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SOUTH BAY

SOUTH BAY CITIES COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

WATCH



BACKYARD HOUSING

Are Accessory Dwelling Units (AKA "Granny Flats") an Affordable Housing Solution for the South Bay? Page 2

The SBCCOG's Jonathan Pacheco Bell (center) is working to find out if accessory dwelling units (ADUs) make sense for the South Bay's housing strategy. Brothers Francisco (far left) and Carlos Aquino Rios (far right) stand in front of their new backyard ADU.

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BUILDING OUT

State Funded Project Seeks to Determine if “Granny Flats,” Once Perceived as Urban Blight, May Be an Affordable Housing Solution for the South Bay

When Jonathan Pacheco Bell conducted zoning enforcement for the Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning from 2006 to 2020, he frequently encountered homeowners who had built smaller, detached residential dwellings, known as accessory dwelling units (ADUs), on the same lot as their single-family homes. Often these units, nicknamed “granny flats,” were unpermitted and violated zoning codes, which required that they not be built too close to their neighbor’s fence. Codes also restricted the conversion of garages into ADUs.

“Everyone had ADUs, but they were against the law. I used to go into homes and make people cry,” Pacheco Bell said. “They would say, ‘This was the only form of housing I could provide for my family.’ I would tell them that the zoning code doesn’t allow it, and they would have to demolish it.”

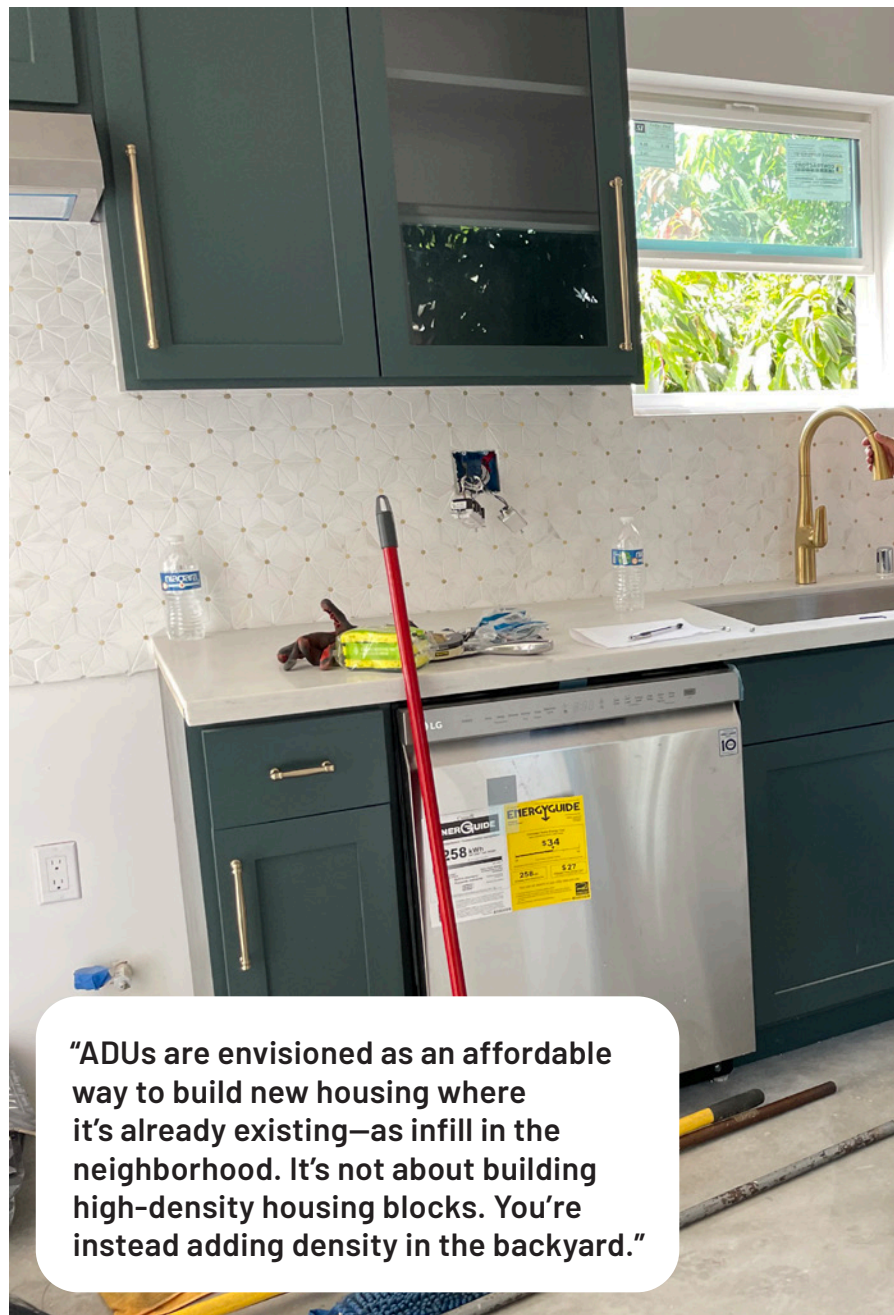
Bell said he also observed “classist” stereotypes about ADUs, depending on where they were located. “In wealthier neighborhoods there were ADUs; (but) they weren’t called ADUs. They were backyard ‘guest houses’ built decades before or ‘servant housing,’” he recalled. “There were never any demeaning aspects attributed to it.”

CHANGING MINDSET

Today the mindset about ADUs is dramatically shifting, as the state seeks ways to increase affordable housing, and cities pursue opportunities to meet Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) requirements to further the state’s economic, fair housing and environmental objectives. Meanwhile, Governor Gavin Newsom has set an ambitious statewide target of building 3.5 million new homes by 2025.

It’s not without controversy, but much more controversial is the high-density, multifamily high-rise housing,” Pacheco Bell said. “So with accessory dwelling units, you can talk about housing opportunity and affordable housing in a way that is more palatable in the South Bay.”

Today, instead of playing the role of ADU code enforcement, Pacheco Bell is working on a project with potential to help legally accelerate their construction across the South Bay region. Following his work for LA County and a brief role at the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust, he joined the South Bay Cities Council of Governments (SBCCOG) in 2021 to support member city community development directors and to manage Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) State of California grant funding, designed to spur affordable housing production. A total of \$604,171 in REAP grant funds is available to the SBCCOG to support the 15 South Bay cities for housing planning activities through 2023.



“ADUs are envisioned as an affordable way to build new housing where it’s already existing—as infill in the neighborhood. It’s not about building high-density housing blocks. You’re instead adding density in the backyard.”

STUDYING THE IMPACT

In 2020, the SBCCOG applied for and received this funding to implement a variety of projects, including to help cities explore the option of ADUs to increase affordable housing inventory. The SBCCOG has hired Black & Veatch to help study the potential impacts of such backyard housing to South Bay infrastructure, including possible strain to water, electricity and sewer systems, as well as parking.

Additional REAP projects under this funding will include a project to identify under-performing commercial segments for potential conversion into affordable housing and conducting a housing education and training series for South Bay cities.



(From left) Carlos Aquino Rios and his brother Francisco inspect the kitchen fixtures of their new ADU in South Los Angeles. Carlos and his partner plan to live in the two-story ADU located behind the family home where the brothers grew up and their parents live.

ADU Calculator Helps Homeowners Calculate ADU Feasibility

To assist homeowners in their assessment of the actual costs—from permit to design to construction—of adding an ADU, the SBCCOG recently added an ADU Calculator to its website. Access to the ADU Calculator, which originated in Northern California, was expanded to the South Bay through funding provided by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. When the homeowner enters the desired number of bedrooms and bathrooms, square footage and chooses from the following ADU construction types, it will provide a customized estimate:

- **New construction of detached or attached building**
 - **Converted garage or pool house**
 - **Modular prefabricated unit**
 - **Conversion of existing living space such as a bedroom**
 - **Conversion of other space such as basement or attic**
- Current cities utilizing the ADU calculator:**
1. Torrance
 2. Inglewood
 3. Manhattan Beach
 4. Hermosa Beach
 5. Rolling Hills Estates
 6. Rolling Hills

The South Bay ADU Calculator is available in English, Spanish and Chinese at <https://southbaycities.org/programs/housing/>.

The first tier of the ADU Acceleration Project will be a survey mailed to approximately 500 South Bay Homes in late August. It will target property owners who have built ADUs, as well as people who live in them—sometimes renters and sometimes family. For homeowners, the objective is to learn what went well, and what hurdles they faced in obtaining permits to build their ADU. It also seeks to learn how the ADU is being used—whether for an elder who is aging in place, or a child who is a college student. It will ask whether the ADU is being offered as free housing or bringing in rent.

The survey will ask tenants whether an ADU compelled them to move to the South Bay, and if so, whether they moved from near or far, and, among other questions, the positive and negative aspects of living in an ADU.

A geographic information system (GIS) mapping layer will reveal

where in the South Bay ADUs are most common.

According to Pacheco Bell, current statewide laws have eased most of the obstacles built into prior zoning codes that restricted new—or required the demolition of existing—ADU construction, including changes to property-line spacing requirements and garage conversions.

But while a possible housing solution, Bell points out the survey could also reveal potential ADU pitfalls.

“ADUs might not be as affordable as people think they are. They might be used as profit-driven housing in your backyard, and not really provide an affordable option,” he said. “Part of this study is trying to understand where we are in the South Bay with ADUs. We’re going to learn from this and we’re going to share this with the whole subregion.” •



From Left: Cynthia Medina, co-director of the Del Amo Action Committee, and Cynthia Babich, founder and director of the Del Amo Action Committee, stand next to the original "Wishing Tree," for which the park is named.

Wishing Upon a Tree

West Carson Turns One of Nation's Most Contaminated Sites Into a Community Gem

In 2018, West Carson resident Cynthia Babich was conducting door-to-door outreach in her neighborhood. She was working to inform the community about upcoming meetings to solicit input on a proposed park project for a community with zero acres of park space. She knocked on a door at a home adjacent to the proposed park site and a grandmotherly figure answered the door, releasing what Babich called "these little butterflies."

"Three little kids come fluttering out. She had probably spent the day trying to keep them contained inside the house, because there's really no place for people to play," Babich said. "They said, 'Oh, what are you going to do with the tree?' And so, I said, 'Which tree are you talking about?' [They answered], 'Oh the wishing tree.'"

The kids went on to explain that they write messages on little notes titled, "our wishes," and place them up in the tree.

"After I was done talking to them, I walked over there to look, and sure enough, you could see old tattered little notes that were tied up in the tree," she said.

The tree has become a focal point of inspiration for the community, now in the final phase of a three decades-long journey to get a park built. It's been an effort with many stops and starts, as the neighborhood's residents, former industrial tenants and the government have often been at odds on what to do with this "brownfield," (i.e., property developed for industrial purposes, polluted and then abandoned), located near Del Amo Boulevard and Vermont Avenue in unincorporated West Carson. The now nearly finished park straddles two sites, measuring hundreds of acres, which are considered among the most environmentally contaminated in the nation.

THE LAND'S STORIED PAST

During World War II, the site served as a rubber plant owned by the federal government. Subsequently Shell Oil purchased and operated the plant until its 1972 closure. Along the way, Capital Metals used the area as a dumping ground for metal slag, found to still be present in the soil during the land's recent excavation. Shell Oil eventually purchased 67 homes near the future park site to create a buffer zone between toxic waste dumped in the area and the community.

"People who lived on this property were getting bloody noses, rashes, miscarriages—just really a whole slew of weird health problems," Babich said. The homes were eventually torn down due to the environmental concerns and residents relocated to hotels in the area. "When they were at hotels most of the problems went away," Babich said.

The community applied for and received a grant from The California Endowment to test the site. During testing, heavy metals "were found everywhere," according to Babich, who in 1994 founded the Del Amo Action Committee to advocate for the area's cleanup and now serves as the group's director.

A turning point came when the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust (LANLT) acquired the property from Shell in 2015 and through that process also became the park's developer. After many drafted revisions to cleanup plans and park designs, the community agreed to move forward, with a condition that a two-foot buffer of clean soil and demarcation barrier be placed over the entire site.



Playground equipment sits ready for use at the new park.

A WISH BECOMES REALITY

The park is now slated to open with a ribbon cutting in the early fall of 2022. When completed, the park will feature 223 trees, two futsal courts (a variation of soccer), a baseball field, a basketball court, group exercise equipment, a half-mile of walking trails, a community building with restrooms, an office and community space for classes and activities. LANLT will lease the property to Los Angeles County Parks to manage its operations.

"Our goal is for every child in LA County to be able to walk to a park. We specifically focus our efforts on communities like West Carson that have a huge amount of industry and no green space," Tori Kjer, executive director, the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust, said. LANLT advocates for new parks, and also public funding to build and

maintain parks. "This property was tricky. No one wanted it because of its history as a superfund site," she said. "The community has no parks nearby. Building a new park on the property is a step towards healing from past and current environmental trauma."

Assembly Member Al Muratsuchi helped secure \$500,000 in state funding to finalize the design of the 8.5-acre park. In total, the project will cost more than \$16 million, raised mostly through public grants and private foundation funding, including \$5 million provided by the LANLT through the Proposition 68 State Parks Bond.



The nearly finished Wishing Tree Plaza, with mosaics by Kim Emerson, will eventually serve as a place to sit under the shade of trees, once matured.

THE FATE OF THE WISHING TREE

Although the current whereabouts of the grandmother and children is unknown to Babich, the original "Wishing Tree" still stands in an alley adjacent to the park—its origin finally explained. According to Babich, the tree was one of several boxed ficus trees Shell Oil had purchased in 1998 in anticipation of being planted in a future park. But after sitting for two decades, the trees eventually grew out of their boxes, with their roots anchoring into the dirt to resemble large mangrove trees. When the committee began considering possible names for the park, Babich shared the "Wishing Tree" story with the park committee, who agreed with her suggestion to make it the park's name.

Those who congregate at the park's community building will have the opportunity to learn about the origin of the park's name at its Wishing Tree Plaza. There, benches form a half circle around a newly planted tree. Near the community building, a tree mosaic art piece designed by artist Kim Emerson will list names of 300 community members.

"People have died waiting for this park to happen. There are generations that have grown up with no amenities. And we want to recognize them," Babich said. Kiosks placed around the park will tell the land's story as a native American trade route, followed by industrialization and homes, and eventually she adds, "ending with the fact that now mother nature has to continue the healing, probably for hundreds of years, but the healing has begun." •



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South Bay Cities Council of Governments

Call for Water-Saving Action

West Basin Wants Residents to Get Super-Cali-Frugalistic



The West Basin Municipal Water District (West Basin), a member of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, is the water wholesale agency proudly serving the South Bay region. Working in partnership with the SBCCOG's South Bay Environmental Service Center (SBESC), it works to ensure water reliability in both wet and dry years, and help the region maintain sustainable communities. To achieve this mission, it is calling on South Bay residents and businesses to do their part by getting "Super-Cali-Frugalistic" and saving water today.

As seen in the news almost daily, California is currently enduring unprecedented drought conditions which require the region to reimagine how it uses water, and to make conservation a way of life.

In response to California's third consecutive year of historic drought, Governor Newsom has declared a statewide emergency, and in January 2022, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) instituted a statewide prohibition on wasteful uses of water.

As such, all municipalities, residents, and commercial/industrial customers should remember that the following uses of water are prohibited:

- **Washing vehicles using a hose, without automatic shutoff nozzle**
- **Outdoor watering that leads to excess runoff**
- **Irrigating ornamental turf on public medians**
- **Filling decorative fountains, lakes, or ponds that don't recirculate water**
- **Washing hardscapes that don't absorb water**
- **Street cleaning or construction site prep**
- **Irrigation within 48 hours after it rains at least one-fourth inch of rainfall**

In May 2022, the State Board called for two additional conservation measures:

- **Ban on irrigating all non-functional turf (commercial/industrial/institutional properties)**
- **Limit on the days of the week/hours/duration for irrigating yards**

According to the most recent (June) State Board reporting of water use, the average water savings across the West Basin service area is 3%. West Basin and water retailers are calling for a reduction in water use of 20 to 30% for its 17 cities.

"West Basin encourages our communities to keep rising to the challenge," said West Basin Manager Gregory Reed. "We are starting to see actual savings as people heed the call to save water in the face of record-low reservoir levels and water supply challenges. However, we still have more conserving to do."

The good news is that across the region people are reducing their outdoor irrigation to two days per week, at the direction of their water provider, which can make an immediate impact on the region's water demand.

Also encouraging is that West Basin is seeing a record number of applications for the West Basin grass replacement rebate program. West Basin service area participants can receive a rebate of \$3 to \$5 for every square foot of grass removed and replaced with drought-tolerant landscaping. In order to receive a rebate, prior to removing any turf an application must be filed and approved.

There is no better time than now to plan for a water wise landscape transformation. Together, the South Bay can reduce water demand and make a difference. •

To learn more about available conservation programs and rebates go to www.westbasin.org.

What Are My Water Restrictions? Who Is My Water Retailer?

Watering days and restrictions vary by water retailer (the agency that sends customers their water bill). So, it is recommended that customers check with their water companies for specific conservation measures that apply in their neighborhood.

To access websites for West Basin retailers, visit www.westbasin.org/about-us/what-we-do/customers.

Most of Torrance is served by Torrance Municipal Water; for conservation guidelines, visit www.TorranceCA.Gov/WaterConservation.

Phase One Planning Work Gets Underway for Micromobility Lane Network

The South Bay Cities Council of Governments (SBCCOG), its technical consultant Fehr and Peers, and cities' staff have begun technical planning work to implement the new 243-mile route network called the South Bay Local Travel Network (LTN).

The LTN is a network of safe streets that will support the growing use of personal, zero-emission micromobility vehicles in the South Bay. It's designed to accommodate neighborhood electric vehicles (NEVs)—street-legal golf carts, along with e-scooters, e-bikes, and other personal electric mobility devices, such as e-trikes or e-skate boards, as well as traditional pedal bikes.

The LTN routes users on residential streets (primarily 25 mph) connecting neighborhoods-to-neighborhoods-to-destinations, while safely crossing busy, faster streets at controlled intersections. (Watch video to see

examples at bit.ly/3pe19Gf.)

The transportation consulting firm, Fehr & Peers, has begun planning work to create the signage, branding and engineering details that will be used to define the LTN. Together, these elements will become a new LTN "sharrow" system in the South Bay. A sharrow system has markings on the road, along with wayfinding signage at the curb indicating that cars and slow-speed vehicles are sharing the road. Because the LTN will primarily operate on residential streets at 25 mph, together, the markings and signage will support safe travel for micromobility users in the South Bay.

Developing the technical details and arriving at consensus for the elements that will make up the LTN brand and wayfinding signage for the network is a region-wide effort now underway. Implementation of the first phase of the LTN is expected to begin in the Fall of 2023 with the first corridors operation-



al in early 2024. The first two corridors of the LTN are the beach cities of El Segundo, Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach and Redondo Beach, as well as across the inland cities of Gardena, Lawndale and Hawthorne. •

To learn more about the South Bay Local Travel Network and to see where the routes proposed for the network are located, please visit the Story Map at <https://bit.ly/LocalTravelNetwork>.

New Temporary Shelter Gives the Unhoused in Torrance a Stepping Stone Toward Permanent Housing

A tiny home village has opened in Torrance to temporarily shelter people experiencing homelessness until they can be connected to a home of their own.

Called 3290 Temporary Housing Village at Civic Center Drive, the project is the result of close collaboration among Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn and the City of Torrance, as well as the Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative, South Bay Cities Council of

Governments (SBCCOG), and Harbor Interfaith Services.

SBCCOG provided \$145,000 in funding for project construction and start-up costs allocated through Measure H Homeless Innovation funds. Additionally, SBCCOG will be providing an additional \$250,000 for outreach and mental health staffing to supplement the operation.

Last year, the Torrance City Council approved using the Torrance Civic Center grounds to be the site of a tiny home village. Supervisor Hahn then supplemented funding from the City of Torrance and the SBCCOG to further advance the project.

Built by industry leader Pallet, the tiny home village includes 40 individual living units, each encompassing 64 square feet of living space, air conditioning, power and other basic necessities. Residents will also have access to restrooms, laundry facilities and daily meals, along with case management and housing navigation.

Harbor Interfaith Services, a nonprofit homeless services provider based in the South Bay, will operate the site. Some of the support offered to clients at the tiny home village will range from life and job skills training to substance use disorder treatment and health care services, in partnership with the Venice Family Clinic. •



The tiny home village includes 40 individual living units, each encompassing 64 square feet of living space.

Great Resignation or Great Reshuffle?

Cities Like Torrance Look at Private Sector Strategies to Address Retention Challenges

Contributed by: City of Torrance Human Resources, Learning and Development, and Economic Development

The Great Resignation describes the higher-than-usual number of employees voluntarily leaving their jobs starting in late 2020 following COVID-19 shutdowns.

A Pew Research survey found the top reasons U.S. workers quit were low pay (63%), no opportunities for advancement (63%), feeling disrespected at work (57%), issues related to childcare (48%), and not enough flexibility to choose hours (45%). However it turned out, workers weren't actually quitting; they were instead swapping jobs within their organizations and outside to other companies. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the census, in 2021 there was an almost one-to-one correlation between quitting and swapping.

Local government hasn't been immune to this trend, including the City of Torrance. While in the past most city employees who voluntarily resigned left for another municipality, the city has recently noted that employees are leaving for the private sector in greater numbers.

To address these challenges, the city's human resources, learning and development, and economic development teams are looking at promising private industry practices.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Gallup has found that wellbeing extends beyond how people feel, and has direct impact on the business, resulting in higher job performance, lower absenteeism, and less likelihood of leaving the organization.

Torrance has a number of businesses in the city with cutting-edge employee engagement strategies and has adopted some of their strategies. It's already seeing positive movement in employee engagement, which will hopefully lead to greater retention.

It recently launched Healthy Torrance, an internal health and wellness program that promotes physical activity, social connection, emotional health, and continuous learning. Employees can participate individually or on teams and can win prizes on their activity.



The city has also created a 12-month pilot work-from-home program, particularly important to employees seeking to reduce commute time. Eligible employees may work from home two days a week. Productivity is measured to ensure that customer expectations are met.

The city also offers flexibility in work start and end times to accommodate employees who have family needs, such as dropping off children at school.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Since 2008, Torrance has offered employees an internal learning academy that promotes development of skills such as customer service, management and team leading. The goal is to enhance employee performance and prepare them for future roles.

RECOGNITION

The city has identified recognition as critical to employee retention. Featuring employee profiles on social media and in public spaces allows the community to connect with the people behind the work.

More formal employee recognition programs link employee actions with specific city goals and objectives. City employees regularly report that formal recognition allows them to connect to a greater purpose, which is vital to employee retention.

While the Great Resignation (or reshuffle) is likely to continue, the city will continue to refine practices that allow Torrance to fully leverage its greatest asset: city employees. •

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A quarterly bulletin to inform local leaders of subregional progress and alert them to emerging issues

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