

Climate Gentrification

<https://www.climateone.org/audio/climate-gentrification>

Recorded on August 3, 2018



Announcer: This is Climate One, a conversation about powering America's future. Cities working to lower their carbon footprint are creating dense housing hubs centered around mass transit. But there may be unforeseen consequences.

Scott Wiener: I've seen waves of gentrification in my community and the people who are being forced out. LGBT people being forced out, seniors being forced out.

Announcer: Can we build smart and affordable at the same time?

Isela Gracian: We're at this moment where we could potentially be the model of a neighborhood that doesn't completely flip with gentrification because of the decades of work of community residents to really drive the investment.

Announcer: Climate Gentrification. Up next on Climate One.

Announcer: Any self-respecting environmentalist reeling off solutions to the climate crisis would include driving cleaner cars, planting more trees, eating less meat. But how do our housing choices factor into this?

Welcome to Climate One - changing the conversation about energy, economy and the environment. Climate One conversations are recorded before a live audience and hosted by Greg Dalton. I'm Claire Schoen.

Announcer: If we can walk to the subway, we can drive our cars less. So where we build housing and how close it is to mass transit has a big impact on our carbon footprint.

Scott Wiener: People are living in places where they have to drive everywhere. Where they have to drive to work, where they have to drive to the store. Whether you're poor, whether you're middle-class, there's no option to get around other than driving. And what we've done is we have just spiked carbon emissions as a result of our land-use patterns.

Announcer: That's Scott Wiener, California's state senator representing San Francisco, Daly City and Colma. Before going to Sacramento he served on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and several regional transportation agencies.

Scott Wiener talked with our host, Greg Dalton, at a recent Climate One event.

According to Wiener, plans to green our cities should include new, urban housing that's convenient to transportation. But this runs the risk of boosting the real estate market and gentrifying the neighborhood out of the reach of all but the wealthy.

Isela Gracian: When we got the light rail there was a lot of concerns around the speculation that was happening with land. And what that would mean for a predominately tenant community of immigrants, low income that didn't have high land ownership.

Announcer: That's Isela Gracian. She's President of the East LA Community Corporation, a nonprofit that has built hundreds of affordable housing units in a working-class neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles. Gracian joined Greg's conversation along with Rachel Swan, a City Hall reporter with the San Francisco Chronicle. Swan's also reported for the SF Weekly and the East Bay Express. And she's looked into ways to preserve affordable housing in green urban planning.

Rachel Swan: A lot of cities in the Bay Area are doing things like impact fees, you know, putting a fee on developers to create more funding for affordable housing.

Announcer: Greg's 4th guest on this panel is Ann Cheng, a transportation expert at TransForm, a transit planning agency and advocacy group. She previously served as a city councilmember and Mayor of El Cerrito. Greg started out this conversation with Ann Cheng and a question about The Brady Bunch:

Greg Dalton: Ann Cheng, we both watched The Brady Bunch growing up.

What is The Brady Bunch and other, you know, TV shows tell us about where we are in housing and urbanization?

Ann Cheng: You know, it's interesting to see the context actually match my life. I grew up in the suburbs and two-car garage and over the years I've learned that marketers of TV programs actually have some of the largest marketing budgets to do research about consumer preferences. And it very much matches consumer preferences from boomers.

Greg Dalton: Senator Wiener, how can we think about two pressing issues for California housing, which is very tangible and immediate and climate which seems to be abstract and faraway?

Scott Wiener: Yeah, they are absolutely linked. And we, we've gone through a long period of time, speaking of The Brady Bunch, where this country encouraged, actively encouraged people to leave cities, to spread out, to live in the suburbs, to drive everywhere. Suburb where I grew up there were no sidewalks there was almost no bus service. And people are living in places where they have to drive everywhere. Where they have to drive to work, they have to drive to the store, where there's no other options for anyone whether you're poor, whether you're middle-class, there's no option to get around other than driving. And what we've done is we have just spiked carbon emissions as a result of our land-use patterns. That's a problem, and we need to get back to the way we did it for a long time, which was to have people living near each other. Having people live near where they work being able to walk get around the ways where they're not burning fossil fuels. And the only way you can do that is to have denser housing, have multiunit housing, near public transportation, closer to where people work. Otherwise, we'll just keep spreading out as a matter of affordability, as a matter of just how we've structured things and we're gonna make our climate situation even worse.

Greg Dalton: A lot of people nod say yes walkable, good, density, good until it comes to a particular neighborhood. So Isela Gracian, why don't you tell us the story of Boyle Heights, east of

downtown Los Angeles. The Metrorail came there and then what followed?

Isela Gracian: Yeah. So Boyle Heights literally is just across the bridge from downtown Los Angeles. And historically it's been home to immigrant communities being one of the few neighborhoods where people of color could live during redlining in the city of L.A.

Greg Dalton: There was actually racial exclusion and covenants. People of certain races couldn't buy property in certain parts of Los Angeles.

Isela Gracian: Right. Races and religion, you know, the Boyle Heights had a strong Jewish community, there's African-American, Russian, Japanese-American then waves from Latin America predominantly Mexico. So because of that, there was lack of investment including transportation and the lack of having the light rail going through. And when we got the light rail there was a lot of concerns around the speculation that was happening with land. And what that would mean for a predominately tenant community of immigrants, low income that didn't have high land ownership. We want investment, we want development but we want to benefit the people that invested their lives when nobody else would invest their money in this neighborhood.

Greg Dalton: And arts community has been central to what's been happening in Boyle Heights. In this case, art galleries became a real flashpoint.

Isela Gracian: Yeah. I think that art and the cultural richness in Boyle Heights has been there for a really long time, right. It's also been home to the mural movement within Chicano community. So you walk around the neighborhood and you see walls full of art that reflect the history and the community, you'll hear musicians. So the flashpoint that's happened in most recent times around investment from downtown into the neighborhood of Boyle Heights. So it's a big tension around having high-end art in a neighborhood where there's still so many other needs to be met including, you know, housing and transportation and other amenities.

And what we've been seeing in Boyle Heights because we also have a long history of activism around community organizing and engaging residents, so in Boyle Heights we're at this moment where we could potentially be the model of a neighborhood that doesn't completely flip with gentrification because of the decades of work of community residents to really drive the investment. So the art galleries are a symptom, not certainly the cause but this has created an opportunity to continue to raise the issue and keep it alive in the neighborhood.

Greg Dalton: Rachel Swan let's get you in here on your reporting covering housing around transit that doesn't push up prices and push people out?

Rachel Swan: A lot of cities in the Bay Area are doing things like impact fees, you know, putting a fee on developers to create more funding for affordable housing. I mean, so there's definitely responsible ways to build dense around transit. Take for example BART stations. I mean we have a lot of places where there just could be infill. It's just asphalt.

Greg Dalton: Gil Friend is a chief sustainability officer of Palo Alto. We asked him what Palo Alto is doing in the heart of Silicon Valley to add more housing in that job rich area. Let's listen to Gil Friend.

Gil Friend: We need more housing we need more affordable housing. We need more housing near transit, we need more housing that is designed to not be dependent on the automobile

Palo Alto has now raised its annual targets for housing improvement more than triple what they were a few years ago. You find that in a lot of local jurisdictions around California, there's a segment

of the community that says, "Can't you just leave me with the community that I moved to 5 or 10 or 20 years ago?" You know it's a delicate balance between the climate urgency and the political reality of the moment.

As people start to feel the pain as they see viable solutions coming into place elsewhere, and as the political organizing for these kinds of solutions strengthens, we're gonna see a shift in practice. The specifics vary as you might imagine in different communities because, you know, the climate regimes are different. The needs are different the land-use patterns are different. But we're seeing increasing cities are stepping up.

Greg Dalton: Gil Friend, chief sustainability officer in Palo Alto home to Stanford University in the heart of Silicon Valley.

We're talking about climate change and affordable housing in California and around the country with Ann Cheng, transportation expert with TransForm an advocacy group; Isela Gracian, president of the East L.A. Community Corporation; Rachel Swan from the San Francisco Chronicle; and Scott Wiener, California State Senator. I'm Greg Dalton.

Senator Wiener, Palo Alto tripled their housing supply, new housing units that still only 300 units in a city of 65,000. Give us a scope of the issue. How many jobs are being created, how much housing does the Bay Area need?

Scott Wiener: Credit where credit is due. I mean, we're seeing some cities like Palo Alto like Mountain View, wealthier cities that have historically been intensely anti-housing, welcome jobs but no housing and kids can't afford to move back home. And you're starting to see a shift but, you know, tripling a tiny number, in terms of the scale of what we're facing, just to put it in perspective, our housing deficit in California right now is 3.5 million homes. We are three and a half million homes short of where we need to be and that number keeps growing. And we need at all income levels. In context, when you look at the other 49 states combined, guess what their housing deficit is, approximately 3 and a half million homes. We're equal to the other 49 states. Shows how intense it is here.

And I've lived in the Castro for 21 years, I've seen the waves of gentrification in my community and the people who are being forced out. LGBT people being forced out, seniors being forced out. And there are times when we say, Okay, let's do it, let's address housing. Great, let's put 20 units here and pat ourselves in the back. That's great, it's 20 more units than we had. We need to have it at a significant scale. And that means making sure that we're zoning properly so you're not zoned around a BART station for single-family homes which means you're pushing people away from transit. It means that we are massively investing in housing for low income and very low income people so that we can make sure that everyone can remain and we're not kicking people out. We need to make sure that we are doing this at a scale that we need while protecting renters so people aren't getting evicted.

Greg Dalton: Rachel Swan, there's NIMBY, Not In My Backyard, it's been a political phenomenon around the country for a long time. Now there's YIMBY, Yes In My Backyard. They're trying to move from kind of an online thing to actually a political force, backed by some powerful tech people such as Jeremy Stoppelman CEO of Yelp. Tell us about YIMBY.

Rachel Swan: YIMBY is a term that I feel like gained currency in the last couple of years or so. It started, you know, around this idea of urban design that became popular in social media. Because, I mean you look at people kind of like my generation-ish and younger. I guess I count as an old millennial but, most of us are renters and, you know, people who maybe can't afford or are

struggling to live in the core of the city. So this group this sort of loosely coalesced online is starting to become more of a political movement. There's actually like YIMBY chapters in the South Bay and all along the region. And in San Francisco there is YIMBY political candidates and they've kind of forced this conversation in electoral politics.

Greg Dalton: Ann Cheng, you have served in electoral politics. Environmentalists are often criticized for being against just about everything. This is a group that's saying, "Yes let's build we need more housing." How do you see that dynamic?

Ann Cheng: I think it's a super welcome voice that has not existed. And what's super exciting is to see young people coming into these really boring meetings that most people never even know about and know where to go and show up. And when you do come, you know, everyone takes notice from the city manager to the police chief and is refreshed that there is, the torch has been passed to the next generation. And being a Gen Xer myself, I've gotten to see the benefit of participating early and young, and when you see your voice impact future plans of a whole city and actually seeing that development start to take shape and knowing that you helped make it happen that it takes you into every branch of life that you pursue. And I just want more and more young people to keep on that track.

Announcer: You're listening to a Climate One conversation about planning housing in the era of climate change. Coming up, Greg asks Scott Wiener why it is so hard to get neighborhood support for creating more housing near transit hubs.

Scott Wiener: People say, "I moved into a neighborhood that was single-family homes. I don't want apartment buildings in my neighborhood." It means physical change in the neighborhood that people rebel against. And that's why it's incredibly hard.

Announcer: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Announcer: We continue now with Climate One. Greg Dalton is talking about smart growth for our cities with Ann Cheng, a transportation expert at TransForm, Isela Gracian, President of the East LA Community Corporation, Rachel Swan a City Hall reporter with the San Francisco Chronicle and Scott Wiener state senator representing San Francisco, Daly City and Colma.

Here's your host, Greg Dalton.

Greg Dalton: Isela Gracian. There's an element to YIMBYism which is tech wealth that is a lot of techies, they're often resisted in some areas and what's your take on this?

Isela Gracian: With the YIMBY, I honestly like I cringe because it's created a dichotomy whether you're a NIMBY or a YIMBY of either you're against development or for any kind of development and there's so much in between, especially in neighborhoods like Boyle Heights and you can see this across the state where communities have been so active for decades in having transformation come to their neighborhood and having that investment take place. And it's almost like in some instances a YIMBY voice has wiped out that resident led, people of color, low income communities like their voice in this conversation. And for me, I think that's very unfortunate and we definitely have seen it in conversations where by YIMBYs we were called an anti-housing organization, when we build affordable housing, we engage people in housing. And it was just kind of hard to wrap my head around having somebody say that our organization was anti-housing. When we've been doing that

for over 20 years actually building and working with the nuances of all that it takes to build the political will the financing and the community power to actually get a building built.

Greg Dalton: You want your community to change but in certain ways, right with certain people moving from renters to owners and people having more choice and economic power. You're for change but a certain kind of change, is that fair?

Isela Gracian: Definitely very fair. Community driven change that centers the most vulnerable populations, right. You know, if we're thinking about shaping our environment for the people to have the greatest opportunities and the most able then we're not gonna lift all boats. We're not gonna be building across.

Greg Dalton: Senator Wiener, you had a bill to fast-track development around transit and around California. Some environmentalists came out against that. What does it mean to be an environmentalist these days to you?

Scott Wiener: Yeah. What the bill said was that you have to allow more housing near public transportation, that you can't have hyper low-density zoning where you say, "I know we have a major subway stop here but we're only going to allow single-family homes and a quarter acre of land around this BART station." Because when you have that hyper low-density zoning around public transportation what you're basically doing is you're banning apartment buildings. And when you ban apartment buildings not only does that reduce the number of people who can live near transit, it means you can't build affordable housing, either. Because people don't build affordable housing single-family homes, you build multi-units.

And, in terms of the environmental community on the bill I authored, Senate Bill 827, it was actually split. We had a number of significant environmental groups that were supporting the bill and helping to move it forward. There were a few environmental groups and then there were also environmental justice groups that were opposed to the bill. Partly, I think the Environmental Justice groups it was around gentrification concerns and we tried to work to put in more tenant protections and affordability requirements. And, you know, I think the environmental movement, in my view is shifting. For many, many years you know it was about clean air and clean water and open space and forests. And all of these critically important issues and these environmental movement has done heroic work trying to get rid of the coal industry. But environmentalism, in my view is incomplete without a housing aspect to it in terms of where people are living and therefore how people are able to get around. And so I think to have a complete environmental agenda, housing and housing density has to be a part of that. And I think we are seeing a change and a shift in the environmental movement towards that.

Greg Dalton: Ann Cheng, you say that housing has kind of shuffled the traditional left and right in American politics. How so?

Ann Cheng: Well it's -- yeah, shuffled. I guess --

Greg Dalton: The typical divisions don't align because there's some, you have progressives who are Sanders supporters who are pro-development, pro-housing. Would you expect the left to be kind of against to how to, you know, against big money?

Ann Cheng: Yeah I think it's creating space for the MIMBYs, the Maybe In My Backyard and let's talk about it and let's respect each other's needs and actually listen to each other's needs and get to know each other and know the history of our involvement in our communities, You know, I think our traditional zoning techniques have been so one size fits all that it's no longer relevant anymore. You

know used to be maybe two or three types of housing and now we really want to open up and give people many transportation choices and many housing choices. And when you think of natural systems, resilience comes from diversity and choice and being able to experiment and iterate and adjust.

Greg Dalton: Isela Gracian, we know from polling that Latinos and African-Americans around the country are concerned about climate because they're often closest to the sources of pollution they understand it but there's a language gap. Tell us about the language gap for people in terms of how they talk about it or think about it?

Isela Gracian: Yeah, I mean definitely in Latino families and Black families and really like poor families, right, the climate and energy conservation has been part of our lives because of economic situations, right. You know, a group in a household where my mom was like every time you leave a room, make sure you turn off the light and, you know, watch how you're using water and, so the issues of climate are very much alive in our communities in the day to day, right. And I also think about like in the Central Valley where there was so many homes without water because of the drought. And so many Latino families that, you know, there's this picture that stays in my head with a woman at the sink with the dishes piling up because there wasn't water to wash the dishes, right. And then we have, for example in Boyle Heights with the freeways intersecting the neighborhood, the 5, the 101, the 60, there is virtually no place in the neighborhood of Boyle Heights where you could go without either going under, or next to a freeway. And the issues of pollution and asthma and heart disease, and what that contributes to young children and adults. So it's an important issue because of the impact on money and on health and overall wellness for Latino communities.

Greg Dalton: So it's a local issue in a health frame versus something ecosystems or something else.

Senator Wiener let's get your take on that and how you see climate as a public health issue. What resonates most directly with people because it's perceived to be far away in time and space?

Scott Wiener: You know, many local communities have been dealing with these challenges for many, many years. I was down in Boyle Heights and one of the community leaders I met made a comment that low income communities, communities of color having dealing with housing and security and not being able to afford housing, getting evicted, getting displaced, wondering if you ever gonna be able to afford a home, forever. And now, white middle-class people are all of a sudden, wow, I can't afford housing and am I gonna get evicted, am I gonna get displaced. So the problem then broadens out and it is tremendously unfair that sometimes the political will to make change doesn't happen until that broadening occurs. But, you know, at least you then start maybe having momentum to make some change. And we need to make sure though that as we're making that change we're not leaving people behind because that's the risk that we have around housing and around some of our approaches to climate change.

Greg Dalton: Rachel Swan, employers are a key driver behind getting housing because they don't want to have to pay their workers so much they want to get prices down so they can keep down that wage inflation. But tell us about the role that Silicon Valley and other companies are playing in trying to get more housing near transit so their people can get to work. Not everyone can go to work in a Google bus.

Rachel Swan: There seems to be this stereotype of all techies are wealthy gentifiers but, you know, actually a lot of them can't, once they start having families they find they can't afford to live near the Twitter building in downtown San Francisco or they're confined to, like, a one-bedroom apartment. So there's a lot of support in the tech community for this idea of a different form of urban design,

sensible housing design. I mean Google is opening a new headquarters by what's supposed to be the downtown BART extension in San Jose. And I think with Jeremy Stoppelman...

Greg Dalton: CEO of Yelp.

Rachel Swan: I'm sorry. CEO of Yelp. He funded a YIMBY lawsuit against the suburb of Lafayette, wanting to build dense housing near a BART station. Wanting to force a suburb to build dense housing near a BART station and I mean he seems to be very deep into this credo of like I want dense housing near transit. So there is a big push to change urban design.

Greg Dalton: Ann Cheng?

Ann Cheng: I think it's great that they're starting to see that, you know, providing buses is not the only solution that may be looking at converting the oceans parking around the Google campuses into housing is important as well as making those complete communities and not just dorms as well as, you know, inviting the community to shape and request their needs get met as well in the part of the package.

Greg Dalton: Ann Cheng, there's a report that came out recently about Uber and Lyft, it was in the Washington Post, and how they are actually increasing overall car traffic. They could be a solution if some of the parking lots near transit were made into housing and people could take ride shares to the station instead of, you know, cars go there and sit there empty for eight or ten hours and then someone comes back and drives them away. That is not a smart use of that land. So tell us about Uber and Lyft whether they're enablers in this or they're making the problem worse?

Ann Cheng: I think it's really helping delay the purchase of private vehicles in some cases. But unfortunately back to the, you know, the housing side of the equation, well, how many homes are affordable to Lyft and Uber drivers? Well it turns out, many drivers are coming all the way from Sacramento in the Central Valley. And so --

Greg Dalton: Hundred miles away. Some 80 miles away.

Ann Cheng: Right, right. Hundred, right, hundred miles away. And, you know, is that really a tenable solution and interestingly actually we have a project, a GreenTRIP certified project. And GreenTRIP is a certification similar to LEED that we've created at TransForm that supports low traffic, low parked housing. And one project in Berkeley, we helped them support zero car parking, instead, they're offering free transit passes for 40 years, a bike kitchen. But it turns out that their set aside of affordable units when we asked like, oh so who's living in those and it turns out their Uber and Lyft drivers.

Greg Dalton: We're talking about climate change and affordable housing with Ann Cheng, transportation expert with TransForm. Rachel Swan from the San Francisco Chronicle, Isela Gracian, president of the East L.A. Community Corporation. and Scott Wiener, California State Senator. I'm Greg Dalton.

Senator Wiener, this idea of transit oriented development has been around for a few decades. Why is it so hard, it sounds logical, walkable communities and yet it just seems like it's, why does it take so long why is it so hard?

Scott Wiener: It's, you know, it's not surprising. We're talking about changing the look and feel of neighborhoods. People say, "I moved into a neighborhood that was single-family homes. I don't want apartment buildings in my neighborhood. I moved into a neighborhood where everything is really spread out and nothing is taller than 20, 25 feet tall. I don't want anything taller than that." And

we've gotten used to in California housing patterns just spreading out and spreading out and covering up farmland and having people commute two hours it's just the way it is. And when you say, "Hey let's instead focus more of our growth and more of our housing around transit in or near job centers," it means physical change in the neighborhood that people rebelling on and that's why it's incredibly hard.

Greg Dalton: Also Senator Wiener, as you look around the country what cities are doing this right? What cities do you look to and say, ah, they're facing these pressures, and they're having the balance of allowing capital to come in without people getting pushed around. Do you see any?

Scott Wiener: I mean, Seattle which is experiencing some really severe problems that are California-like has been I think --

Greg Dalton: Too California-like for their taste.

Scott Wiener: Yeah. Well we export our housing problems to other places too as people can't afford to live here. But Seattle has been actually really implementing and also exploring some really aggressive increases in density, including having that conversation about single-family home zoning. They're having that conversation in Seattle and they're doing some really good work. You know, Chicago is a city that, not perfect city by any stretch of the imagination, but they've not been afraid of accepting new housing. Or you look at Washington D.C. again having some of the same gentrification struggles as all major cities, but their rents have gone down because they've been adding a lot of housing. And even in New York, with problems that are again on the scale of California in a lot of ways, in multiple boroughs their rents are starting to come down. It's not coming down fast enough it's not broad enough. We want it to be faster, faster, faster. But, you know, we are seeing some positive things happen, even as very challenging things happen.

Greg Dalton: Expanding supply works. Isela Gracian, I wanna talk about lot of headlines recently about the border terrible things, you know, heinous things happening at the border. A lot of people were anxious about deportation. I want you to talk a little bit how that's affecting your community and people seeking services. We're talking about housing, you know, some people are worried about things getting worse.

Isela Gracian: Yeah. I mean I think with the issue of immigration and deportation in our communities it's something that unfortunately has been alive for a really long time. And I think right now it's just getting a different level of attention. And for communities that we engage with and work with around housing and just improving their neighborhood, we have a lot of families that are mixed status. In Los Angeles a lot of our housing is protected with rent stabilization. And if there is a landlord that maybe is evicting you know, they're fearful of speaking up about those issues, or if their housing conditions are in not so great situations. Like there is an apartment that we went to one time where there was a railing and if you leaned on the railing the front door would open even if it was locked. So there is just like so many things that the current environment around immigration just makes it a lot harder. Increase in the homelessness in the city of L.A. there's a lot more we're hearing from partners that work with shelters and current services that there's been an increase in people without status going to seek those services.

So every opportunity that we have to be able to protect tenants we have to take it. And there was a time in our state, in our country where government was in the business of providing housing and we pulled out of that. And there was a time in our country where companies were in the business of providing for their employers. And we have to also shift the way we look at ownership and stewardship of land. We think about it it's like it's my property when land is a natural resource, right. And I can tell you in, I grew up in the Latino community my parents having their own home,

but they didn't see it as something that they're gonna cash out or move into a bigger place. This is like a place to grow family to grow community and that has shifted a lot, right. You see all these shows it's like, "You can get a lot of money you can flip it." So this notion has gone on steroids about using land and property and home to make a lot of money. And that has impacts on climate because of the resources that that takes but we have to shift on every single level. And if we're gonna solve and get out of this really bad place that we're in, we have to shift on the policy level we have to shift from the economic level and we have to shift on the personal level on how we view our homes.

Announcer: This is Climate One. You're listening to a conversation about creating housing near public transit as a way to limit carbon pollution. Coming up, Greg Dalton asks Isela Gracian how this can be done in a way that includes people rather than displacing them?

Isela Gracian: It's creating space to engage and get to know each other as people and individuals. Having conversations of what they enjoy about the neighborhood versus starting the long list of everything that they don't like about the neighborhood. And that helps bring down a little bit of the tension so that you can get into really tough conversations.

Announcer: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Announcer: You're listening to Climate One. Greg Dalton is talking about the challenge of creating housing density around transit while not displacing long-term residents with Ann Cheng of TransForm, a transit planning agency and advocacy group; Isela Gracian, President of the East LA Community Corporation; Rachel Swan a City Hall reporter with the San Francisco Chronicle; and State Senator Scott Wiener, representing San Francisco, Daly City and Colma.

Here's Greg, taking questions from the audience at Climate On:

Greg Dalton: We're gonna include your comments or questions. Join us with a single, one part comment or question. If you need help keeping it brief, I'm here for you. [chuckle] There is a first brave mover right there. Welcome to Climate One.

Male Participant: Hi, thanks for the talk. So, Kamala Harris and Cory Booker have introduced federal legislation around housing renters, a refundable tax credit some other flexibility things from Cory Booker. So it seems nothing is gonna move in the short term so we need to focus state and local but what's a long-term role of the federal government in this space?

Isela Gracian: Resources. As an organization that builds affordable housing the cuts to funding have been so significant at the federal level. In double digits of percentages of like how much money is available to actually like build. So the federal government plays a role in resources and they also play a role in framing and participating in supporting changing the hearts and minds of our neighbors, right, on how we can approach and solve the housing crisis.

Greg Dalton: Scott Weiner.

Scott Wiener: I am thrilled that you have United States Senators, including ones who may run for president who are talking about housing. Because I think historically, housing has been purely and you had the federal government that used to invest one away and it was just all local, local, local, local government plays a key role, but it's not enough. And so the state is starting to step in with better standards since it's a statewide issue but I think it's great that President Obama that his HUD issued a lot of guidance around housing and sustainable housing we now have senators. So I think the more we can have all levels of government focusing on housing the better.

Greg Dalton: Next Question. Welcome.

Female Participant: So I'm speaking to a chicken-egg issue or chicken-egg, chicken-egg, chicken-egg. There's problems of crowded transit. The phenomenon of increases in transit, provoking investment, which in turn provokes gentrification. What do you do about that?

Ann Cheng: I recommend community development corporations to essentially purchase land and then ignite transit funding measures. So, in Boston the Indigo Corridor essentially did that. So they knew to purchase the land of a defunct transit corridor that was majority Black Americans along this corridor. And by buying up the land first and then initiating the transit initiatives to fund that transit to bring it back online they were able to do that value capture altogether.

Greg Dalton: Sounds like an expensive and long-term game. Let's go to our next question. Welcome.

Male Participant: Yes, I am Mark Rocha, Chancellor, City College of San Francisco. And my college owns 64 acres that is 50 yards from the Balboa Park BART station. So we have a master plan that will put workforce and student housing, eliminate our own homelessness crisis among our students by putting as many as a thousand units there. So, I'm very happy about that but of course there will be besides risking my own life by putting that proposal forward, which is out there on the west part, Western San Francisco, you know, it'll be a -- one thing I just wanted to raise is that land is so dear, but here we have community colleges educate most of the college students in the state. And we have a lot of land and it's not being used very efficiently. We have 10 campuses in the city of San Francisco. And we could be putting housing on several of them with some help and support.

Greg: Senator Wiener.

Scott Wiener: And we have enormous amounts from our community colleges but also our school districts, just government owned surplus property or parking lots from BART stations and it presents great opportunities to build housing with a significant component of affordability and we have to support these institutions because the community pushback is often severe.

Greg: Ann Cheng.

Ann Cheng: I just wanna offer also we have a TransForm development tool called GreenTRIP Connect. Everybody has their phones, you can actually dial it in connect.greentrip.org. And the whole purpose is to give everyone a traffic climate and parking calculator tool to analyze a housing project in a neighborhood near you. And this is a tool that has been essentially supported by the Governor's office of planning and research to guide general plan updates around cities across the state. So I invite you to use it, it's free, connect.greentrip.org.

Greg Dalton: Next question. Welcome to Climate One.

Female Participant: Thank you. My name is Carla Mays. I'm with Smart Cohort, we're the first intermediary for equitable smart city development. And I saw the senator earlier on the last session and we talked about the lack of diversity on projects and design and build and in Leed. And you spoke earlier about trying to have a different dialogue with different communities and how there seems to be very progressive white environmentalists on one hand, pushing biking, pushing different things and then trying to talk to black and brown communities about these things. One are the challenges that, you know, is trying to be a part of these discussions and sitting at the table to put together solutions. And I wanted to understand how are you addressing the lack of being able to bring these two communities together and especially the lack of diversity? Thank you.

Greg Dalton: Senator Wiener.

Scott Wiener: We're doing a lot of infrastructure investment. We're doing more building of affordable housing there's more development overall. And it does take a certain level, a lot of intentionality to make sure that communities are benefiting from those jobs. Whether it's high-speed rail, whether it's a smaller project, it's incredibly important.

The voters of California and the U.S. Supreme Court have not made our lives easier in terms of that we've really been restricted in our ability to try to ensure diversity in terms of who is hired and what firms are hired. In San Francisco, we found some I think creative ways within the bounds of the law to do that outreach to really get, you know, more kinds of businesses and people from different neighborhoods and backgrounds and saying if we're building you your community, let's make sure people in this community are working and businesses are getting that business from that community. So there are ways to do it. I think at a statewide level it's probably behind. But I think there's certainly a will in that diverse outreach.

Greg Dalton: Isela Gracian.

Isela Gracian: Yeah I would just add that I think it's important to note that on the ground there is a lot of movement around racial equity and diversity and inclusion in breaking down racism in particular. And I think that it's still a challenge in policy spaces to really lean into that conversation especially around housing. I've been in a lot of spaces where folks are like, oh, you know, it's just a natural transitions of people or it gets diverted to we're in California we're inclusive. So I think it is important to continue to uplift that and bring it up at the forefront and there are a lot of organizations and community residents that are building up that movement and really bridging across sectors. Because this is, there's intersections, you know, I'm really excited that we're here at Climate One talking about housing within the context of climate but there's a lot of intersections that are taking place. And there are, you know, educational justice organizations that before were never taking about housing that now are because of the impact to students and not being able to focus because of their housing or all these wins around educational justice and now the students can't benefit from it because their families are being displaced. So being able to uplift racial diversity within these conversations, I think is really important and critical. And there is movement happening on the ground and we just need to continue to bring it up and lean into the discomfort that that brings until we can break through into the other side and truly have policies that uplift everybody.

Greg Dalton: We're talking about climate change and affordable housing in California and around the country with Ann Cheng, transportation expert with TransForm an advocacy group. Isela Gracian, president of the East L.A. Community Corporation. Rachel Swan from the San Francisco Chronicle and Scott Wiener, California State Senator. I'm Greg Dalton.

Let's go to our next question. Welcome.

Female Participant: Hi, thank you. I'd like to hear some specific recommendations around unifying communities with relatively like-minded goals but clearly are clashing, right, in these processes as you're talking about like the yes in my backyard people coming into conflict, right, with like local community organizers and they probably mean well, right, and then like there these problems happening. So I just like to hear some specific solutions around like avoiding gentrification while still maintaining the infill that we need for our ever-growing cities. Thank you.

Greg Dalton: Isela Gracian.

Isela Gracian: Really simple but really hard at the same time. It's creating space to engage and get to know each other. Within our processes and we've been building out around community driven development, it's being intentional about creating space for people to dialogue and get to know each other as people and individuals. And more recently we've been leveraging practices around arts and culture to bring people into spaces where they're creating and doing and then having conversation. And those can look like sharing food and learning about dishes that are particular to families and cultural traditions. And then being able to build from there and that helps bring down a little bit of attention so that you can get into really tough conversations. Because we've experienced very horrible comments when we are working through our projects and getting support. But being able to have these spaces where, traditionally you go in and you're ready to fight, right. And we need to be able to build in processes where you're getting to talk you're getting to know each other. So that when you're talking about the tougher conversations, your starting point is different. So it encourages sharing meals, coming together to make meals having conversations of what they enjoy about the neighborhood versus starting the long list of everything that they don't like about the neighborhood.

So it's really about dialogue, creating community, creating relationships and being intentional about that and putting in the work. It's messy, it's hard, it's challenging but we've definitely seen shifts in our neighborhood where there was community residence that as soon as they heard our name they were like, "No, nothing." And then once they started seeing and experiencing our process and all the different work that we do, then now they're at a place where like, "Oh let me hear about what they're working on and then I'll make a decision." So it's really creating those spaces, having community convening having the sessions and not being afraid of talking about the challenging topics.

Greg Dalton: Civil dialogue. Let's go to our last question.

Male Participant: Brief comment which is that, new housing tends to be wheelchair and disability accessible up to ADA code that's an incredible value of dense housing as opposed to old places with steps up to the front. So really appreciate everybody fighting for, you know, accessible housing. Another thing is Union of Concerned Scientists just came out relatively recently with a study looking at housing that's going to be underwater by 2045 in the Bay Area and the immediate coast has a, you know, somewhere short of \$10 billion worth of property and you know, many, many thousands of homes. How do we balance the fact that we're having multi-hundred million dollar mixed-use and condo units going up within a few meters of sea level here in the Embarcadero and being long-term climate ready with low carbon impact housing?

Greg Dalton: 1 to 6 feet of sea level rise this century. Ann Cheng.

Ann Cheng: You mentioned the 10 billion mark, I wanted to make sure everybody understood that a parking space to house a car cost \$50,000 and to house a family, to create a unit of housing is about \$400,000. So you're talking about almost 12% of a cost of a home is all going to house a car. And I did a quick calculation the Bay Area is ideally building 200,000 units of housing by 2022 who knows if we'll ever get there. But if we were to just reduce the car ratio so reduce it from an average it's two car parking spaces per one housing unit. If we just reduce that by one, that's an equivalent of \$10 billion alone.

Scott Wiener: And more housing.

Ann Cheng: And more housing.

Greg Dalton: But on sea level rise, Senator Wiener, there's lots of property, you know, California

has a lot at risk. I talked to a U.S. Admiral, the country's largest naval base in Norfolk, Virginia is flooding sea level rise, we're not ready for this it seems slow but it's happening fast. What's California doing?

Scott Wiener: You know, I think we're starting to grapple with it and we're behind. And we've seem forgetting which highway in the North Bay, which are flooded for the whole winter, is that 37 or one of them? And it's gonna be lost. And I think stuff like that is a real wake-up call for people like, well, this is okay tangible in my life that this road will not be there anymore. We know that we have major transit infrastructure that could be underwater. The Embarcadero seawall which is ancient and deteriorating. And we're at risk of having the Muni subway tunnels flooded and the Embarcadero flooded. And so we, A, we are ramping up our infrastructure investment to shore things up and protect them, and we have to do that on steroids. So we need to be faster and do more and we need to make sure and this is around sea level rise but also around the wildfires. And these are hard conversations but where are we building housing. And as we rebuild, are we gonna rebuild exactly what we did before or we're gonna see the patterns and try to do things differently. That's a real hard one. But we have to learn and not repeat the past mistakes in terms of how we're building housing and where we're building housing.

Announcer: Greg Dalton has been talking about housing strategies for greener cities with Ann Cheng, of TransForm, a transit planning agency and advocacy group; Isela Gracian, President of the East LA Community Corporation a nonprofit that has built hundreds of affordable housing units in a working-class neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles; Rachel Swan a City Hall reporter with the San Francisco Chronicle who's also reported for the SF Weekly and the East Bay Express; and State Senator Scott Wiener representing San Francisco, Daly City and Colma.

To hear all our Climate One conversations, subscribe to our podcast at our website: climateone.org, where you'll also find photos, video clips and more. If you like the program, please let us know by writing a review on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And join us next time for another conversation about energy, economy, and the environment.

Greg Dalton: Climate One is a project of The Commonwealth Club of California. Kelli Pennington directs our audience engagement. Tyler Reed is our producer. The audio engineers are Mark Kirchner and Justin Norton. Anny Celsi, Devon Strolovitch and Claire Schoen edit the show. I'm Greg Dalton, the executive producer and host. The Commonwealth Club CEO is Dr. Gloria Duffy.

Climate One is produced in association with KQED Public Radio.