

**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT****Division of Housing Policy Development**

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**STATE HOUSING ELEMENT LAW****Overview**

State law requires each city and county to adopt a general plan containing at least seven mandatory elements including housing. Unlike the other general plan elements, the housing element, required to be updated every five to six years, is subject to detailed statutory requirements and mandatory review by a State agency, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (Department). Housing elements have been mandatory portions of local general plans since 1969. This reflects the statutory recognition that housing is a matter of statewide importance and cooperation between government and the private sector is critical to attainment of the State's housing goals. The availability of an adequate supply of housing affordable to workers, families, and seniors is critical to the State's long-term economic competitiveness and the quality of life for all Californians.

Housing element law requires local governments to adequately plan to meet their existing and projected housing needs including their share of the regional housing need. Housing element law is the State's primary market-based strategy to increase housing supply, affordability and choice. The law recognizes that in order for the private sector to adequately address housing needs and demand, local governments must adopt land-use plans and regulatory schemes that provide opportunities for, and do not unduly constrain, housing development.

The housing element process begins with the Department allocating a region's share of the statewide housing need to the appropriate Councils of Governments (COG) based on Department of Finance population projections and regional population forecasts used in preparing regional transportation plans. The COG develops a Regional Housing Need Plan (RHNP) allocating the region's share of the statewide need to the cities and counties within the region. The RHNP is required to promote the following objectives to:

- (1) Increase the housing supply and the mix of housing types, tenure, and affordability in all cities and counties within the region in an equitable manner;
- (2) Promote infill development and socioeconomic equity, the protection of environmental and agricultural resources, and the encouragement of efficient development patterns; and
- (3) Promote an improved intraregional relationship between jobs and housing.

Housing element law recognizes the most critical decisions regarding housing development occur at the local level within the context of the periodically updated general plan. The housing element component of the general plan requires local governments to

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balance the need for growth, including the need for additional housing, against other competing local interests. Housing element law promotes the State's interest in encouraging open markets and providing opportunities for the private sector to address the State's housing demand, while leaving the ultimate decision about how and where to plan for growth at the regional and local levels. While land-use planning is fundamentally a local issue, the availability of housing is a matter of statewide importance. Housing element law and the RHNP process requires local governments to be accountable for ensuring that projected housing needs can be accommodated. The process maintains local control over where and what type of development should occur in local communities while providing the opportunity for the private sector to meet market demand.

In general, a housing element must at least include the following components:

#### **A Housing Needs Assessment:**

- Existing Needs - The number of households overpaying for housing, living in overcrowded conditions, or with special housing needs (e.g., the elderly, large families, homeless), the number of housing units in need of repair, and assisted affordable units at-risk of converting to market-rate.
- Projected Needs - The city or county's share of the regional housing need as established in the RHNP prepared by the COG. The allocation establishes the number of new units needed, by income category, to accommodate expected population growth over the planning period of the housing element. The RHNP provides a benchmark for evaluating the adequacy of local zoning and regulatory actions to ensure each local government is providing sufficient appropriately designated land and opportunities for housing development to address population growth and job generation.

#### **A Sites Inventory and Analysis:**

The element must include a detailed land inventory and analysis including a site specific inventory listing properties, zoning and general plan designation, size and existing uses; a general analysis of environmental constraints and the availability of infrastructure, and evaluation of the suitability, availability and realistic development capacity of sites to accommodate the jurisdiction's share of the regional housing need by income level. If the analysis does not demonstrate adequate sites, appropriately zoned to meet the jurisdictions share of the regional housing need, by income level, the element must include a program to provide the needed sites including providing zoning that allows owner-occupied and rental multifamily uses "by-right" with minimum densities and development standards that allow at least 16 units per site for sites.

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#### **An Analysis of Constraints on Housing:**

- Governmental - Includes land-use controls, fees and exactions, on- and off-site improvement requirements, building codes and their enforcement, permit and processing procedures, and potential constraints on the development or improvement of housing for persons with disabilities.

#### **Housing Programs**

Programs are required to identify adequate sites to accommodate the locality's share of the regional housing need; assist in the development of housing for extremely low, lower- and moderate-income households; remove or mitigate governmental constraints; conserve and improve the existing affordable housing stock; promote equal housing opportunity; and preserve the at-risk units identified.

#### **Quantified Objectives**

Estimates the maximum number of units, by income level, to be constructed, rehabilitated, and conserved over the planning period of the element.