

Hi Folks,

I am sending this primarily to volunteer leaders active in local chapters around the state, and with whom I have worked on issues in the past, because a problem is brewing that I hope you can work together to solve.

The Sierra Club California twitter account is getting an increasing number of notifications of posts by folks complaining about the Bay Chapter's perceived opposition to affordable housing. We get the notifications because the sender includes @sierraclubca in the post to make sure we see it or directly asks @sierraclubca why we oppose higher density urban housing and/or affordable housing. (Like so many folks, the twitterers don't know that Sierra Club CA is just a policy advocacy shop, and is not the boss of local chapters.)

First--and I am sure you all know this--the Club supports infill development in urban areas that encourages walkability, etc. It also supports historic preservation, better transit, safe waste disposal and an array of characteristics intended to make urban areas livable, walkable, etc., so as to discourage sprawl development into parks, natural areas. Here's the link to the policy:
<http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/urban-environment>.

On Wednesday, an article appeared in something called the Bay City Beacon that directly attacks the local chapter's position on a proposed infill development that would require demolition of a parking garage. Here's the link: http://thebaycitybeacon.com/32740/282282/a/the-sierra-club-fights-to-save-a-parking-garage?utm_content=buffera862&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer.

This article is getting some circulation on twitter and, again because of the way the tweets about it have been written, has come to my attention. It presents a pretty unflattering view of the Club and its local chapter.

Right now, in the state Capitol, housing is a huge issue. There are probably more bills about housing and how to increase housing than about any other topic. Some of these bills include language that would overtly weaken environmental review. The perception that local chapters of the Club--and not just in the Bay Area--are employing environmental review to stop reasonable higher density urban and affordable housing projects is not uncommon in the Capitol and that perception makes it more difficult for us to successfully defend environmental review.

So far, Kyle and our allies have succeeded in killing the worst bills. But I think it is only a matter of time before the pressure to increase housing statewide becomes so intense that efforts to protect environmental review, and to fight displacement of local residents, will fail unless we are able to change the perception about Sierra Club's housing stance.

So, I am asking those of you on this email to take this perception issue quite seriously. I hope you (and other volunteers you think should be included) can possibly work together to help figure out how to ensure that in California the local chapters' approaches to urban housing, and communication of the Club's position on urban housing, reflects the Club's written policy and helps end what appears to be a misguided perception about the Club's position.

I don't have the answers and am not implying that the Bay City Beacon or the SF Chron or any number of media outlets have gotten the story about the Club's position right. But the public perception and political optics right now are not good.

I have CC'd my colleagues among Club staff who I think need to know about my concern as well.

--KP

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Director
Sierra Club California