



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INFORMED CITIZENS WANT MORE HOUSING

Majority Support Higher Density, More Regional Solutions

Foster City, CA – Is there a critical housing shortage in San Mateo County? If so, what should be done about it? An unprecedented scientific random sample of 238 San Mateo County residents deliberated for two days on housing solutions at Threshold 2008’s Countywide Assembly on Housing Choices. More than two-thirds of the participants believe that more housing needs to be created in the county.

Threshold 2008, a non-profit organization formed to engage the public on housing issues in San Mateo County, held the Countywide Assembly to discuss the pros and cons of different options for dealing with the county’s future housing needs. The results of the weekend-long discussion show that 68% of participants think there is a need for more housing in the county, a dramatic increase from the 38% who held that view prior to the event.

The Countywide Assembly – technically known as a Deliberative Poll® - took place March 15-16, 2008 at Cañada College in Redwood City. Participants were surveyed before and after the event in order to see how their attitudes changed once they became informed through presentations of balanced information, small group discussions and Q&A sessions with experts.

“We want to bring an informed public voice into discussions about housing solutions,” said Greg Greenway, executive director of Threshold 2008. “The results show that people are willing to reconsider their own views when they get new information and talk in-depth with others.”

Other key findings include:

- 68% feel that the county’s vital services like education, fire, police and health would suffer if there continues to be a shortage of housing, compared to 46% prior to the event.
- 76% believe that new housing will increase the economic vitality of the region, as opposed to 61% before the event.
- 72% think any new housing should be located in already developed areas, an increase from 61% before to the event.
- 65% believe there should be “increased regional authority” in housing as compared to 43% before the event.

[Download the report, as well as view photos of the event, at www.threshold2008.org.]



Participants were paid an honorarium of \$200, but the rewards of getting involved went beyond the money. An overwhelming majority of participants (95%) believed that the Countywide Assembly was valuable, specifically citing the usefulness of the small group discussions and Q&A sessions with experts. More than 90% of the 238 participants want to remain involved in the issue.

Approximately 400 people attended the event, including participants, discussion moderators, expert panelists, and observers. Policymakers and opinion leaders observed the action to ensure that people in the county were presented with balanced information and truly engaged.

“It was inspiring to watch people get excited and involved in housing issues and policies affecting residents and those commuting to jobs in our county,” said Duane Bay, San Mateo County Department of Housing. “Leaders will lead, and as we find out more about what people really want, they will lead more boldly. This event was a great step in that direction.”

Deliberative Polling®, a public process developed by Professor James Fishkin of Stanford University, is a technique that combines deliberation in small group discussions with scientific random sampling to provide public consultation for public policy issues.

“A representative sample of residents in San Mateo County were put in one room to think about some hard choices, become more informed and come to striking conclusions,” said Professor Fishkin. “This process showed what people think when they really consider competing arguments and I hope policymakers will pay attention.”

Threshold 2008 will now offer an opportunity for the entire community to weigh in on these choices in an interactive Online Dialogue and a series of Community Conversations. People who work or live in the county can sign up in April at www.Threshold2008.org

Threshold 2008 is an unprecedented campaign to build the public voice about housing issues and options in San Mateo County. It is a community-driven effort supported by Open Square Foundation, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, The David & Lucile Packard Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation to make the process of developing housing policies and solutions more inclusive. Please visit www.threshold2008.org for more information.

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