

Editorial

Free land

SOME PARTS of Monterey County are ridiculously expensive when it comes to real estate — so much so that four of our zip codes are in the nation’s Top 100 for home prices, according to a survey from propertyshark.com.

Zip code 93921, which covers about 95 percent of Carmel-by-the-Sea, has an average home sale price of \$3.008 million, or 25th in the nation, propertyshark says, followed by Pebble Beach, 93953, in 41st place at \$2.59 million, the 93923 portion of Carmel Valley in 82nd place in the country at \$2.002 million, and the southern part of the Big Sur coast, also known as 93920, in 83rd place at an even \$2 million.

Even more costly are places like zip code 94027 in Atherton, which is No. 1 in the nation with an average home sale price of \$8.3 million, followed by 11962 in Sagaponack, N.Y., at \$8.075 million, 33109 in Miami Beach at \$5.5M, and 93108 in Santa Barbara, where an average home will set you back \$5 million. A few places like those, and pretty soon you’re talking about real money.

Needless to say, buying a home in any of these communities has become impossible not only for blue-collar workers, but for young professionals with good incomes. Can a married couple, both making \$100,000 a year, and with enough savings for a 15 percent down payment, find something to buy in Carmel or any of the other places we’ve mentioned? Especially with today’s interest rates, the answer is, “No way.”

California is trying to make a dent in the problem by requiring even the most exclusive communities to downzone single-family neighborhoods so that apartments can be built almost anywhere, and by letting owners of existing homes build granny units. It remains to be seen whether either strategy will make much difference.

But the Wall Street Journal reports that some of the nation’s most exclusive towns are trying a more proactive approach, not by rezoning for higher densities and waiting for private developers to take advantage, but by buying land themselves, building housing on it and dedicating the units for city employees, teachers and the like.

In Vail, Colo., for example, the city is spending \$7 million to buy three “oddly shaped parcels” from the Colorado Department of Transportation, intending to build worker housing on them. The city also recently spent \$2 million to purchase a two-family house which it plans to rent to municipal employees. And Vail’s director of housing has launched a program to pay homeowners to create deed restrictions that require at least one of the people who lives there to work at least 30 hours per week in town. The price of the restriction is usually about 20 percent of a home’s value, the WSJ reports, with 200 having been acquired to date at a cost of \$17 million to the City of Vail, which gets the money from a local sales tax.

And on Nantucket Island in Massachusetts, where affordable housing is so scarce some workers commute to their jobs by plane, the town has voted to expand the real estate transfer tax to fund affordable housing. Even the local land conservation group has gotten in on the act.

“In the last couple of years,” says Jesse Belle, executive director of the Nantucket Land Bank, “we’ve given away three house — to a restaurant, a hair salon, and a landscaping company — to use as employee housing.”

The well-funded Land Bank also purchased a lot in conjunction with a local pro-housing group to provide access to a parcel on which the group plans to build affordable housing. And in July, “citing the lack of affordable worker housing, the Land Bank bought an eight-bedroom duplex near a golf course for \$2.9 million to house the course’s employees,” the WSJ said.

These unusual efforts illustrate a hard financial reality for expensive communities: The only way to supply affordable housing is to start with free land. One way for that to happen is for civic-minded rich people to donate it. Another way is for taxpayers and nonprofits to buy it.

BEST of BATES



“It’s obvious, Mabel. You ate too much turkey.”

Letters to the Editor

The Pine Cone encourages submission of letters which address issues of public importance. Letters cannot exceed 350 words, and must include the author’s name and home town. We reserve the right to determine which letters are suitable for publication.

The Pine Cone only accepts letters to the editor by email. Please submit your letters to mail@carmelpinecone.com

DiMaggio for the win

Dear Editor,
I recently finished speaking with Joe DiMaggio at Cal Am about a neighbor who has been suffering through multiple illnesses, tragedies and deaths in the past year. He had received a \$6,000 water bill and notice to shut off his water if payment wasn’t made.

Joe took the initiative to connect us in a three-way conversation and resolve the situation in a matter of just a few minutes.

Joe’s support, consideration and response were way above and beyond the normal call of duty and are a credit to him and to Cal Am, particularly during this holiday season. He and Cal Am are to be commended.

Richard Ely, Carmel

Town speaks

Dear Editor,
Bohemians raised me to be welcoming to refugees from the hectic world. Throughout

the years, I have worked to maintain my independence from the overwhelming development in other places while still being welcoming to new ideas and innovation. I have been a nurturing oasis of peace, charm and creativity. Although this is a time of great personal freedom and self-expression for many, somehow I’m finding my independence and unique identity are being stripped away by regulations meant for big cities. Please allow larger cities to densify and save cities like me so that we can share our unique gifts with generations to come. Write on my behalf to the city council and our senator asking them to protect my right to express my unique and precious charm.

The Village of Carmel-by-the-Sea,
c/o David O’Neil, Carmel

Red Cross thanks

Dear Editor,
We extend our gratitude for the support of the community throughout the years. Their commitment to the American Red Cross mission has been a source of inspiration and legacy, and we are thrilled to share an important update regarding the Red Cross office in Carmel by-the-Sea.

The roots of the former Carmel Area Chapter trace back over 107 years, with the inaugural meeting taking place at Carmel City Hall. Fifteen dedicated individuals were selected for the board of directors from a pool of 34 nominees, marking the beginning of a longstanding commitment to serving the community.

The Pine Cone has played a vital role in

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