

Housing Element

Description

What is a Housing Element?

Housing elements are critical parts of the General Plan. They dictate where and what kind of housing can be built in your community.

In California, the Housing Element is state mandated, it assesses the existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the community; identifies potential sites; and contains adopted goals, policies, and implementation programs for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing.

Every city in California must update its housing element in 2022. Use this website to track upcoming housing element updates across the state: fairhousingelements.org.

How is the Housing Element connected to climate & why is it so important?

California is facing an extreme affordability crisis that is driven by the interrelated housing shortage, economic inequity, and climate crises. We are not building enough housing at any income level. When we don't create enough homes, prices go up and working-class and low-income families are forced to live far away from where they work or grew up. This continued upward pressure on the cost of housing means that Bay Area residents are having a harder time finding safe housing and purchasing even a modest home.

California is short over 3.5 million homes, according to [a report by the McKinsey Global Institute](#), which forces more workers to become super commuters—people who have to drive more than 90 minutes to get to work. The lack of affordable housing close to jobs also increases pressure for sprawl development on our natural and working lands—where urban infrastructure intermingles with wildland vegetation, also known as the [Wildland Urban Interface](#) (WUI). That is exactly where wildlife risk is more pronounced, yet this land is being rapidly developed in the Bay Area.

In California, about 40% of [greenhouse gas emissions](#) (GHGs) come from transportation—the bulk of that from gasoline and diesel-burning vehicles. The carbon footprint of our auto-centric urban planning is even greater when we count oil refining and upstream emissions outside of the state. Denser forms of development—building up instead of out—reduce the dependence on personal vehicles, which in turn reduces travel time and costs, the consumption of oil and gasoline, and the planet-warming GHG emissions responsible for elevating the risks of climate change.

Even as California has made great progress in cleaning up its electricity grid, transportation emissions were on an upward trend prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In some counties, as much as two-thirds of emissions are up from automobiles. Building more [climate SMART \(Sustainable, Mixed, Affordable, Resilient, Transit-Oriented\) housing](#) in the right places can mitigate these climate impacts and reduce housing costs and inequities. But in order to do this, we need to change the way we build and eliminate

the stigma around multi-family homes.

As we encourage and engage in equitable, fire and flood-safe infill development (development of vacant land—usually individual lots or leftover properties—within areas that are already largely developed), it is imperative that we think about how we can maximize the benefits we get from our land. We need to build more infill housing in existing urban areas and ensure that all housing includes a healthy amount of green infrastructure like bioswales, carbon sequestering trees that provide shade and help regulate microclimates while mitigating the urban heat island effect, native plants that can provide habitat, and other nature-based solutions to climate risks.

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