

REDWOOD CITY CHALLENGE GRANT SUMMARY

| Community-Based Partners | Fellow | Government Partner |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| <p>Lead Partner: Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County (LASSMC)</p> <p>Additional Partners: Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center; Faith in Action Bay Area</p> | <p>Brandon Harrell</p> | <p>Alin Lancaster Housing Leadership Manager, Redwood City</p> |

CONTEXT

Redwood City has been experiencing a dramatic increase in its population. While market-rate housing supply has also increased, the supply of affordable housing has not been meeting the needs of low- and moderate-income residents. With multi-family residential buildings in low-income neighborhoods converted to higher-paying tenancy, Latino and African American communities have experienced the bulk of negative impacts due to gentrification trends. In addition, despite recent efforts by Redwood City to adopt new tenant protection policies, there is still a growing trend of landlords resisting or violating protection policies.

POLICY JOURNEY

Prior to the Challenge Grant (**CG**), Redwood City made the following progress in equitable housing policies:

- **Downtown Precise Plan (DPP):** In 2016, the City Council amended the DPP to reserve 15% (375 units) of the maximum allowable residential development for affordable housing.
- **707 Bradford Affordable Housing:** In 2015, the City Council dedicated an acre of downtown City-owned land towards the production of affordable housing for which the Planning Commission approved development plans in 2017. The completed project includes 117 residential units for seniors in the very low-income affordability level¹ and a daycare on the ground level.
- **Housing Impact Fees & Affordable Housing Ordinance:** In 2015, the City adopted a Housing Impact Fee on residential and non-residential development. In 2018, the City Council adopted the Affordable Housing Ordinance to increase the supply of affordable housing, which imposed an inclusionary requirement for all residential development projects. Over 450 affordable units are under construction or approved and over 800 affordable units are proposed as a result of the impact fees and ordinance.
- **Relocation Assistance (RAO) and Minimum Lease Term (MLTO) Ordinances:** In 2019, the City adopted an RAO and MLTO, which they sought to evaluate and improve upon as part of the CG work. RAO stipulates owners of rental properties with five or more units who are seeking to evict tenants for certain reasons – such as withdrawing from the housing market, remodeling, or converting a building’s use – must assist tenants meeting certain requirements with three months’ rent to cover relocation costs. To comply with MLTO, rental property owners must provide at least a 12-month lease and can only increase rent after the 12-month period ends; MLTO applies to properties with three or more units. These ordinances would later be preempted by the Tenant Protection Act (AB 1482), a statewide legislation passed in 2020.

¹ Redwood City (2022). “Affordability Levels.” Retrieved from: <https://www.redwoodcity.org/departments/city-manager/housing-services/developers/affordability-levels>

At the start of the CG, Redwood City initially decided to pursue the following policies:²

- **Enforcement and evaluation of renter protection** measures
- **Preservation of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing** multi-family units

During the CG period, the Redwood City CG team determined it needed to develop a set of strategic policy recommendations to advance its policy goals. Ultimately, the Redwood City CG team developed a comprehensive Anti-Displacement Strategy (**ADS**)³ consisting of:

- **Tenant protection policies**
- **Preservation of unsubsidized affordable housing and mobile homes**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Redwood City's Housing and Human Concerns Committee (**HHCC**), made up of residents elected by the City Council, provided support and guidance to the CG team. Specifically, the CG team engaged two HHCC subcommittees, the Housing Preservation and Tenant Protections Ad-Hoc Committees.

The collaboration with LASSMC, the lead community-based organization (**CBO**), was very positive from the start. LASSMC had a history of reaching out to tenants who were a good fit for the CG. The CG team engaged the community via focus groups, workshops, 1-on-1 interviews, and a survey geared towards Spanish-speaking community members. The CG team also partnered with additional CBOs in Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center and Faith in Action Bay Area, along with a community engagement consultant, Common Knowledge, to engage different community groups such as tenant and landlord or rental manager groups. This occasionally made it more challenging to have a unified outreach message and strategy.

Early on, the Fellow also held meetings with CBOs One Redwood City and Casa Circulo, which provided additional tenant perspectives to the work, and invited them to participate in the quarterly convenings. The team also engaged Common Knowledge – which was not originally part of the CG application – to engage rental property owners and managers in facilitated meetings.

POLICY JOURNEY HIGHLIGHTS

Successes

- The ADS document and framework overall is a success for the City. If adopted by the City Council, it will serve as a guide for the City in strengthening its preservation and tenant protection measures. The suite of recommendations and amendments to tenant protections in the ADS – backed by extensive community engagement and research – is a successful outcome of the CG work. These recommendations strengthen the RAO and MLTO requirements.
- The City had an early focus on mobile home preservation strategies and, through their community engagement, found park owners who want to find ways to preserve housing for their residents. These strategies are also outlined in the City's ADS.

² San Francisco Foundation (2019). Redwood City CG Summary Sheet, n.d.

³ Redwood City (2022). "Redwood City's Anti-Displacement Strategy." Retrieved from:

<https://www.redwoodcity.org/home/showpublisheddocument/24468/637769764048830000>

Compromises

- The core CG team delayed their community engagement at the start of the CG to consider the implications of the newly implemented tenant protection policies. The CG team made a few compromises to the RAO recommendations, specifically keeping an income requirement for relocation assistance eligibility and capping the size of the assistance at three months of Fair Market Rate instead of the tenant-suggested six months. For the most part, compromises were in response to feedback from property owners and to align with previous proposals supported by Councilmembers.

Challenges

- Shirley Gibson, the main LASSMC contact, passed away in late 2021. Her passing was a setback for the work of LASSMC, as other staff had to quickly get up to speed on the CG. Some lessons learned from the CBO were lost as part of this process.
- Redwood City is small and has a limited housing staff and budget. The proposed recommendations under the ADS aim to be realistic about staff capacity to implement policies and strike a balance between landlord preferences and tenant needs. At the latest study session with council on January 10, 2022, tenants advocated for additional ideas that City staff had not been able to research in-depth, including an anti-harassment policy, a right to return provision, and limits on renovation-related evictions.
- Some community engagement was carried out late into the CG, frustrating one of the CBOs, which felt the voices of their community members were not taken into account sufficiently.

STATUS OF POLICY PRIORITIES (AS OF MARCH 2022)

Staff will update the ADS to include more detailed analysis of time, cost, and execution for each of the eight amendment recommendations related to the RAO and MLTO. Staff will also conduct additional community engagement and formally incorporate Ideas #4 (anti-harassment policy) and #6 (adding limits on renovation related evictions and a “right to return” provision to the RAO) into the ADS.

The City Council requested additional analysis and community engagement on its ADS; an updated ADS is tentatively scheduled to go to the City Council in June 2022.