

# Fresno council says 'no' to \$1.3 million loan for Lowell housing project

By George Hostetter  
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A divided Fresno City Council has rejected a major effort by Mayor Ashley Swearengin to revitalize the Lowell Neighborhood near downtown.

A council majority on Thursday said the proposed affordable housing project is too expensive.

Council Members Lee Brand, Sal Quintero and Clint Olivier voted no. That was enough on the seven-member council to carry the day because Council President Oliver Baines and Council Member Steve Brandau were absent.

The council was asked to approve a \$1.3 million loan to the Fresno Housing Authority, spearhead on the project. The Housing Authority, like Swearengin, has a keen interest in restoring older neighborhoods.

The \$1.3 million would come from federal housing funds controlled by City Hall. This money plus other Housing Authority funds would pay the bill for the \$6.8 million project.

The plan was to rehabilitate a 22-unit apartment complex on Calaveras Street and build eight housing units on Glenn Street.

1963

The year that Calaveras Court Apartments, the complex proposed to be rehabilitated, was built.

The idea was to get low-income people into quality housing.

The policy was to make more progress in the restoration of a historic area.

All this sits well with city officials of every political stripe. Some, Brand foremost among them, blanch on occasion at the cost to taxpayers.

Nearly \$7 million for 30 housing units is simply too rich for good government, Brand said.

Monthly rents at the remodeled 22-unit apartment complex would have ranged from \$270 to \$701.

The paradox, Brand said, is that "the most expensive housing to build is affordable housing."

Housing Authority Deputy Director Tracewell Hanrahan, with an assist from Planning Director Jennifer Clark, explained in compressed form the dynamics of government housing money.

Hanrahan summed up thus: Rules are made further up the government food chain; many powerful interests attach themselves to policy; City Hall has a fundamental commitment to equitable housing for all Fresnoans.

Besides, Hanrahan said, the project will pump millions into the local economy and "add to the vibrancy of the neighborhood."

I would like to see so much more affordable housing.

Council Member Esmeralda Soria

Council Vice President Paul Caprioglio and Council Member Esmeralda Soria voted for the loan.

Soria said she was doing so with a measure of hesitancy. It's only common sense to wish for more than 30 housing units from a \$6.8 million investment by taxpayers, she said.

Yet, she added, there's no need for City Hall to cut off its nose to spite its face.

When it comes to affordable housing, Soria said, "I know there is a need."

### **In other action**

The council proclaimed June 25 to be "My Job Depends On Ag Day." The proclamation honored the local online educational and support group that started the widely popular Facebook page called "[My Job Depends On Ag.](#)"

Olivier sponsored the proclamation.

"The importance of the agricultural industry is felt worldwide," Olivier said. "What we're seeing is the beginning of a movement. It's happening here."

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