

OPINION

Cities need the state as partner on housing

By Mark Evanoff

Union City's Station District follows state and regional policies to focus new housing and community amenities around transit hubs, yet the California Department of Finance is slowing the development there of market-rate housing, and the property tax revenues it will generate, by requiring the city to execute 500 separate agreements to continue development.

In 2000, Union City in collaboration with nine public agencies and extensive citizen input created a vision to build housing, job centers and community facilities on vacant lands surrounding the Union City BART Station.

Thirteen years later, more than 812 housing units have been built within close walking distance of the BART station. The neighborhood is walkable, with multiple safe paths to BART. BART, buses and passenger rail are being integrated into one transit center.

Residents enjoy the beautiful community plaza and playground. MidPen Housing's Station Center, consisting of 157 units of affordable housing, just opened. Station Center together with the Station District are finalists in the Urban Land Institute's Global Awards of Excellence, which recognizes real estate developments of

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international significance.

However, the state is not approving a plan that was reviewed and approved by officials from five different agencies to convey properties next to the Union City BART Station to the city for the Station District. A private developer, who wants to build market-rate housing next to BART, cannot begin work because the state is not allowing the land to be transferred to Union City without significant additional steps.

Instead, the state is requiring separate agreements with all of the taxing entities be executed for 20 properties owned by the former redevelopment agency (including seven properties surrounding the BART station, a playground, fountain and dog park).

This will slow down the development and could pre-

vent Union City from meeting its obligations to the California Department of Housing and Community Development, which has committed \$22.6 million in Proposition 13C funds to build infrastructure around the BART station.

The state Department of Finance has a different interpretation of what's legally required.

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There are 400 successor agencies to redevelopment agencies in California that formerly owned thousands of properties throughout the state. The Department of Finance's procedures could require thousands of agreements with taxing entities before the property is developed.

The state would help communities like Union City if it would partner with successor agencies rather than throwing up new requirements. Readers, tell the governor and legislator to direct the state Department of Finance to stop the make-work and let cities put people to work, build badly needed housing, and generate more property taxes for schools.

Mark Evanoff is the redevelopment manager for Union City.