



American Planning Association  
**California Chapter**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

**SENATE TRANSPORTATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE  
CALIFORNIA'S HOUSING CRISIS: LONG-TERM & COMPREHENSIVE  
FUNDING AND REGULATORY SOLUTIONS**

Thank you for inviting me to this hearing on behalf of the American Planning Association, California Chapter.

APA California has been active in state housing policy for literally decades and last fall we convened a task force of experienced professional planners to focus specifically on what can be done to increase housing production and improve housing affordability, and I'd like to share our recommendations with you this afternoon.

Our recommendations reflect a few foundational principles that are important to mention from the outset:

First, we cannot simply PLAN our way out of California's affordable housing crisis. While good long-range planning remains essential to increasing the state's housing supply, good planning is not enough by itself and we must now also focus on strategies that actually get those planned housing units built.

Second, while we must take steps to increase housing production we also need to recognize that we cannot simply BUILD our way out of the state's housing affordability crisis. Increasing housing supply will help make housing more

C/O STEFAN/GEORGE ASSOCIATES |  
1333 36<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
SACRAMENTO CA 95816-5401

P: 916.736.2434  
F: 916.456.1283  
[www.calapa.org](http://www.calapa.org)

affordable, but in some of the most expensive real estate markets in the country, some areas of our state will never produce enough housing to meet the needs of all economic segments of our communities. We need to do more than just build.

Third, this need to focus on housing production is not simply a local government problem. If the result of the many new housing bills introduced in this session is simply to pile more mandates at the feet of local governments, we will have failed. **We believe that there are, in fact, many more jurisdictions in California that want to increase housing for their residents than those that don't.**

But local governments don't build housing, nor do they control many of the factors that influence housing development. That means solutions for increasing housing production must include all of the many players, and that includes not only local governments but also the state, builders including non-profit builders, labor and environmental organizations, and of course the communities themselves.

For this reason we believe that a real solution to California's housing production problems has to be a package deal. APA California's recommendations include six different themes:

1. Provide adequate funding for housing, infrastructure and planning
2. Create certainty in housing approvals
3. Encourage housing that is more affordable by reducing the cost to build
4. Focus HCD on providing proactive assistance and new strategies
5. Streamline Housing element law
6. Enforce Existing Housing Laws

C/O STEFAN/GEORGE ASSOCIATES 2  
1333 36<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
SACRAMENTO CA 95816-5401

P: 916.736.2434  
F: 916.456.1283  
[www.calapa.org](http://www.calapa.org)

## 1. Provide Adequate Funding for Housing, Infrastructure & Planning

- Affordable housing must become a state funding priority, including subsidies for affordable housing in areas where the market cannot meet the needs of lower income households.
- Provide funding for long-range planning (general plans and specific plans) to ensure that communities are prepared to accommodate additional housing and to streamline the permitting process for housing projects consistent with the adopted plans.
- We need funding or funding mechanisms to increase community capacity for housing development. In the world of housing elements and housing planning, we often think of “capacity” just in terms of land; does your city have enough sites to meet your housing need? But this view is too narrow. We have to increase the capacity of our communities to accommodate additional growth, including the local infrastructure and services needed to support housing, including water, sewer, transportation, parks, schools, and libraries. **This investment in increasing community capacity is a critical issue – and must be accomplished in conjunction with other housing production strategies.**

## 2. Create Certainty in Housing Approvals

Housing developers often face tremendous uncertainty when they begin the local entitlement process because they don’t know the outcome or how long it will take. Both factors increase the cost to develop new housing and sometimes even the willingness of developers to take on projects. To address this:

- APA California supports ministerial or by-right housing approvals for most housing that is consistent with adopted plans.
- At the same time, let’s allow cities and counties to

C/O STEFAN/GEORGE ASSOCIATES 3  
1333 36<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
SACRAMENTO CA 95816-5401

P: 916.736.2434  
F: 916.456.1283  
www.calapa.org

address project design without triggering the CEQA process on projects that would otherwise be exempt; let's include a CEQA exemption for design review of housing projects that are otherwise allowed by-right, along with reasonable time limits for completing the design review process.

- We should also provide expedited CEQA litigation for housing projects, similar to what's been done for stadium projects.
- Lastly, let's change the building code revision process so that projects with planning entitlements don't have to be redesigned to meet new building code requirements that changed while they were going through the planning process.

### **3. Reduce Development Costs to Encourage More Affordable Housing**

Affordable housing development is particularly sensitive to cost issues. Improving the certainty of the permitting process will certainly help reduce those costs, but more is needed. For example,

- Smaller units are less expensive to build, so let's eliminate minimum size requirements for affordable units.
- Encourage zoning strategies, like form-based codes, that limit building height and bulk rather than the number of units.
- Ensure that impact fees are scaled to the size of units.

### **4. Focus HCD on providing proactive assistance and new strategies**

We would like to see HCD shift its focus toward building more housing rather than additional housing element processes. This could include:

- Funding for HCD to work with architects, housing developers and planners to develop ADU or other housing prototypes and provide financial incentives to use the prototypes.
- The state should fund HCD to track affordable units that are at risk of loss and to proactively work with

C/O STEFAN/GEORGE ASSOCIATES<sup>4</sup>  
1333 36<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
SACRAMENTO CA 95816-5401

P: 916.736.2434  
F: 916.456.1283  
[www.calapa.org](http://www.calapa.org)

owners and communities to find funding to preserve those units.

- Let's improve local accountability around housing issues by requiring an objective accounting of the city's or county's record on approval of new housing development, including the number of units applied for, the number approved, how long the process took and what incentives did the city or county provide? **We believe this will provide a more complete picture of what is going on in each jurisdiction and highlight the facts about housing within the community.**

## **5. Streamline the Housing Element Law**

While the General Plan Housing Element is a critical piece of the package for addressing our state's housing needs, let's eliminate requirements that don't directly result in more housing production. For example, we could scale back things like:

- Requirements to analyze "non-governmental constraints" that local government can't control.
- Requirements to plan for farmworker housing in urban areas with little or no agriculture.
- Let's streamline the analysis needed for each and every housing site shown in the plan.
- Let's not address energy conservation in the Housing Element when this is controlled through the state building code.

**Instead, we can make the Housing Element more useful by concentrating on the parts that really make a difference:**

- Designation and zoning of adequate sites for affordable housing and homeless shelters.
- Ensure conformance with state law requirements for transitional and supportive housing, people with disabilities and farmworker housing.
- Analysis of affordable housing that may convert to market-rate, with state funding to help preserve

C/O STEFAN/GEORGE ASSOCIATES 5  
1333 36<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
SACRAMENTO CA 95816-5401

P: 916.736.2434  
F: 916.456.1283  
[www.calapa.org](http://www.calapa.org)

that housing.

- Encourage regional or subregional analysis of housing issues instead of a separate analysis for each city and county.

## **6. Enforce Existing Housing Laws**

We consistently hear about the so-called “bad actor” cities and counties that aren’t complying with state housing law. We believe that bad-actor local governments are a small minority, but there is no reason that any communities should get a pass on complying with state housing law while others are working hard to meet housing needs.

- Let’s fund the AG to proactively enforce housing laws, especially communities that have not adopted housing elements or not done promised zoning and those that deny housing projects in violation of state law.

***APA California hopes that the Legislature takes the time to ensure all of these key pieces are enacted together.***

C/O STEFAN/GEORGE ASSOCIATES 6  
1333 36<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
SACRAMENTO CA 95816-5401

P: 916.736.2434  
F: 916.456.1283  
www.calapa.org