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## Council approves density ordinance despite criticism

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STAFF WRITER

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**SAN DIEGO – Home builders will be allowed to boost the number of units permitted in their projects and seek other land-use incentives as long as they agree to include affordable housing in their developments, the San Diego City Council has decided.**

**The action Nov. 6 came despite harsh criticism from community activists who accused the council of selling out to developers and opening the door to high-rise housing without the consent of neighborhood residents.**

**Katheryn Rhodes of the San Diego Coastal Alliance said approval of the density-bonus ordinance ensures that council members will have no recourse “when their constituents need help with unscrupulous adjacent developers. The check and balance of power between the City Council and the mayor will be in jeopardy.”**

**The ordinance, four years in the making, arose out of a statewide law enacted in 2003 aimed at removing governmental barriers to the production of low-and moderate-income housing. The council has tried several times this year to enact some form of the law, but delayed action because of**

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**intense concerns voiced by residents in a number of communities.**

**Frustrated by the tenor of the opponents' comments, Council President Scott Peters said it was time for elected leaders to start addressing San Diego's affordable-housing crisis.**

**“This density-bonus thing was the product of housing advocates around the state who saw what government officials were doing to thwart the development of housing,” Peters said. “. . . Maybe we do want to impose these costs and barriers to the development of housing, but let's not pretend that will result in affordable housing.”**

**The measure passed 5-1, with Councilwoman Donna Frye dissenting and council members Toni Atkins and Brian Maienschein absent. The council did not favor an alternative ordinance recommended by City Attorney Michael Aguirre's office that would have more closely mirrored state law.**

**Under the new regulations, developers will be allowed to build additional units in their projects over and above what is permitted in local land-use plans if they make at least 5 percent to 10 percent of the dwellings affordable to low-income households earning as little as \$21,000 a year for a family of four.**

**The resulting density bonuses range from 20 percent to 35 percent over the total allowable units, depending on how much affordable housing is provided.**

**In addition to the added density, builders will be able to seek waivers from parking, height and setback standards.**

**In limited cases, they will be able to get those waivers approved without having to go before community planning groups and local legislative bodies.**

**That's what has some community members, as well as Frye, steaming.**

**“People spend years and years dedicating their lives to their community planning groups, and then the state comes in and says, 'Oh, by the way, some of those things you hold near and dear, such as height, are affected,' ” Frye said. “It's not because people don't want affordable housing.**

**Also of concern to opponents are greater density bonuses that will be offered to developers who set aside at least 10 percent of their dwelling units for middle-income households earning up to 110 percent of median income, or \$76,350 for a family of four.**

**“When did we lose sight that our work force needs housing as much as low-and very low-income households?” asked developer Sherm Harmer, head of the Downtown Residential Marketing Alliance, who spoke in favor of the bonus allowance.**

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