

Article Last Updated: 9/24/2005 11:15 PM

Program tackles affordable housing

By Edward Barrera, Staff Writer
Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

CLAREMONT - Streamlining regulations and innovative long-term planning are key to easing the shortage of affordable housing in California, experts said Saturday at Claremont McKenna College. Part of a two-day program that began Friday, speakers at the Rose Institute Academy for Civic Engagement noted that outdated ordinances, public resistance and local officials' reluctance to approve controversial projects were just a few elements preventing more housing development.

"If we don't do something in California, we are going to have challenges," said Jeff Burum, founder of two affordable housing organizations. "If we are going to make changes, it is going to be uncomfortable for a while."

Housing was one of several topics addressed during the two-day conference, including transportation, government finances and water issues. Dozens of local elected officials from Ventura, Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Orange counties attended the event.

Organized by Burum, who is also a co-managing partner of the Colonies project in Upland, the event was created to give local elected leaders a broader perspective on the issues facing their communities, college officials said.

Burum was joined at the housing seminar by Randall Lewis, executive vice president of Lewis Operating Cos., and Bart Doyle, a land-use attorney and former mayor of Sierra Madre.

Lewis said local leaders need to look at what works in other areas and attempt to change the outmoded perceptions of the public and city staff, especially concerning the attributes of master-planned communities and higher density projects.

"Density is one of the key things that drives down housing costs," he said, acknowledging that each city must decide how that fits into its general plan.

Doyle, president of the Building Industry Association, Los Angeles County East Chapter, said that one way to speed development is for cities to create a specific zoning plan for a particular area.

A specific plan would allow builders to know exactly what is expected of them in developing a project. If they stay within the guidelines, the development would automatically be approved, Doyle said. Residents would have the opportunity to comment while the preliminary plan is put into place, he added.

Burum said local leaders must fight the stigma of affordable housing. Such housing should not be isolated and relegated to undesirable areas, he said, adding that mixed-income residential neighborhoods work best in creating sustainable housing.

Pomona Councilwoman Paula Lantz said these types of seminars are important for local leaders who are trying to devise ways to overcome challenges, especially in housing. "I think it helps to educate elected officials and policy makers, and it shares the wealth of knowledge that these people have," she said.

Organizers said they plan to make the Academy of Civic Engagement an annual event.

- Edward Barrera can be reached by e-mail at edward.barrera@dailybulletin.com or by phone at (909) 483-9356.