



## Overview of the Housing Element of the General Plan and its Relationship to the Sustainable Communities Strategy

### Description

The housing element is one of seven mandatory elements comprising a locality's General Plan. The housing element outlines how the housing needs of all community members can be met through zoning and other local programs. It promotes the state's interest in a healthy housing market that fully addresses Californian's shelter needs, while leaving the ultimate decision about how and where to grow to local governments.

### Three Key Goals of the Housing Element

1. Increase the overall housing supply to match California's population growth
2. Increase the mix of housing types and their affordability levels to reflect Californian's incomes and preferences
3. Promote infill development, efficient development patterns, and the protection of environmental and agricultural land

### Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA)

Based on demographic and employment projections from the state Department of Finance, the state Department of Housing and Community Development calculates each region's projected housing need for a specified period. The numbers are divided into five income categories: extremely low, very low, low, moderate, and above moderate, based on household income in relation to the area's median income. For example, an "extremely low income" household is defined as one earning 30% of the area median income or less. The regional council of governments assigns responsibility for a portion of the RHNA to each city and county.

### Components of a Housing Element

- A. Analysis of existing and future housing needs
  - How many people are living in overcrowded conditions or paying more than 30% of their income for rent/mortgage?
  - What is the condition of the existing housing stock?
  - How many and what types of homes will be needed to accommodate population growth (Regional Housing Needs Assessment)?
  - What are the needs of specific populations, e.g. people with a disability?

## Components of a Housing Element (cont)

- B. Land/site inventory and rezone program
  - Which sites are currently available for residential development?
  - Which sites need rezoning, new infrastructure, or other changes to be viable for residential development?
- C. Government constraints analysis and removal program
  - Examines land use controls, developer fees, building codes, and permitting process
  - Commits to adopting changes that remove or modify any identified barriers where appropriate and legally possible.
- D. Other programs to address identified needs. Examples:
  - Improve energy conservation in existing housing stock
  - Preserve deed-restricted homes at risk of converting to market-rate due to expiring contracts
  - Promote equal housing opportunities

## Relationship to the Sustainable Communities Strategy

- The council of government must allocate Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) numbers to cities and counties consistent with the SCS, i.e. within the development footprint envisioned in the SCS.
- Localities' housing elements are due 18 months after the Metropolitan Planning Organization adopts its Regional Transportation Plan.
- While localities are not bound by the SCS footprint in deciding where to accommodate residential growth, transportation dollars governed by the Regional Transportation Plan must be spent within the footprint. This link provides an incentive for localities to conform to the SCS footprint.
- A strong, effective housing element can both contribute to greenhouse gas reductions and provide more housing options for lower income people. Most of the housing and land use strategies adopted by local governments to meet their housing needs also serve to effectively address climate change concerns. These strategies include:
  1. Promoting more-compact development
  2. Increasing the amount of transit-oriented development affordable to high-propensity transit riders
  3. Reducing development on the fringe through infill and mixed-use options

The information in this summary was drawn from the following sources:

1. *Housing Element Policies and Programs Addressing Climate Change*, California Department of Housing and Community Development [http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/HE\\_PoliciesProgramsAddressingClimateChange.pdf](http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/HE_PoliciesProgramsAddressingClimateChange.pdf)
2. *Housing Element: Tool to Build Vibrant, Livable Communities*, California Department of Housing and Community Development [http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/hrc/plan/hel/tool\\_vibrant101707.pdf](http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/hrc/plan/hel/tool_vibrant101707.pdf)
3. *Housing Element Law*, California Affordable Housing Law Project <http://www.housingadvocates.org/docs/housingelementlaw.pdf>
4. *Components of a Housing Element*, Sacramento Housing Alliance