

Public Comment: Concerns Regarding AB1033 and ADU Condominiums

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) have become a topic of debate, especially in cities with small residential lots and unique community character, such as those near downtown. While state mandates drive the adoption of ADUs, local governments still have some discretion in how these policies are implemented. One choice is to opt-in or out of the “Condo” provision. There are many unknowns regarding how offering an incentive to put an ADU on one’s property will impact the character of the city and the financial security of the individual who chooses this option. For homeowners much if not all of their wealth can be in the home value.

Economic and Community Impact

The most financially viable way to create a sellable condo under current rules is to place a single-wide mobile home on a property. However, **the proliferation of mobile homes, particularly on small lots in the downtown area, threatens to alter the city’s character** and could negatively affect property values for existing homeowners. Allowing ADUs to be converted into condos may further incentivize this trend, even though the long-term impacts remain unclear.

Considerations for the sale of a home with an ADU turned condo

Think about buying property with an ADU-turned-condo. You, as the new owner, must accept that the ADU owner has approval rights over future changes to the property. There is no upside economic opportunity for the next homeowner only issues that potentially complicate future sales and property values. **Early reports from cities like San Jose, which adopted these policies ahead of others, suggest that homes with condo-ADUs are harder to sell and may experience declining property values.**

Local Policy Choices

Many cities, including those in Sonoma County, have updated their zoning codes but have chosen not to opt into the condo provisions for ADUs. Cities like Santa Rosa and Petaluma have focused on alternative housing strategies, such as “Middle Housing” and historical preservation, rather than embracing the condo conversion of ADUs.

Balancing Affordability and Community Character

While increasing affordable housing is an important goal, achieving it through high-density development or widespread ADU conversions may not be suitable for cities with small lots and established neighborhoods. High-density solutions could lower housing costs but do so by fundamentally changing the town's appeal and lowering property values.

Practical Considerations

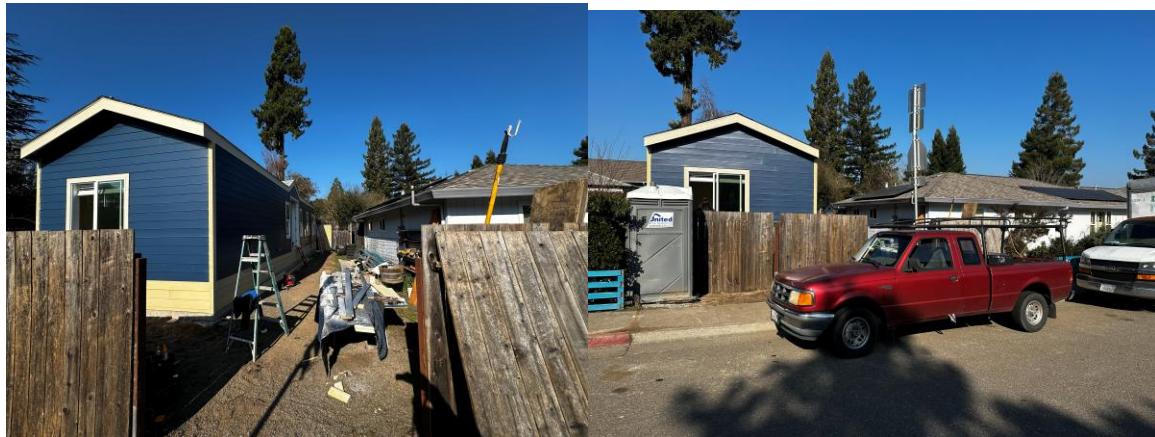
Building a new well designed ADU can be expensive (\$300,000+), but placing a single-wide trailer is a cheaper alternative (\$100,000) that may lead to unintended consequences, such as increased street parking and diminished neighborhood aesthetics. The removal of architectural compatibility requirements from zoning ordinances further exacerbates these concerns. I am pretty sure our State Legislatures don't care if Sebastopol becomes more like a trailer park but residents and local voters do.

Illustrative Example: Mobile Home Placement

A notable concern is the visual and practical impact of placing a single-wide mobile home on a residential lot. For instance, imagine a new, well-maintained trailer positioned where a driveway once was, in a neighborhood of higher-valued homes.

While the mobile home itself may be in good condition, its presence changes the streetscape: cars that previously parked in the driveway now occupy street parking, increasing congestion.

The contrast between the trailer and surrounding homes can be stark, raising questions about neighborhood character and long-term property values. This scenario exemplifies how even a single change can alter the feel of a block, potentially leading to a proliferation of similar units and, over time, a shift in the area's overall appearance.



Recommendation for Caution

Given the uncertainties and potential negative impacts, it is recommended that the City Council pause or withdraw approval for ADU condo conversions until more research is available on the experiences of other cities. Allowing time for observation and analysis could help identify better approaches to increasing housing options while preserving community character.

Conclusion

The city should be cautious about creating new incentives for mobile home placements and ADU condo conversions. These changes are not mandatory, and the potential impact on property values and neighborhood character is still unknown. It would be prudent to let other cities test these policies before making a final decision.

If these changes have negative consequences they are not easily reversed so they should not be approved hastily.

Sebastopol has a history of progressive initiatives, but rapid adoption of AB1033 may not serve the community's best interests. The city's small lots and limited development of new ADUs suggest that a more measured approach is warranted.