

COMMON GROUND

Up-to-Date Information on East Palo Alto's Housing Issues

**Premier Issue
August, 2001**



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BECOME A HOMEOWNER

Did you know that 20% of every single-family housing development must provide homes to be sold at below market rates for lower-income, first-time homebuyers? If you have ever wondered how you can become a homeowner in East Palo Alto, attend a *Home Buying Education Workshop* on Thursday, August 16th or Monday, October 15th. You'll learn about budgeting, lending options and financing a home. They will also help guide you in repairing your credit and reducing any outstanding debt. The Next Step Housing Assistance Center can help you every step of the way. They are located at 2369 University Ave. Call 650.473.9838 and register today.

FIRE SAFE YOUR HOME

In 1997, nine people in East Palo Alto died because window bars blocked them from escaping their homes during a fire. Firefighters were kept out of the house by bolted-on window bars. They had to cut through the garage door with a chain saw to get inside the house.

To combat this problem, the City of East Palo Alto Code Enforcement Division, in conjunction with Menlo Park Fire Protection District, is offering a program to assist homeowners and renters.

The Bars on Windows Program will remove bars at no cost on the windows of current homeowners or tenants in East Palo Alto. The window bars will be removed or retrofitted with quick-release devices, and smoke detectors will be provided for the bedrooms and hallway, as well as thumb-turn locks for the main exit to the house.

Low income homeowners will receive the services for free. Tenants should call to report that they have bolted-on window bars. The City will ask landlords to pay their costs.

For more information on the program, call the Menlo Park Fire Protection District's "Bars on Windows" hotline at 650.482.9622.

(Based on a story by Marv Snow in the Palo Alto Weekly.)

KNOW YOUR RENT RIGHTS

The City of East Palo Alto's Rent Stabilization Program (RSP) protects tenants by insuring stability in rental rates. All RSP tenants and landlords should have received a certificate stating the maximum legal rent that can be charged from now until June 30, 2002. It is critical that you review the certificate for accuracy and inform us of any discrepancies.

Landlords who are in compliance may be able to increase rents up to a maximum of 5.8%. Landlords must provide apartment tenants with 30 days notice and mobile home tenants with 90 days notice before raising rents.

If you receive a rent increase from your landlord which is higher than the Maximum Legal Rent Certificate, you may have grounds to file a petition for a downward rent adjustment.

A landlord is not allowed to raise rents for the following reasons:

- If the landlord has failed to complete the registration material and pay the annual fee by July 1, 2001.
- If the rental unit is not in compliance with the implied warranty of habitability.
- If the landlord has failed to make repairs as ordered by the City of East Palo Alto.

OPINIONS

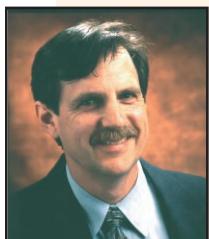
QUESTION:

What is the most critical decision for the City Council to make in order to meet the housing challenges faced by East Palo Altans?



Myrtle Walker, Mayor

"Supplemental housing funding to assist first-time homebuyers. Prices are out of reach for most families in East Palo Alto. Down payment assistance tacked on to loans will help."



Duane Bay, Vice Mayor

"Where best to build? Will grown children living at home, or renters, ever get their own housing here that's affordable? What about senior housing? We need several hundred compact living units that are well designed and sensibly placed."



Sharifa Wilson, Councilmember

"Developing multi-family units provides the greatest opportunity for residents. Yet, many residents want only single family units constructed. We must balance the interests and concerns of all as we plan to meet the housing needs of our residents."



Pat Foster, Councilmember

"We need to grow our housing stock, while also protecting our mature neighborhoods. We should encourage development on the easiest to develop sites and where higher densities make sense, like near retail and transit corridors—that's smart growth."



Donna Rutherford, Councilmember

"The City Council needs to make sure enough land is set aside for housing. There may have to be consideration given to rezoning and the City Council should, in some cases, consider higher density housing."

DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

I am excited to deliver to you the premier issue of Common Ground, the up-to-date news of what is going on with housing issues in the City of East Palo Alto. This periodic newsletter will keep you informed of all housing-related news from the City's Housing Services Department (HSD). Homeowners can learn about programs that can assist them in maintaining and improving their property. Renters are an equally important part of the readership, as the City provides rent stabilization services and opportunities to realize their dream of becoming a homeowner.

I look forward to communicating with you through Common Ground and meeting you in person at upcoming neighborhood meetings or community events. If you have particular questions, please call Tapu Soolefai, the Housing Services Department Office Manager at 650.853.3109, to schedule an appointment.

Lisa Hamburger

Lisa Hamburger



Staff Photo: (Left to Right) Back Row: Arlene Joyner, Tapu Soolefai, Lisa Hamburger, Cornelius Thurman. Front Row: Antoinette Pietras, Jerome Calubaquib, Mike Fleming, James Carr.

THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT

The mission of the Housing Services Department (HSD) is to advance and support policies and programs to ensure that East Palo Alto is a sustainable and economically vital city of culturally and vocationally diverse residents of all ages. The HSD is comprised of three divisions, Housing Development, Rent Stabilization and Code Enforcement, all under the leadership of Lisa Hamburger. Tapu Soolefai is the Office Manager for the department.

• Housing Development recognizes that housing is a basic necessity. It seeks to build various housing options that address the housing demands of all East Palo Alto residents and workforce. Arlene Joyner is a housing specialist with primary responsibility in this area.

• The Rent Stabilization Program (RSP) implements the voter-approved Rent Stabilization and Eviction for Good Cause Ordinance. Antoinette Pietras is a housing specialist with primary responsibility in this area.

• Code Enforcement works in collaboration with neighbors to create a healthy and beautiful city and the development of neighborhood improvement programs. Enforcement of the City's municipal codes is used to ensure safe and decent housing. The City's Code Enforcement team includes Jerome Calubaquib, James Carr and Cornelius Thurman. Mike Fleming, who has been with the City for over a year, will be leaving in August to attend law school in Sacramento.

THANK YOU

Special thanks to Karla Ossandon, Dennis Parker, Antoinette Pietras, and Arlene Joyner for contributing time to writing and editing this issue and to our photographers Paul Maumalanga, Letta Seiuli, Tapu Soolefai, and Cornelius Thurman. We are grateful to Rosalba Navarro and Mascotta Hamburger for Spanish translation. Layout and production kudos goes to Susie Denison of Fraser Advertising.

PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

• Interested in talking to other residents about issues, including the City's Housing Element? Come to the East Palo Alto Council of Tenants meeting on Friday, August 10th @ 7:00 pm at 1637 Woodland Ave., Apartment #6 (the cottage at the rear). For questions please call 650.322.9725.

• The next Home Buying Education Workshop will be held on Thursday, August 16th. Call EPA CAN DO's Housing Assistance Center for time and location at 650.473.9838.

• The next community meeting on the Housing Element will be held on Thursday, September 13th at 6:00 pm at 2415 University Avenue. At this meeting you are invited to review a preliminary draft of the Housing Element. After the input from this community meeting is incorporated, a draft Housing Element will be presented to the Planning Commission and City Council. For questions call Lisa Feldstein at 415.221.3478.

JOIN THE RENT BOARD

The Rent Stabilization Program (RSP) is overseen by a board comprised of homeowners, landlords and tenants. The Rent Board's powers and duties include:

- adopting, amending, or repealing the rules and regulations;
- setting registration fees and the annual general adjustment percentage;
- issuing decisions on tenant and/or landlord appeals, and;
- conducting independent studies, surveys and investigations concerning the rental market.

Any interested member of the community may submit an application to serve on the board. Currently, there are vacancies for tenants, landlords and homeowners.

Meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at 7:00 pm in the City Council Chambers. Members receive a stipend for the meetings attended. Contact RSP for more information at 650.853.3114.

CODE ENFORCEMENT COMPLAINTS

First talk to your neighbor and ask for their cooperation. If that fails, dial 650.853.3156. A Code Enforcement Officer will return your call ASAP.

When you call, give the exact location of the problem including a street address and house number. If there is no address, give the location of the property (i.e. the north-west corner of Runnymede and University).

Give a specific description of the complaint. Examples include:

- A vehicle license number, type, color, or make of the vehicle or any identifying marks such as "flat tires". State if the vehicle is on the street or on private property.
- Indicate the type of debris - car parts, building materials, tires or garbage - and where the items are located on the property.
- Give a description of the activity occurring along with the dates and times it occurs.

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR: PATSY JOHNSON

"Always hear both sides," says Mrs. Patsy Johnson, a 15-year resident of East Palo Alto. She is a member of the City of East Palo Alto Rent Stabilization Board and has been a landlord for 52 years, including 25 years with WestPark Properties which owns almost 750 units in East Palo Alto. Mrs. Johnson has a great reputation for keeping her units safe from crime and in top condition.



Mrs. Johnson likes to keep a good relationship with her tenants and deals with them by simply talking it out. "Never cut them off! I am always willing to talk with my tenants; everything should go one-on-one." Mrs. Johnson advises other landlords that, to be effective, you have to care for the property and that includes your tenants. "Don't be too concerned about the dollar, that will come later."

One of the things she enjoys most about being a landlord is seeing change, especially in the Spanish community and youth. Mrs. Johnson also likes to host activities to get to know her tenants. Every year she holds an annual Cinco de Mayo party, including all the hot dogs, nachos, drinks, snow cones, and cotton candy any kid or adult could dream of, not to mention arcade games, slides, face painting, and a life-size Pooh and Tigger. All 750-plus tenant families are invited as her guests.

Mrs. Johnson gives many thanks to her staff who have been working with her for so many years. East Palo Alto needs more landlords like Mrs. Patsy Johnson to start making positive changes in our community.

DON'T GET TOWED!

Follow these rules and avoid the neon orange tag that says your car will be towed!

- Never block a sidewalk or any public right-of-way.
- Never leave a car on jacks unattended.
- Never store or park a car on public streets for more than 72 hours.
- Never let the registration expire. Cars with an expired registration older than six months are towed immediately.
- Never park an inoperable car (missing wheels, engine, etc.) on the street. Inoperable vehicles can be towed immediately.
- Never store an inoperable vehicle on private property in view of the public street; instead, store it safely inside of a garage or other non-visible area.
- Never repair someone else's car on your property. Minor repairs may be made in your driveway as long as the vehicle is registered to the address where the work is taking place or registered to the person who is doing the work. Work hours are limited outside of garage areas to between 8:00 am and 10:00 pm. This work can not be done in the public right-of-way and is limited to only one car at a time. Storage of vehicle parts within public view is prohibited.



Remember, these rules apply to recreational vehicles, too. The RV must be operable, currently registered and parked only on paved surfaces.

- Never park on a lawn or dirt surface.
- Never occupy or allow a person to occupy any recreational vehicle, including sleeping and eating, on any street, alley or public way between the hours of 10:00 pm and 6:00 am.

TENANTS PETITIONS

Ask yourself if you are paying an illegally high rent. Have you received the interest on your security deposit? Has your apartment or building lost an amenity? Has your home deteriorated to the point where there may be health and safety code violations? Has your landlord failed to provide what was promised in your rental agreement?

If you answered "Yes" to any of the above questions, the next step is to send your landlord a written request. If the landlord does not respond to your written request in a timely manner, you may wish to file a petition with the RSP.

The process begins by requesting a blank petition from the RSP and completing the relevant information. Should you need assistance with preparing the petition, you may contact independent legal assistance, the East Palo Alto Community Law Project, a representative of a tenant organization, or any other person knowledgeable in landlord/tenant issues. The RSP staff is also available to assist you, but does not provide legal advice.

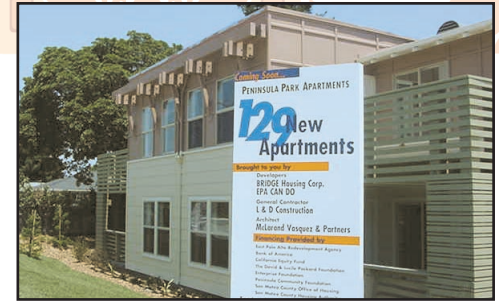
The completed petition, including all relevant supporting documents, must be submitted with a non-refundable \$25.00 filing fee to the Rent Stabilization Program. Fee waivers may be available. An appointment for a hearing will then be set, and a notification of the date will be sent to you and the landlord through the mail. The RSP employs hearing examiners to hear both sides of the case and make a decision. All decisions are then submitted to the RSP for acceptance.

EPA'S HOUSING CHALLENGES

The East Palo Alto community, local organizations and churches, tenants and property owners are invited to a dialogue about addressing the City's housing issues. The City must update the Housing Element before the end of 2001 or risk losing access to low-cost capital loans and grants from the State.

The City has to show a plan that creates at least 1,100 new homes for low to moderate-income households between now and 2006. The target number of homes to be created is based on a Regional Housing Needs Determination which is set by the

Association of Bay Area Governments and a local needs assessment. The City's needs assessment was launched in July. The next community-wide meeting will be held Thursday, September 13th at 6:00 pm at 2415 University Ave.



There are over 70 acres of unused or underdeveloped land already zoned for multi-family and single-family type developments. If these sites are built at the currently approved densities, enough homes can be developed to meet the requirements. The real challenge for East Palo Alto is having the immediate neighbors of these sites express their support for well-designed, conceived, and financially feasible projects. Housing can only be made available to East Palo Altans if it is built. For questions or comments, contact Lisa Feldstein, the City's Housing Element consultant at 415.221.3478 or by email at lisa@lisafeldstein.com.



NEW HOMES AND APARTMENTS NUEVAS CASAS Y APARTAMENTOS

Following is a list of several newly constructed homes and apartment buildings that will be available for homebuyers and tenants this year.

NAME (NOMBRE)	AVAILABLE (DISPONIBLE)	BEDROOMS (RECAMARAS)	COST (PRECIO)	UNITS (UNIDADES)	CONTACT INFO (INFORMACIÓN)
Peninsula Park Apartments	Now	1, 2 & 3	\$1,095 - \$1,795 per month (mes)	65	Bridge Management 650.223.3305
Woodland Creek Apartments	October, 2001	1, 2 & 3	\$1,995 - \$3,495 per month (mes)	78	Wind River Investments, LLC 650.328.5100
University Square	Now	3 & 4	\$543,900 - \$657,900	3	Signature Properties 650.566.9980
Shorebreeze II	Now	4	\$525,000 - \$550,000	6	Clarum Homes 650.322.7069 x24