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DUST-UP


Great myths of L.A. housing


What's the biggest myth about the Los Angeles housing market? All week, Joseph Mailander and Peter Dreier debate Los Angeles housing policy and solutions.

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April 13, 2007

Today, Dreier and Mailander try to clear up myths about the city's housing problems. Previously, they [proposed big-picture solutions](#), debated whether [rent control helps or hurts](#), discussed [City Hall efforts](#) to rein in property rights, and [sketched out the contours](#) of what they think this housing crisis is. Tomorrow, they'll clear up myths about the Los Angeles housing market.

Myth 1: No future
By Joseph Mailander

The biggest myth about housing in Los Angeles is that it's impossible to live the dream here. Despite what the City Council and homeless industrial complex have done to the city, it is indeed still possible to live the American dream in Los Angeles.

But the fact that a semblance of a dream is possible for a few doesn't mean that it's the likely outcome for most of the people pursuing that kind of dream. We have to adapt policies as a city and even as a region that enable home ownership for a larger segment of people, and we need to replace the missing rungs on the lower tier of the housing ladder with market-based housing solutions, even while making sure that our homeless have shelter not four years from now, not a generation from now, but now.

To do this, our city first needs to plug into...itself.

I am very fond of telling groups that where I live, on the border of Los Feliz and Silver Lake, almost everyone hates President Bush. Mostly, they just despise the president. And that is the extent of their political involvement. This must change.

I dislike Bush too. But when you come home from the protest rally and scratch your head wondering how the forty-unit condo arrived on your little block while you weren't watching, or why the city keeps throwing a hundred million a year at affordable housing yet you never seem to know a single person who benefits from it, or why it's considered "inhuman" by the city's homeless industrial complex to house the homeless in yurts, and more human not to house them at all, you realize how much you've been missing. It's time to tune into these issues, even to the extent that we tune into national issues. It's time to make politics local again.

The local power players, the developers, large construction companies, and politicians...they all love

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your apathy. They love the fact that a whopping 93% of you didn't vote in the last city election. They love the fact that not a single City Council race in the last election had an [outcome that was in any kind of question](#). They love their new \$171,000 a year salaries, and their new term extensions, and they love throwing up their hands and claiming they're powerless whenever you confront them with something about your neighborhood you don't like.

They especially love telling you that housing and planning issues are very complex, and discouraging your involvement in anything that doesn't support their agenda: keeping housing prices high, keeping the missing rungs of the housing ladder missing, and keeping their out-of-town developer contributors in the pink. The media often help them along, calling any citizen who rocks the boat a "gadfly." I say, make every citizen a civic stakeholder; every citizen a homeless advocate; every citizen a planner; every citizen a watchdog.

I've been asked where the best city in the county is in terms of housing policy, and I have to respond that that distinction belongs right here, to the City of Los Angeles. I say this not because of any ordinance or outcome or government policy—I dislike so many, and indeed, I sincerely think that this current city council is the worst of our lifetimes. But the reason this here fabulous cosmopolitan burg remains the best in the County for housing policy is because of its overriding zeitgeist: the way it attracts the kind of people—brilliant and assiduous creatives and immigrants and post-suburban professionals—who can navigate the maze, hurdle the roadblocks, and figure out how to save this city from its greedy oligarchs, self-centered interest groups, and power-hungry politicians. In these I have faith; in these, a brighter future for the City of Los Angeles resides.

Joseph Mailander is a writer and lecturer on architecture and urbanism who often nags the city of Los Angeles about housing issues. He edits the blog [MartiniRepublic.com](#), which features a special category on architecture and urbanist issues, [martinirepublic.com/la+u](#).

How Santa Monica solved its problems

By Peter Dreier


The housing crisis is not confined to L.A. or even to California. It is a national problem.

How serious is America's housing crisis? Today, about 35 million American households pay more than 30% of their incomes for housing. That's one-third of all U.S. households—about 90 million people. That's significantly more than the number of Americans who lack health insurance. Almost 16 million households—one out of seven—pays more than half their income for housing. These are almost evenly divided between owners (7.4 million) and renters (8.4 million). And it is getting worse. Housing is rapidly eating up much more of the family budget.

Since 2000, real hourly wages have grown by only 2 percent. Meanwhile, the median home price has increased by 52 percent. While the homeownership rate has increased, many owners are now financially strapped; a growing number face foreclosure. The American Dream is a slippery slope even for many middle class families.

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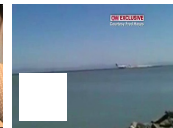
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