

The Need for Affordable Housing in Sacramento County



Verna Ekpeduma stands in front of her first-floor apartment at Mutual Housing at Norwood, an affordable housing community that was built by the nonprofit Mutual Housing California. Photo courtesy Edgar Sanchez.

When Verna Ekpeduma moved into a bright, one-bedroom apartment in North Sacramento, she knelt, kissed the living room floor and wept. As the tears cascaded, Ekpeduma embraced sweet reality: She no longer was homeless or living with “horrible” roommates.

“I couldn’t believe I had such a beautiful apartment,” the 62-year-old housekeeper says of the place she’s called home since 2012. “I love it here.”

Ekpeduma lives at Mutual Housing at Norwood, an attractive housing community for families of modest means. While Ekpeduma has found affordable housing, other low-income

Sacramentans find it harder to do so, says Darryl Rutherford, director of the Sacramento Housing Alliance (SHA).

The SHA is at the forefront of the fight for affordable housing, a mission it pursues partly with a grant from The California Endowment.

According to Rutherford, local developers were long required to designate 15 percent of all new homes as affordable units – but that requirement vanished in Sacramento County in 2014 and in Sacramento in 2015.

Instead, the county now requires developers pay \$2.69 per square foot of new construction into its housing trust fund. Developers inside the city pay even less – \$2.67 per square foot into the city’s fund. Developers claimed the housing market was so weak, they could no longer build homes for the poor. As a result, no affordable homes are currently being built locally at a time when, by one estimate, Sacramento County needs 59,000 more affordable rental homes.

“We had a policy in place that was very successful,” Rutherford says of the former 15 percent mandate. Between 2000 and mid-2015, the city’s 15 percent rule alone resulted in 1,559 new affordable units, according to the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency.

While the City Council and the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors may soon revisit the issue, Rutherford cited other options for affordable-home construction, including a new source of funding that would have to be approved by 66 percent of voters.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops sustainable housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

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“It would be pretty challenging to do,” he says of the funding source, “but other cities have done it.”

Meanwhile a range of factors, including President Donald Trump, skyrocketing local rents and a loss of redevelopment funds, threaten to increase local homelessness.

Recently married, Ekpедuma enjoys living with her husband of nine months, Macauley Ekpедuma, and their chihuahua, Bella. A resident leader, she serves on the board of Mutual Housing California, the nonprofit that built and operates her affordable-home community.



Building Healthy Communities

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.