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San Francisco Supervisor Wants to Rein in Monster Homes in Central Neighborhoods

Supervisor Rafael Mandelman announced legislation to curb luxury home conversions in central San Francisco neighborhoods like Noe Valley, Dolores Heights, and Glen Park.

SAN FRANCISCO — Today District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman introduced an ordinance to combat the ongoing trend of large, luxury single-family “monster homes” replacing smaller, older homes that are more affordable to middle income residents. The conversion of middle class housing to monster homes erodes the City’s existing housing stock, reducing housing opportunities for average working people while reshaping neighborhoods into exclusive enclaves for only the wealthiest homebuyers and investors. This trend has been especially pronounced in central neighborhoods like Noe Valley, Glen Park, and Dolores Heights that offer access to transportation and views that attract speculative development.

“The way much of San Francisco is zoned today makes it easier to flip existing housing into monster homes than to build small apartment buildings for regular working people,” said Mandelman, who represents neighborhoods including Glen Park, Noe Valley, Diamond Heights, the Castro, Eureka Valley, Corbett Heights, Mission Dolores and Twin Peaks. “We’ve done a really good job of building housing for millionaires and billionaires over the last decades when we should be building housing for the middle class.”

The legislation introduced today applies only to District 8 residential neighborhoods, and is a revision from the ordinance the Supervisor introduced last year that would have applied citywide. The original ordinance was heard by the Planning Commission in September, which did not recommend advancing a citywide ordinance, but rather recommended a revised ordinance scaled to District 8 and similar neighborhoods where the issue has been most pronounced. Accordingly, the revised ordinance would create a new Central Neighborhoods Large Residence Special Use District (SUD) that would comprise District 8 neighborhoods including Glen Park, Noe Valley, Dolores Heights, Mission Dolores, Diamond Heights, Twin Peaks, and Eureka Valley.

The large residence ordinance is just one part of Supervisor Mandelman’s strategy to expand housing opportunities for middle class San Franciscans in our neighborhoods. Last summer, he also introduced legislation to allow for fourplexes in all RH zoning districts. That ordinance was unanimously recommended by the Planning Commission in November and is being revised to incorporate the Commission’s feedback before proceeding for a vote at the Board of Supervisors.

“I see a steady stream of older 1,200 or 1,500 square foot homes in neighborhoods like Noe Valley and Glen Park being converted into 5,000 square foot mega mansions for one household that flip for \$6 or \$7 million,” Mandelman said. “If you’re building 5,000 square feet of housing, you should be building housing for two, three, or four households in that building.”

“During the past seven years, our 12 square block neighborhood has had more than 30 significant home demolitions or remodels. About half of these projects were 4,000 square foot homes, and at least six were in excess of 5,000 square feet,” said Carolyn Kenady, Chair of the Dolores Heights Improvement Club. “Allowing monster homes creates a dynamic in which those with capital acquire modest-sized houses and expand them to double or triple in size. They outbid families that have saved enough to afford a modestly-sized home in San Francisco, and we thank our supervisor for taking action to address this issue.”

“The proliferation of monster homes in Noe Valley where the average home is around 1,500 square feet is a serious issue that not only affects livability for current residents but also the environment as a whole,” said Ozzie Rohm of the Noe Neighborhood Council. “Noe Valley has become ground zero for such homes because of its geography and abundance of old and relatively affordable cottages that can be ballooned up for the sole purpose of flipping. Supervisor Mandelman understands the issue and we're grateful to him for his willingness to act on it.”

“The Corona Heights Large Residence (SUD) has been an invaluable tool for our community by making sure that when a monster home is proposed we get notified well in advance and have a chance to push back on objectionable developments,” said Bill Holtzman, President of Corbett Heights Neighbors. “We hope this initiative will be embraced by other neighborhoods in District 8.”

Specifically, the ordinance would apply the following requirements to new construction and residential expansion projects in RH (Residential House) zoning districts in the SUD that submit a development application after January 1, 2022, except for areas already covered by the Corona Heights Large Residence SUD.

- A Conditional Use approval from the Planning Commission would be required for any development that would result in a residential unit that is more than 3,000 gross square feet (including garage space), or the equivalent of a 1 to 1.2 Floor to Area Ratio (FAR), whichever is less. *(For example, on a 2,000 square foot lot a CU would be triggered if any unit will exceed 2,400 square feet, while for lots of 2,500 square feet or larger the threshold would be 3,000 square feet per unit).*
- No project resulting in a single unit exceeding 4,000 gross square feet would be permitted. Property owners would be entitled to seek a Variance from this requirement if a specific hardship can be demonstrated.
- However, in all cases a 15% increase in floor area would always be permitted, as measured cumulatively over the prior 10 years beginning January 1, 2022.

The Central Neighborhoods Large Residence SUD ordinance is expected to come before the Board’s Land Use and Transportation Committee in February before going to the full Board.

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