that Culver City is willing to house has resulted in a Darwinian struggle of low-wage workers competing with

high-wage workers for a static supply of housing... a competition that (as demonstrated above) low-wage workers are losing. This pattern is, of course, not unique to our town.

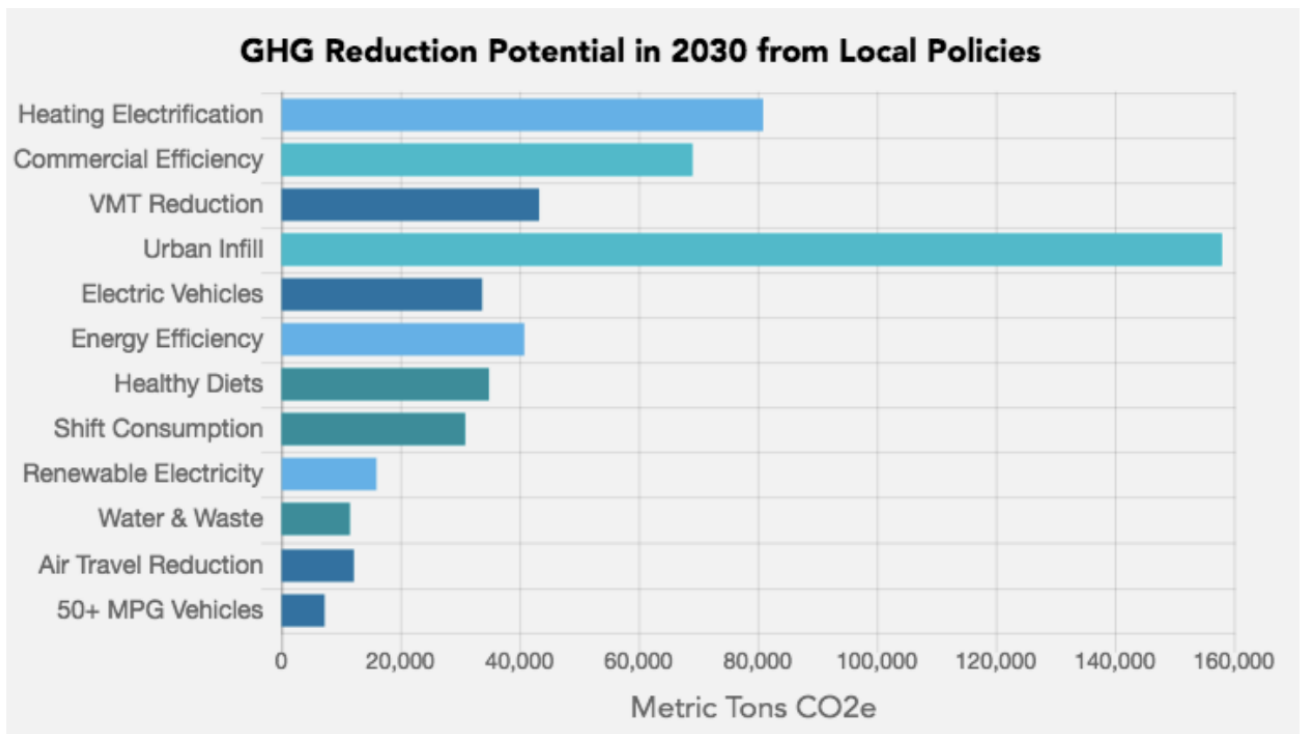
To address this housing crisis on a regional level, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) recently approved its 6<sup>th</sup> Cycle Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) Plan. The plan legally requires Southern California cities to zone for a grand total of 1,341,827 new housing units. Culver City will see a 20.2% increase — 3,341 — in the number of homes for which it must zone. And of those new housing units, 1,712 must be allotted for Low Income or Very-Low Income residents.<sup>25</sup> Another 560 homes must be allotted for residents who are designated Moderate Income, an income tranche that appears tailor-made for “missing middle” housing.<sup>26</sup> Note that Culver City’s median household income is 29.5% lower in its majority multi-family areas (areas predominantly zoned for 2-20 units) than in its majority single-family areas.<sup>27</sup> Opening residential zones to more missing middle housing is a way for Culver City to create space for such moderate-income families and meet its RHNA obligations while largely adhering to prevailing structure scale and preserving (or improving) neighborhood walkability.

### ***Environmental Sustainability***

Over the past decade, Culver City has increasingly recognized its responsibility to address the global and regional threats caused by climate change, including drought, extreme heat, wildfire, and sea level rise. In 2012, for example, the City Council voted to urge national leaders to use the Clean Air Act to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and head off catastrophic climate change.<sup>28</sup> In 2017 the City Council committed Culver City’s utility ratepayers to the Clean Power Alliance.<sup>29</sup> Distinguished Councilmembers publicly voiced their commitment to a phase-out of fossil fuel production in 2018<sup>30</sup>, and in 2020, acted to end extraction at the Inglewood Oil Field.<sup>31</sup> And very recently the City Council resolved to support the California state goal of 100% Zero Emission Vehicle Sales by 2030.<sup>32</sup> But a roll-back of exclusionary zoning would be Culver City’s most climate-friendly act yet.

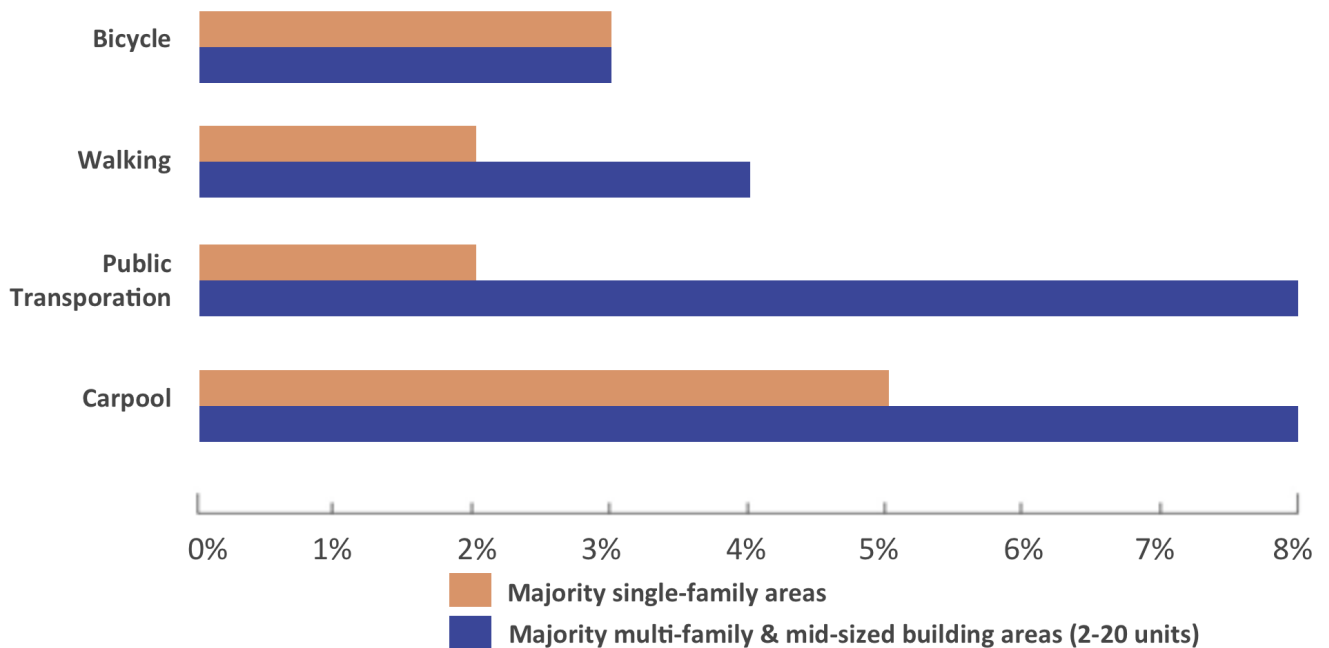
Nobel Laureate and Director of UC Berkeley’s Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory, Daniel Kammen, recently quantified local and state opportunities to reduce greenhouse gases from a “comprehensive consumption-based perspective.” Upon analyzing 700 California cities and towns, Professor Kammen (et al.) determined that the most impactful local policy to reduce greenhouse gas consumption by 2030 is urban infill.<sup>33</sup>





The above is largely attributable to differences in transportation usage between residents of single-family neighborhoods and those of denser multi-family neighborhoods. According to a study conducted at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, the rate of transit ridership in Culver City's mid-sized building zones (areas predominantly containing housing between 2 and 20 units) is four times as high as the rate of transit ridership in Culver City's single-family zones; people walk and carpool at higher rates in Culver City's non-single-family zones than they do in our single-family zones. Additionally, the rate of people driving alone is highest in our single-family zones—79 percent—and lowest in our mid-sized building areas—68 percent.<sup>34</sup>

The rate at which Culver City residents commute by means other than driving alone are highest in the block-groups where multi-family housing (2-20 units) predominates.



In short, the most meaningful way for Culver City to address climate change is to end exclusionary zoning and allow the production of more homes near job centers and transit.

### ***Current Discourse on Exclusionary Zoning Regulations***

Exclusionary zoning laws have been a recent topic of conversation in this state, due in part to California’s stifling shortage of housing stock (49<sup>th</sup> out of 50 U.S. states, on a housing unit per capita basis<sup>35</sup>). The imperative to add housing units comes with a responsibility to do so equitably, addressing historic and systemic housing injustice, while also moving California closer to its climate goals. The City of Berkeley took an affirmative step in February 2021 when its City Council unanimously passed a declaration of intent to eliminate exclusionary zoning by 2022.<sup>36</sup> In March, the City Council of Santa Monica, as part of its Housing Element update process, officially directed its staff to “meaningfully address historic exclusionary zoning practices” by considering zoning reform in R1 neighborhoods “to advance fair housing goals.”<sup>37</sup> In April, the Culver City City Council, while not specifically addressing exclusionary zoning, passed a resolution of the Council’s intent to “affirmatively further fair housing” and to “remove unwarranted constraints to the development of housing.” This resolution instructed city staff and the city’s Housing Element consultant to ensure zoned capacity for lower-income housing “be equitably distributed throughout the city.”<sup>38</sup>

Exclusionary zoning laws were also a prominent topic nationally during the 2020 Presidential campaign, under the guise of “protect[ing] America’s suburbs.”<sup>39</sup> *Home Alone 2* co-star and former President Donald Trump, along with then-Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

Ben Carson, warned that a roll-back of exclusionary zoning laws would end single-family home ownership and “destroy suburbs,” neither of which is, in fact, true. Then-President Trump also officially rescinded the Obama Administration’s 2015 Fair Housing rule that barred racial bias in housing. In so doing, Trump declared that Democrats, like his opponent then-Vice President Joe Biden, wanted to “eliminate single-family zoning, bringing who knows into your suburbs, so your communities will be unsafe and your housing values will go down.”<sup>40</sup> As the Democratic nominee, Biden indeed ran on a contrasting platform, which included \$300 million in local housing policy grants to give communities the planning support they need to eliminate exclusionary zoning.<sup>41</sup> On November 3, 2020, Joe Biden was elected President, drawing 51.3% of the national vote, and 83.2% of all votes cast in Culver City.<sup>42</sup> Now in office, President Biden has made good on his campaign promise via the recent “American Jobs Plan,” allocating \$40 billion in various housing measures which, as touted by Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge in an address to the National Low Income Housing Coalition on March 31, 2021, include “new incentives to encourage communities to eliminate exclusionary zoning and harmful land-use restrictions.”<sup>43</sup>

### ***Conclusions***

There is a lot to love about Culver City. Ending exclusionary zoning is, in our view, necessary to retain what is already great about our town. Culver City’s unique communities need to be able to grow in order to remain vibrant and flourishing, and our current strategy of supercharging job-creation while strangling home construction cannot accommodate this. Zoning reform will allow Culver City greater autonomy to determine the future of our neighborhoods rather than simply surrendering to our current trajectory of housing scarcity and unaffordability, resulting in the loss of diverse and vital constituencies.

### **Redressing Injustice**

As we become increasingly aware of Culver City's past as a "sundown town," bringing an end to exclusionary zoning would be a tangible, concrete way to help correct the sins that perpetuate racial segregation in Culver City still today. Allowing for denser affordable housing development in all of our neighborhoods is a positive step because, as housing costs and economic inequality rise in tandem, it’s incumbent upon Culver City to confront our artificial limits on housing production and the consequences for our non-white and lower-income neighbors. As a high- and highest-opportunity area, Culver City must open its doors and enable economic mobility for communities of color and for the low-wage workers who the people of Culver City have thus far welcomed as servants (restaurant, retail, domestic, custodial) but not as neighbors.

### **Meeting our Climate Goals**

Culver City has set ambitious targets in regards to sustainability and climate impact, and ending exclusionary zoning is critical to meeting those targets. An increase in the density of residential zones, especially near downtown, will enable more Culver City residents to walk and bike to their destinations. This is also true of public transit use. There is no way for Culver City to increase transit ridership while maintaining the majority of its residential land as sprawling, spare single-family acreage. Nor can Culver City be a responsible climate steward while deliberately exiling large numbers of its workers to long daily automotive commutes to and from faraway homes. Greater density will let more Culver City workers bike to work from Lincoln Avenue and Pickford Way, not drive to work from Lancaster and Pacoima.

### Preserving our Town

Culver City's unique charm stems from our historical and diverse communities. We cannot protect these communities and keep lower-income residents from being priced out of town if we don't implement a plan to house our growing workforce. Nor can we preserve the housing types that make Culver City special. We've all seen cottage tear-downs to make way for \$2 million McMansions, all out of character with their surroundings and all perfectly legal under current zoning. Compare those McMansions to the charming and historic multi-family bungalow courts and garden apartments scattered around town, very-much consistent with Culver City's community aesthetic and very-much illegal to build almost anywhere in Culver City today. Without reform of our city's zoning policies, we'll only see much more of the former, and vanishingly little of the latter.

In sum: A Culver City we love—a Culver City that is fair and equitable and vibrant and diverse and ecologically responsible—must be a Culver City that moves forward. And Culver City cannot move forward while clinging to the unjust and unsustainable practice of exclusionary zoning. The time has come to end it.

Please place this discussion on the agenda.

### **Contact Person(s)**

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