



Memorandum

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Mayor Sam Liccardo
Councilmember Pam Foley
Councilmember Magdalena Carrasco
Councilmember Sylvia Arenas

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: December 13, 2019

Approved

Date 12/13/2019

SUBJECT: AMENDMENT TO TITLE 20 (ZONING ORDINANCE OR ZONING CODE) OF THE SAN JOSÉ MUNICIPAL CODE TO ALIGN WITH CALIFORNIA STATE LAW REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Accept staff recommendation.
2. Assuming Staff continues to believe it can “greenlight” the workload for an update of the ADU ordinance, direct staff to report back to Council with amendments to Title 20 to legalize Portable Living Units (PLUs) by April 2020.
 - a. Explore PLU ordinances enacted by the City of Fresno, the City of San Luis Obispo, and any other city that has legalized or is in the process of legalizing PLUs, such as the City of Los Angeles.
 - b. Work with the San Jose Conservation Corps + Charter School to research PLUs and identify any innovative strategies that might streamline the legalization of PLUs
 - c. Identify legal distinctions between PLUs, ADUs, and RVs.

BACKGROUND

San José must use every tool in its public policy toolbox to address the housing crisis. Portable Living Units (PLUs), otherwise known as tiny homes on wheels or movable tiny houses, are a cost and time-efficient way to produce more naturally affordable housing.

Compared to other housing types, PLUs are inexpensive to build, with an estimated construction cost of \$50,000. This is in stark contrast to the average cost of building an affordable home in San José, which currently stands at \$672,000 per home. Not only cost effective, PLUs can be

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built in about 3 weeks – a far cry from the long and often unpredictable time it takes to build a traditional home. PLUs check the box for both cost efficiency and time efficiency.

PLU construction types vary, but an example provided by the San Jose Conservation Corps + Charter School illustrates a potential home that is 153 square feet. Cities like Los Angeles plan to connect PLUs to water, sewer, and electrical utilities. They can be built off-site and rolled onto a paved surface with the utility connections, wheels, axles, tongue, and hitch hidden from view by skirt paneling.

PLUs are required to include all necessary amenities of a fully functional living space. The amenities inside a PLU include convertible futons for sleeping and resting, a bathroom with a shower and toilet, a kitchenette with fridge, cooktop, and sink, and space heating and cooling appliances.

The idea of PLUs was first presented to the City of San José by San Jose Conservation Corps + Charter School as a potential housing solution for their students who are experiencing homelessness. The San Jose Conservation Corps + Charter School's proposed program would provide low-income homeowners a monthly rental income for hosting a PLU in their backyard. Conservation Corps students would build the PLUs themselves — aiding in the development of valuable trade skills — and reside in them once built.

Currently, the San Jose Conservation Corps + Charter School is unable to implement this solution because the zoning code in San José only allows PLUs in mobile home parks. Cities such as Fresno and San Luis Obispo have already made progress in amending their restrictions to legalize PLUs, and Los Angeles and San Diego are working toward the same goal.

By studying ordinances already enacted in other cities, working in tandem with organizations such as San Jose Conservation Corps + Charter School, and starting on a path towards amending our zoning code to further legalize PLUs in San José, we will facilitate the creation of more naturally affordable housing options throughout our city.

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