
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE HOUSING ELEMENT

Sacramento County's General Plan serves as a policy document to guide the development of the unincorporated area of the County. The Housing Element of the Sacramento County General Plan is one of seven required elements of the plan. The other six required elements are Land Use, Circulation, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, and Safety.

State law requires the General Plan elements to be integrated and internally consistent, both among the elements and within each element. The goals, objectives, and policies of this Housing Element have been reviewed for consistency with goals, policies, and implementation measures of other General Plan elements. This Housing Element is consistent internally and consistent with the other elements.

The purpose of the Housing Element is to identify and analyze existing and projected housing needs for all income groups and implementation strategies with measurable performance objectives to address those needs. The strategies are followed by a series of sub-strategies, policies and programs which facilitate the achievement of the strategies.

The State requirements for Housing Elements are based on the Legislature's findings that:

- The availability of housing is of vital statewide importance, and the early attainment of decent housing and a suitable living environment for every Californian, including farmworkers, is a priority of the highest order.
- The early attainment of this goal requires the cooperative participation of government and the private sector in an effort to expand housing opportunities and accommodate the housing needs of Californians of all economic levels.
- The provision of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income households requires the cooperation of all levels of government.
- Local and state governments have a responsibility to use the powers vested in them to facilitate the improvement and development of housing to make adequate provision for the housing needs of all economic segments of the community.
- The legislature recognizes that in carrying out this responsibility, each local government also has the responsibility to consider economic, environmental, and fiscal factors and community goals set forth in the general plan and to cooperate with other local governments and the State in addressing regional housing needs.

HOUSING ELEMENT CONTENTS

Government Code Section 65583 requires that a local government's General Plan include a housing element that addresses the preservation, improvement, and development of housing. State Planning Law also requires a housing element to include:

1. An assessment of housing needs, and an inventory of resources and constraints relevant to meeting the needs. The assessment and inventory should include: an analysis of population and employment trends, an analysis of household characteristics, an inventory of land suitable for residential development, an analysis of potential and actual governmental constraints to housing development, an analysis of any special housing needs, an evaluation of opportunities for energy conservation, and an analysis of subsidized housing projects which may be converted to market rate rentals.
2. A statement of the community's goals, quantified objectives, and policies relative to the maintenance, preservation, improvement, and development of housing.
3. A program which sets forth a five-year schedule of actions the local government is undertaking, or intends to undertake, to implement the policies and achieve the goals and objectives of the Housing Element. This includes the administration of land use and development controls, provision of regulatory concessions and incentives, and the utilization of appropriate Federal and State financing and subsidy program. The program should address:
 - Identification of adequate sites, through appropriate zoning and development standards, to facilitate and encourage the development of a variety of housing types.
 - Assistance in the development of adequate housing to meet the needs of low-income and moderate-income households.
 - When appropriate, the removal or reduction of governmental constraints.
 - Conservation and improvement in the condition of existing housing stock.
 - Promotion of housing opportunities for all persons regardless of race, religion, sex, marital status, and economic status. This includes promotion of housing opportunities for members of special needs groups, including female heads-of-household, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, farmworkers, homeless people, and large families.
 - Preservation of assisted housing development for lower income households.

This 2008 Housing Element is a revision of the 2004 Housing Element. This revision was prepared to comply with Section 65583 of the Government Code and to address revisions of other state laws since 2004 that address housing, planning, and zoning issues.

The Housing Element is divided into 11 Chapters. These are listed below:

Chapter 1: Introduction: Provides an overview of the purpose and contents of the Housing Element, a description of the public participation process, and describes how the Housing Element is consistent with other planning documents.

Chapter 2: Financial Resources: This Chapter describes the institutional context and allocation of resources for implementing Housing Element policies and actions.

Chapter 3: Housing Action Plan - Strategies, Goals, Policies, and Programs: Contains the County's proposed strategies, goals, policies, and implementation programs for the development, conservation, and rehabilitation of housing. Also, the County's quantified objectives are included.

Chapter 4: Evaluation of Prior Achievements: Evaluates the County's achievements in implementing the programs of the 2004 Housing Element. This Chapter evaluates which programs were successful, which programs need revisions to be successfully implemented, and which programs should be discontinued, as well as identifying new program needs.

Chapter 5: Population and Housing Characteristics: Provides information on population and household composition, income, and employment. This Chapter describes characteristics of the housing stock, including housing type, age, and condition.

Chapter 6: Land Inventory: Contains an analysis of vacant and underutilized land in the unincorporated area suitable for residential development. This analysis compares residential development potential on vacant sites with the County's regional housing allocation, under the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) Regional Housing Needs Plan for the 2006 - 2013 period.

Chapter 7: Housing Constraints Analysis: Discusses governmental and non-governmental constraints that affect the cost and availability of housing, particularly for lower income households.

Chapter 8: Housing Needs Assessment: Describes current and future unmet housing needs arising from the cost and availability of housing, particularly for lower income households and special needs groups.

Chapter 9: Residential Energy Conservation: Describes opportunities for residential energy conservation that decrease the cost of building, maintaining, and occupying housing.

Chapter 10: Preservation of Assisted Units: Evaluates the potential for subsidized rental housing developments in the unincorporated area to convert to market rate rental housing and potentially displace lower income households. This Chapter analyzes the potential cost of preserving or replacing affordable rental housing units.

Chapter 11: Community Profiles: Summarizes and compares population and housing information for each of the County's community planning areas.

Appendices: Appendix A provides a compilation of public comments. Appendix B is an evaluation of each program in the previous Housing Element that has provided insight in the development of the updated programs. Appendix C is a parcel inventory of vacant and underutilized parcels in the unincorporated County that were used in summarizing the acreage and corresponding units available for residential development in Chapter 6. Appendix D provides maps of the location of the inventory of parcels. Appendix E provides references to the data used in this update.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The 2008 Housing Element was prepared with public outreach and participation. Cities and counties are required by State law (Section 65583[c][7] of the California Government Code) to “make a diligent effort to achieve public participation of all economic segments of the community in the development of the Housing Element.”

The County of Sacramento (County) invited participation from the general public, nonprofit organizations, County departments, and private development groups to ensure the broadest range of input during its community outreach process. The County used several strategies to encourage involvement, particularly among low-income and special-needs groups. Community outreach locations were chosen to be accessible according to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and located near public transportation routes. Opportunities for public involvement included the following:

- Five community workshops were held to educate residents about the legal requirements, past accomplishments, and future goals of the Housing Element. Workshops took place in October and November 2007 in five communities in the County. Meetings were held at the North Highlands Community Center, the Florin Sheriff’s Service Center, Smedburg Middle School, Orangevale Community Center, and La Sierra Community Center.
- Four focus group meetings were held at the County Administration Building in downtown Sacramento during January and February 2008. The focus groups discussed housing conservation and preservation, affordable housing, constraints to housing development, and special-needs housing.
- Three targeted focus group meetings with major stakeholder groups were held in January 2008. The meetings were held with the Housing Subcommittee of the County’s Disability Advisory Commission, the Sacramento Housing Alliance, and the Building Industry of Superior California. These meetings provided the County with additional feedback on suggested goals, policies, and programs.
- Two public workshops were held with the Policy Planning Commission in March 2008.
- The draft Housing Element was presented to the Policy Planning Commission on May 27, 2008 and the Board of Supervisors on May 28, 2008. Both hearings were open to the public.

The workshops and meetings were attended by the general public, representatives of various housing-related organizations and agencies, and local private developers. The following organizations participated in the focus groups:

- Alchemist Community Development Corporation
- Avondale Glen Elder Neighborhood Association
- Californians for Disability Rights
- Housing Now
- MacKay and Soms
- Mercy Housing of California
- Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services
- Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance
- Sacramento County Department of Neighborhood Services
- Sacramento County Planning and Community Development Department
- Sacramento Housing Alliance
- Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency
- Sacramento Mutual Housing Association
- SBM Site Services, LLC
- WALK Sacramento
- Wasatch Property Management

The County notified participants about the outreach meetings by e-mail, newspaper ad, and direct mail. The General Plan Update e-mail list was used to distribute an informational flyer about the meetings. The flyer had a link to the Housing Element Web site, where meeting information was posted. A press release advertised the focus group meetings. Additionally, the South Sacramento Neighborhood Services Center mailed a copy of the informational flyer to community and neighborhood groups in South Sacramento.

The meetings provided the County with a variety of housing-related comments. Several important comments repeated in different meetings included:

- The development process should be streamlined.
- Fees are a constraint to affordable housing development.
- The County should focus on conserving/preserving existing units over new construction.
- Affordable housing needs to be located near transportation and services.
- Barriers to creative housing types (e.g., boarding houses, limited equity co-ops) should be removed.

Recorded comments were organized based on five Housing Element goals - adequate supply of land, reduction of constraints to housing production, conservation and rehabilitation of existing housing and neighborhoods, improvement to housing opportunities for special needs groups, and provision of affordable housing. Comments from each category are provided below, along with a brief comment summary. A detailed list of public comments is located in Appendix A.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION COMMENTS

ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF LAND FOR HOUSING

- Promote infill development before developing agricultural land.
- Work with property owners of underutilized parcels and small-lot owners.
- Provide for transitions in scale.

Many comments identified infill development as being essential in meeting the County's housing land supply needs. This includes transit-oriented development, which would be beneficial to seniors and low-income individuals who need reliable access to services and amenities. Some participants commented that greenfield development is still needed because new homes might not be visually compatible with older neighborhoods. Most participants were in support of having Infill development along existing corridors. Some participants stated that the County needs to work with owners of underutilized properties to promote the benefits of infill development. The County also needs to help owners of small lots with the permitting process. Small-lot owners need financial assistance (e.g., reduced permit fees, fast-track permitting) to provide the housing opportunities that meet the County's goals.

REDUCTION OF CONSTRAINTS TO HOUSING PRODUCTION

- Development fees are a constraint to all housing.
- The second-unit ordinance is legally compliant, but not aligned with lender's requirements.
- The County does not support small developers.

Participants representing the local development community commented on the high cost of development fees, which increased dramatically with the accelerated housing market of the early 2000's. They noted that fees have not been lowered as the housing market has slowed. Some participants believed that fees were not related to the actual cost of providing services and suggested basing fees on the marginal cost to provide services. The second-unit ordinance was identified as a means of providing more affordable housing. However, the current 400-square-foot maximum size limit (without a use permit) is below the minimum 600-square-foot requirement to qualify for financing. The County's lack of support for small developers was also mentioned as a constraint to affordable housing production. The County could offer fee reductions or waivers, relaxed parking requirements, and modified fee timing to reduce the high upfront costs of development.

CONSERVATION AND REHABILITATION OF EXISTING HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

- Emphasize conservation/preservation over new construction.
- Create a rental inspection program to identify and address substandard units.
- Increase ownership opportunities.
- Convert underutilized commercial buildings to housing.

Most participants wanted to rehabilitate and conserve existing neighborhoods and housing in order to slow greenfield development. Some participants recommended that the County be proactive in maintaining neighborhoods by creating a program for the inspection of substandard housing. This program would be applied to

limited geographical areas for a certain amount of time before moving on to other areas. The program could be linked with financial assistance programs that will help property owners and landlords maintain their units.

Some participants want some units of affordable apartments to be converted to affordable condominiums in order to provide low-income ownership opportunities. This could be applied in areas with large concentrations of affordable rental units. It was suggested that underutilized commercial buildings could be converted to high-density housing to further promote infill development.

IMPROVEMENT OF HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPECIAL-NEEDS GROUPS

- Locate housing near transit and other services.
- Ensure that design is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.
- Provide accessible and affordable units.
- Develop housing for a variety of income levels.

Participants commented on the importance of housing location for special-needs groups. Seniors, veterans, disabled residents, and others often rely on public transportation and need housing with easy access to transit stops. Some participants emphasized that transitional housing should be designed to be compatible with its surrounding neighborhood to reduce opposition or NIMBYism (“not in my backyard”). Housing for special needs groups, such as senior group homes or cottages, is often compatible with single-family residential neighborhoods. Apartments could be renovated and converted into senior condominiums. Participants mentioned that available funding for accessibility improvements should be used to create accessible affordable housing rather than high-end renovations for residents without financial need. It was also mentioned that the percentage of accessible units required in new construction should be increased. Developing housing for a variety of income levels is important to create a safety net for residents who have a sudden change in income. It is important to keep these people close to their support network.

PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Promote creative/alternative housing types.
- Locate housing near transit and services.
- Prevent segregating affordable housing from market rate housing.

To provide more opportunities for affordable housing, participants suggested that the County promote alternative opportunities for housing, such as boarding houses, limited-equity co-ops, buying foreclosed properties in bulk, and converting underutilized commercial buildings to housing. But, traditional affordable options are still needed. This includes the purchasing of land for mobile home parks. Most participants stressed the importance of the location of affordable units because most residents would need to be in close proximity to essential services or have access to public transit. Some participants were concerned that the affordable housing ordinance results in affordable housing being concentrated in one area of a subdivision rather than being integrated into the rest of the development. The participants were concerned that the in-lieu fee and the dedicated land options of the affordable housing ordinance contributes to this segregating of affordable units from the market rate units.

CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING DOCUMENTS

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

State law requires that the Housing Element include a statement of how consistency was achieved with the other elements of the General Plan. The following analyses and actions conducted by the County ensure that the Housing Element is consistent with the other General Plan elements.

- The goals and policies of the Housing Element are consistent with those of the Land Use Element. The County reviewed General Plan Land Use Element classifications and implementing ordinances (such as zoning, specific plans, and other regulatory documents) to ensure that there are adequate sites with appropriate zoning/specific plan designations to accommodate the County's Regional Housing Needs allocation. (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the SACOG Plan and the County's land use inventory.) There is more emphasis on infill development and redevelopment in the new Housing Element than there is in the existing 1993 General Plan with strategies and policies that are more extensive than those in the 1993 Plan.
- To have consistency with the Open Space and Agriculture Elements, the County did not include lands designated for open space or agriculture in the inventory (except lands zoned for agricultural/residential use). There are no sites identified in the County's inventory for residential development that conflict with open space, conservation, or agricultural policies of the General Plan. For this reason, the new Housing Element is consistent with the Open Space and Agricultural Elements.
- The County has policies in the Housing Element that are consistent with the Land Use, Circulation, and Public Facilities Elements of the General Plan. This includes policies pertaining to mixed use and infill development, accessibility of multifamily housing to transportation and services, and the provision of infrastructure. The emphasis on mixed-use development with access to transportation and services is consistent with both the existing and proposed Land Use Elements.
- The County reviewed the growth assumptions underlying SACOG's housing allocation for the unincorporated County, and the infrastructure and public services that would be necessary for the projected level of residential development through 2013. The growth assumptions of the housing allocation are consistent with the SACOG Blueprint Project's Preferred Scenario. The draft General Plan growth assumptions are also consistent with the Preferred Scenario.
- The projected residential development evaluated in the Housing Element is consistent with General Plan policies regarding the Urban Policy Area and the Urban Service Boundary.
- No area proposed for residential development will conflict with General Plan policies for the conservation of natural resources or the protection of public health and safety.

- The Housing Element includes supportive services policies consistent with policies in the Human Services Element.

CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER PLANNING DOCUMENTS

In updating the Housing Element, the County consulted the following planning documents to ensure consistency:

- The 2003-2007 Consolidated Plan, which contains strategies, policies, implementing actions, and quantified objectives for the use of Federal Community Development Block Grant, HOME Program, and Emergency Services Grant funds to address lower income housing, community development, and economic development needs. The County has also considered the draft 2008 - 2014 Consolidated Plan.
- The Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness adopted by the County to address homeless needs.
- Redevelopment project area implementation plans, which contain funding strategies, actions, and quantified objectives for housing replacement, residential relocation, housing rehabilitation, new housing development, and community revitalization in the several redevelopment project areas in the unincorporated area.