

Huffman bill paves way for affordable housing in Point Reyes

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Legislation giving Marin County the first crack at acquiring surplus Coast Guard quarters in Point Reyes for affordable housing was introduced Wednesday by San Rafael Rep. Jared Huffman.

Under Huffman's "Point Reyes Coast Guard Housing Conveyance Act," the 22-acre Coast Guard complex, up for sale at a federal auction next year, would instead be sold to the county at fair market value as determined by an appraiser "based on the use required by this act."

The complex includes 36 housing units, a dormitory, commercial kitchen, meeting room, dining hall, administrative offices, and outdoor recreation facilities just beyond downtown Point Reyes Station. The complex includes picnic areas, a playground, pool, tennis courts, trails and creek access as well as a path leading up the hill to West Marin School.

Huffman, noting the Point Reyes community has rallied around the idea of converting the facility into an affordable family complex, said his bill seizes a rare opportunity to provide housing in Marin.

"The dearth of affordable housing in West Marin has pushed more and more working-class families out of the region, negatively impacting families and making it hard for local businesses and agricultural producers to find long-term staff," Huffman said. "We have a rare opportunity to provide affordable housing to the Point Reyes community without impacting the existing landscape."

"I hope Huffman can get this federal legislation through," said Supervisor Kate Sears, president of the county board. "It's always an uphill battle it seems."

The housing proposal has been championed by CLAM, the Community Land Trust Association of West Marin, which has worked on it for the past year.

"This is broadly supported," Huffman noted late last week. "The location makes sense. The community wants it. We just need to do it."

Affordable housing opportunities in West Marin have just about vanished amid skyrocketing realty prices, restrictive zoning, a web of environmental regulations as well as speculators who snap up homes for use as vacation rentals.

"The Coast Guard site offers us the chance to unite the deeply held values of community and land stewardship in a single embrace, and to provide physical assets that will strengthen the community for years to come," according to Kim Thompson, head of the land trust association.

The Board of Supervisors discussed the situation and possible real estate purchase in a closed session last week, and will consider formal support on Nov. 25.

"We do not have too many opportunities like this in Marin County," the congressman noted.