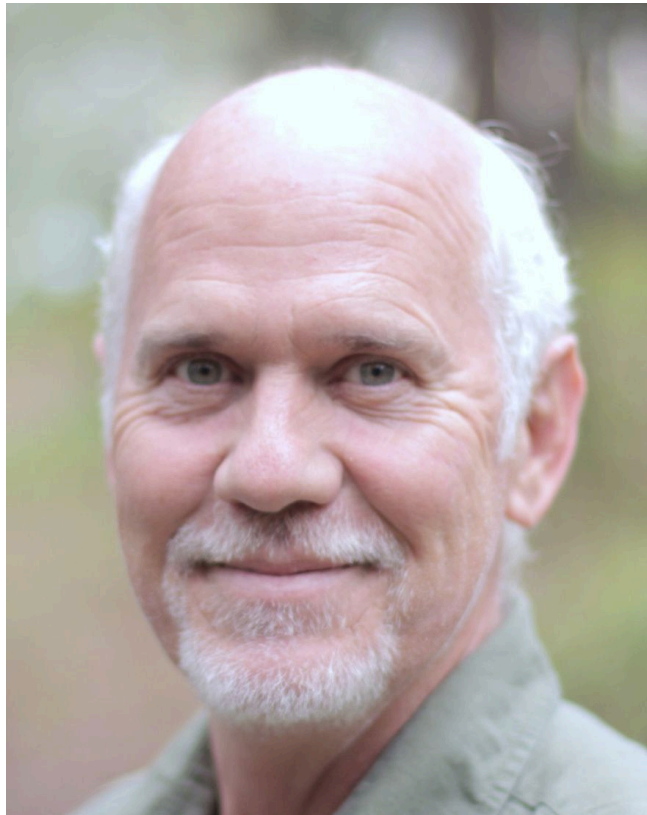

In My View: Mammoth Housing Developments

April 23, 2023



The Rural Caucus of the California Democratic Party had a zoom meeting recently when I heard an inspiring presentation about the aggressive steps that the Town of Mammoth Lakes, California has taken to develop housing in their community. (MammothLakesHousing.org)

The membership of the Rural Caucus is comprised of delegates from rural areas across California. Our mission is to educate elected officials and advocate for fair, effective rural policies, such as support for deployment of high-speed internet to rural areas and protection of safe drinking water.

A new priority for the Rural Caucus is constructing more affordable housing in rural communities. The progress that Mammoth Lakes has made in the last few years can serve as a model of successful best practices.

Housing Now!

The Town of Mammoth Lakes (Mono County) is a remote rural community of 7,200 residents. In the next 24 months they will add 272 units of work force housing through a program they call, “Housing Now!”

Most state and federal housing funding is targeted to low-income households earning no more than 80 percent of the AMI. The Area Median Income (AMI) for Mono County is \$81,200 year for a family of 4.

The Housing Now program also addresses housing affordability for moderate to upper middle-income households (81 to 150 percent of AMI) because these people also need ownership or rental subsidies.

The following are examples of the projects that Mammoth Lakes is developing.

Low Income Housing

“The Parcel” is the largest project that Mammoth Lakes is developing. In 2018, Mammoth Lakes purchased 25 acres in the center of town that was owned by the Forest Service. Then they involved the public in the planning to develop this property with up to 450 affordable housing units.

Even though this project is a relatively high-density development for the area, there was no opposition.

Phase 1 of this project will build 81 apartments with 80 affordable units and 1 manager’s unit that will range from studios to 3-bedroom units. This will also include a childcare facility and a public park.

The most fascinating part of this project is that they are building this apartment complex from prefabricated modular units. The developer builds these in Boise, Idaho and ships them to the site. It took only 30 days to assemble 100 of these modular units.

This fall, Phase 1 will be ready for occupancy with rents between \$600 and \$1,600 per month depending on income and number of bedrooms.

This project has cost Mammoth Lakes relatively little, except for selling the land to the developer for a low cost. The cost of construction is primarily paid by the developer with grants and tax credits. They are currently seeking funding for Phase 2 of “The Parcel” when another 148 additional apartment units will be built.

To date, Mammoth Lakes has successfully patched together nearly \$75 million in funding from a variety of sources. They are leveraging \$5 of outside funding for every \$1 of local funding.

Middle Income Too!

Mammoth Lakes is building a model for filling in vacant land with housing through a “Small Site Development” program. They have purchased a .20-acre parcel and are building a 4-unit residential development (2 duplexes). They will sell these condos at below market prices.

The town has partnered with a contractor to design and build these units. Once again, they are using modular components that will be shipped in and very quickly assembled. This first project will serve as a development model that is replicable and scalable to build housing on other small properties.

The Mammoth Lakes “Bridge” Program is converting 12 existing market-rate condominiums into affordable residential units. They will purchase market rate units which are then deed restricted and sold to qualified

households at a subsidized price.

The Small Site Development program and the Bridge program will serve moderate to upper middle-income earners. The buyers of these subsidized condos must agree to deed restrictions that include the requirement that the buyer is employed in the region and plans to use it as their primary residence.

The buyer must further agree to sell for the same price when they sell it. According to Mammoth Lakes staff this is “a tool to keep the units affordable in perpetuity.”

Mammoth Lakes is also setting 7 housing units aside for use as interim housing by new employees.

They will provide up to 6 months of housing to allow time to look for more permanent housing.

Housing Partnerships

The Town of Mammoth Lakes is working with a non-profit housing partner called Mammoth Lakes Housing (MLH) to develop low-income housing.

MLH has received funding through the California Homekey Project to acquire and convert an existing hotel into 16 rental apartment units consisting of 15 affordable studio units and 1 manager’s unit.

MLH is also converting existing commercial buildings into 11 affordable 1-bedroom units. This project is largely funded by federal grants for building low-income housing.

In an effort to encourage the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), Mammoth Lakes has streamlined permitting by providing pre-approved ADU designs that are ready to build. These prescribed designs can be downloaded for free and used for permitting. This will eliminate the cost of building plans.

Even the local Chamber of Commerce is helping. The Chamber will prescreen and maintain a list of locally employed people who need housing. They will also maintain a list of property owners who are ready to rent rooms, ADUs, apartments or houses. Then they will help match tenants to available rental units.

Local Housing Plans

Crescent City and Del Norte County have adopted housing plans that have committed to facilitate the development of 575 housing units over the next 8 years. However, adopting these housing elements is only the first step.

What happens next will determine whether these plans sit on a shelf or result in new housing. The City and County must incentivize private developers and assist them to access the flood of state and federal housing funding that is now available.

As constituents we must remain vigilant to ensure that our representatives stay focused on developing the affordable housing that is essential to the economic vitality of our community.

Kevin Hendrick is a 30-year resident of Del Norte County. kevinjameshendrick@gmail.com

