

ANOTHER VIEW

Housing effort concentration

Robert V. Tobin, executive director of Cottage Housing Inc., is responding to the April 10 Op-Ed "Scatter homeless housing; don't concentrate sites."

By Robert V. Tobin

The only thing worse than over-complicating a simple problem is oversimplifying a complicated one.

No one argues that there is an over-concentration of big buildings in the downtown Sacramento area. Yet the virtues of such centralization – infrastructure cost-efficiencies, transportation accessibility and availability of ancillary amenities – quickly become drawbacks when applied to other community interests and population needs.

This shift requires a certain amount of verbal sleight-of-hand.

For instance, David Lukenbill argues that the transitional housing program proposed for south Sacramento would impose the same allegedly disastrous effects as those instituted on our city's north side. However, such dire predictions never materialized concerning our award-winning Quinn Cottages project in the Richards Boulevard area; the local business association now acknowledges its valued contributions to the neighborhood. Similarly, our agency was named "Business Leader of the Year" after opening its Serna Village project in North Highlands, and McClellan Park executives commend this program's positive presence.

There are indeed after-hours issues related to daytime drop-in centers and emergency shelters, but associating these with supportive housing programs is inaccurate. In fact, studies elsewhere show that property taxes go up after transitional programs move into a neighborhood.

Such "helpful" suggestions simply defy the laws of economics. Minimizing development costs is essential to all successful residential construction and especially low-cost housing. Scattering such projects into Fair Oaks or Carmichael may seem like a great idea to everybody except those who actually live there, but requires even larger subsidies than those presently available.

Obviously, people who don't have homes tend to also lack cars as well. These projects' success therefore depends on proximity to major public transportation routes and, preferably, walking distance to medical, educational and employment services. "Concentration" thus becomes an asset rather than liability, just as it is when putting big buildings in the downtown area.

City Councilwoman Lauren Hammond and others not only have a right but also a responsibility to assure the program proposed for Stockton Boulevard achieves the same positive results that similar programs throughout the Sacramento region do.

However, famed community organizer Saul Alinsky warned of people's tendency to say things that make themselves feel good about doing nothing. Lukenbill's central thesis is that low-income and special use housing is perfectly fine anywhere except wherever it is proposed. But what is the ZIP code of Someplace Else?