



## OPINION AND COMMENTARY

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VIEWPOINTS

# *California is overlooking this vast supply of public land for affordable housing*

BY ELIZABETH HANSBURG AND CRISTINA GARCIA *SPECIAL TO THE SACRAMENTO BEE*

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California's public golf courses have a role to play in delivering affordable housing. STOCK FILE



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California's public golf courses have a role to play in delivering affordable housing.

Cities are scrambling to find adequate sites to fulfill their legal obligation to plan for sufficient housing. In California communities where housing costs are high and jobs are plentiful, golf course redevelopment offers a unique opportunity to create mixed-income communities with more housing options than most cities currently offer.

Our existing housing stock is predominantly single-story houses on lots of 6,000 square feet or more, the workforce housing of the postwar generation. Golf course redevelopment can integrate affordable housing with starter homes, open space and retail to create new neighborhoods within established communities — perhaps with less opposition than often greets projects perceived as being “in my backyard.”

OPINION

Today's workforce housing should include both subsidized and unsubsidized apartments for low- and moderate-income households as well as condominiums and town homes attainable to first-time home-buyers. To build housing affordable to today's middle class, we must build at densities higher than the typical postwar housing tracts allow.

Golf courses have the space for thoughtful planning and design of such neighborhoods and integration into surrounding cities with little impact on existing housing tracts. This opportunity is most valuable in urban and suburban communities, where infill development opportunities are often limited to industrial sites known as brownfields.

Many jurisdictions have included or are considering including publicly owned golf courses in their state-required housing plans as sites for affordable residential development — housing priced below market rate for lower-income households (below 80% of an area's median income).

The development of low-income affordable housing requires subsidies. These can take the form of tax credits, state and federal funds, and philanthropic donations as well as the use of publicly owned land. A local government's ability to donate or discount the land can be pivotal in making an affordable-housing project financially feasible.

Public golf courses subsidize the hobby of a few people with sufficient means to afford the pricey equipment and pay the "green fee," which is literally admission to occupy public space. We can reprioritize the basic housing needs of individuals and families when we use the land to build new neighborhoods and community amenities for today's workforce.

[Assembly Bill 1910](#) would establish a grant program to provide incentives to local governments that make publicly owned golf courses available for housing and publicly accessible open spaces. This bill expands the options that local governments have should they decide to convert a public golf course to housing.

While golf course redevelopment may not be appropriate for exurban or resort communities, AB 1910 is a first step in getting our priorities straight in the urban and suburban communities that much of California's workforce calls home.

*Elizabeth Hansburg is a co-founder and director of People for Housing OC, a Yes In My Backyard (YIMBY) organization in Orange County. Cristina Garcia is an assemblywoman from Los Angeles County.*




Elizabeth Hansburg is the co-founder and director of People for Housing OC, the Yes In My Backyard (YIMBY) organization in Orange County. *ELIZABETH HANSBURG*



Assemblymember Cristina Garcia represents California's 58th Assembly district, which includes a portion of the Gateway Cities region of Los Angeles County. *CRISTINA GARCIA*

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