

MY TURN

State legislation should support, not hinder, efforts to plan for more housing



BY GUEST COMMENTARY

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IN SUMMARY

With dozens of bills on housing, the Legislature should keep in mind the right to citizen engagement in the local planning process.



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Like so many essential workers, city employees and elected officials have been in overdrive for the past year, trying to save and support our communities from the ravaging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic recession.

California's cities spent billions addressing the public health crisis, maintaining essential services like public safety, sanitation and transit that our citizens cannot live without, and supporting small businesses to help them survive.

While these efforts have been well-chronicled, at the same time cities have been diligently confronting another emergency: doing their part to address the high cost of housing. The pandemic may have temporarily tempered the public's attention to this important issue, but for city officials their resolve to do their part has never wavered.

Hundreds of cities and regional governments throughout the state have been undergoing an intense process updating their local [housing element](#), which includes identifying land for housing, and planning and zoning to provide these additional housing units. Since 1969, California has required that every city adopt a housing element as part of its general plan to show how the community plans to meet existing and projected housing needs of people at all income levels.

Planning for and ultimately adopting a city's housing element is a laborious, time consuming and costly process that dictates how the city, over the next eight years, will accommodate housing, businesses and transportation needs. The process also includes community engagement, and meeting

conservation and open space requirements. By the end of 2022, all of the state's major regions and cities will have completed their latest housing element.

At the end of this process, cities will have identified and planned for more than 2 million units of additional housing statewide over the next eight years. That's on top of the millions of homes that cities have already planned, zoned and approved in past housing element cycles and will include housing across all income levels and of all types, such as mixed use, multi-family, transit oriented, infill and single-family.

As the 2021 legislative cycle advances, housing continues to be at the forefront of the Legislature's attention. There are [dozens of bills](#) that seek to alter the relationship between the state and local governments on land use issues.

Some will provide helpful assistance, streamlining and funding to help cities plan for homes. Others would undermine the constitutional authority granted to cities to plan and zone land for housing, as well as undermine the important role of residents in shaping their communities.

These bills come as we're just beginning to implement the more than 50 bills passed in the last four years that have substantially added more requirements and obligations for cities.

The [League of California Cities](#) and the cities we represent are committed to continuing to do our part to address the housing crisis, and to working with the administration, Legislature and other interested parties. While cities don't build homes, we have an obligation to ensure we're planning for and approving homes that meet the diverse housing needs of our communities, while minimizing delays, costs and barriers to housing.

At the same time, we ask our state partners to recognize the significant investment cities are making to update housing plans to accommodate millions of new units of housing. Lawmakers should avoid pushing new,

unproven policies that would undermine this process, change the rules mid-stream or conflict with the myriad of new housing laws recently passed that cities are only now being asked to implement.

Most importantly, we ask that our state partners respect the vital role that local voters - our residents - demand: the right to citizen engagement in the local planning process.

Cities have been and will continue doing their part. We respectfully ask state lawmakers to refrain from making it more difficult to get the job done.

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