

**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
DIVISION OF HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

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March 30, 2023

Tennis Wick, Director
Permit Sonoma
County of Sonoma
2250 Ventura Ave
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Dear Tennis Wick:

RE: County of Sonoma's 6th Cycle (2023-2031) Draft Housing Element

Thank you for submitting the County of Sonoma's (County) draft housing element received for review on December 30, 2022, along with revisions received on March 13, 2023. Pursuant to Government Code section 65585, subdivision (b), the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) is reporting the results of its review. In addition, HCD considered comments from Sonoma County Housing Element Working Group, Public Interest Law Project, California Rural Legal Assistance, Sonoma and Dan Northern, Sonia Taylor, Berda Lee, and Fred Allebach, pursuant to Government Code section 65585, subdivision (c).

The draft element addresses many statutory requirements; however, revisions will be necessary to comply with State Housing Element Law (Article 10.6 of the Gov. Code). The enclosed Appendix describes the revisions needed to comply with State Housing Element Law.

As a reminder, the County's 6th cycle housing element was due January 31, 2023. As of today, the County has not completed the housing element process for the 6th cycle. The County's 5th cycle housing element no longer satisfies statutory requirements. HCD encourages the County to revise the element as described above, adopt, and submit to HCD to regain housing element compliance.

For your information, pursuant to Assembly Bill 1398 (Chapter 358, Statutes of 2021), if a local government fails to adopt a compliant housing element within 120 days of the statutory deadline (January 31, 2023), then any rezoning to make prior identified sites available or accommodate the regional housing needs allocation (RHNA) shall be completed no later than one year from the statutory deadline pursuant to Government Code sections 65583, subdivision (c) and 65583.2, subdivision (c). Otherwise, the local government's housing element will no longer comply with State Housing Element Law, and HCD may revoke its finding of substantial compliance pursuant to Government

Code section 65585, subdivision (i). Please be aware, if the County fails to adopt a compliant housing element within one year from the statutory deadline, the element cannot be found in substantial compliance until these rezones are completed.

Several federal, state, and regional funding programs consider housing element compliance as an eligibility or ranking criteria. For example, the CalTrans Senate Bill (SB) 1 Sustainable Communities grant; the Strategic Growth Council and HCD's Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities programs; and HCD's Permanent Local Housing Allocation consider housing element compliance and/or annual reporting requirements pursuant to Government Code section 65400. With a compliant housing element, the County will meet housing element requirements for these and other funding sources.

For your information, some general plan element updates are triggered by housing element adoption. HCD reminds the County to consider timing provisions and welcomes the opportunity to provide assistance. For information, please see the Technical Advisories issued by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research at: <https://www.opr.ca.gov/planning/general-plan/guidelines.html>.

We are committed to assisting the County in addressing all statutory requirements of State Housing Element Law. If you have any questions or need additional technical assistance, please contact Mashal Ayobi, of our staff, at Mashal.Ayobi@hcd.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Paul McDougall
Senior Program Manager

Enclosure

APPENDIX COUNTY OF SONOMA

The following changes are necessary to bring the County's housing element into compliance with Article 10.6 of the Government Code. Accompanying each recommended change, we cite the supporting section of the Government Code.

Housing element technical assistance information is available on HCD's website at <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/planning-and-community-development/hcd-memos>. Among other resources, the housing element section contains HCD's latest technical assistance tool, *Building Blocks for Effective Housing Elements (Building Blocks)*, available at <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/planning-and-community-development/housing-elements/building-blocks> and includes the Government Code addressing State Housing Element Law and other resources.

A. Review and Revision

Review the previous element to evaluate the appropriateness, effectiveness, and progress in implementation, and reflect the results of this review in the revised element. (Gov. Code, § 65588 (a) and (b).)

While the element includes analysis of past programs' accomplishments over the previous planning period (Appendix C), it should also evaluate the cumulative effectiveness of the previous housing element's programs to address the housing needs of special needs populations.

B. Housing Needs, Resources, and Constraints

1. *Affirmatively further[ing] fair housing in accordance with Chapter 15 (commencing with Section 8899.50) of Division 1 of Title 2...shall include an assessment of fair housing in the jurisdiction. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (c)(10)(A).)*

Outreach and Enforcement: While the element includes some broad discussion of fair housing laws and some County measures to promote affordable housing, it should discuss how the County complies with fair housing laws as well as any past or current fair housing lawsuits, findings, settlements, judgements, or complaints. For additional information, please see HCD's Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) Guidance Memo (Starting on p. 29) at <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/planning-and-community-development/affirmatively-furthering-fair-housing>.

Segregation and Integration: The element includes some brief discussion of income patterns within the County, however, the analysis should utilize median income data available on HCD's Data Viewer available at <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/planning-and-community-development/affirmatively-furthering-fair-housing>. The analysis should

examine patterns and trends, coincidence with other AFFH factors (e.g., concentrated areas of affluence, access to opportunity, displacement) and complement the data and maps with other relevant factors and local data and knowledge.

Racially Concentrated Areas of Affluence (RCAA): The element mentions some RCAAs in the County but should also examine these areas, including complementing the data and mapping with other relevant factors and local data and knowledge.

Disproportionate Housing Needs, including Displacement Risk: The element should expand the discussion of persons experiencing homelessness to better formulate an appropriate programmatic response. For persons experiencing homelessness, in addition to reporting data on characteristics (e.g., race, disability), the element should evaluate the disproportionate impacts on protected characteristics. Also, while the element discusses patterns of persons experiencing homelessness, it should also address access to services, transportation and other opportunities. This analysis should also incorporate local data and knowledge and other relevant factors such as commenters on this review and the impacts of encampment and other policies. For displacement,

Local Data and Knowledge and Other Relevant Factors: While the element describes some outreach; past zoning and redevelopment areas; it should relate this and other information to the data and mapping to better understand the fair housing issues and formulate policies and program. For example, the element mentions the County's inclusionary requirement and housing trust fund. The element could also discuss the application of that requirement in higher income areas and racially concentrated areas of affluence. From there, programs could be modified to better target resources and promote inclusive communities.

Contributing Factors to Fair Housing Issues: Based on the outcomes of a complete analysis, the element should re-assess and prioritize contributing factors to fair housing issues and add or modify programs.

2. *Include an analysis of population and employment trends and documentation of projections and a quantification of the locality's existing and projected needs for all income levels, including extremely low-income households. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (a)(1).)*

Analyze any special housing needs such as elderly; persons with disabilities, including a developmental disability; large families; farmworkers; families with female heads of households; and families and persons in need of emergency shelter. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (a)(7).)

Extremely Low-Income (ELI) Households: While the element includes some information on ELI households relative to race, it should also evaluate tenure, overpayment, resources and strategies available and the gap and magnitude of housing needs to better formulate policies and programs.

Special Housing Needs: While the element quantifies (pp. A-28 to 38) the County's special needs populations, it must also analyze their special housing needs. For a complete analysis of each population group, the element should discuss challenges faced by the population, the existing resources to meet those needs (availability of senior housing units, number of large units, number of deed restricted units, etc.), an assessment of any gaps in resources, and proposed policies, programs, and funding to help address those gaps.

In addition, the element should include specific analysis of farmworkers and persons experiencing homelessness. For farmworkers, the element should examine the magnitude of the housing needs, household characteristics (e.g., income, tenure), other relevant factors such as transportation, health and other costs of living and should add or modify programs as appropriate. For persons experiencing homelessness, the element should consider comments on this review and supplement the analysis as appropriate.

3. *An inventory of land suitable and available for residential development, including vacant sites and sites having realistic and demonstrated potential for redevelopment during the planning period to meet the locality's housing need for a designated income level, and an analysis of the relationship of zoning and public facilities and services to these sites. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (a)(3).)*

Progress toward the Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA): The element may use pending, approved, permitted, under construction and constructed units toward the RHNA since June 30, 2022. However, the element must demonstrate their affordability and availability in the planning period. While the element demonstrates the affordability of various projects, it should also address their availability in the planning period. The element lists anticipated completion dates but should also discuss anticipated schedules, potential for projects not continuing toward completion and any known barriers to development in the planning period.

Parcel Inventory: While a significant majority of sites are proposed for rezoning and listed in the element, the element indicates some sites are being used toward the RHNA based on existing zoning (p. 70, Table 11). As a result, the element should list these sites by the various factors such as parcel number, acreage, general plan, zoning, realistic capacity and affordability level.

Realistic Capacity: The element assumes sites will be built at 85 percent of maximum allowable density based on projects routinely developing at levels higher than 90 percent of maximum allowable densities. However, the element should support this conclusion. For example, the element should list recent projects by zone, size, allowable density, built density and affordability. In addition, if utilizing zones that allow 100 percent nonresidential uses, the calculations should account for the likelihood that residential may not occur. For example, the element could explain recent trends for all development in the pertinent zones and discuss how often 100 percent non-residential uses occur. Based on

the outcomes of a complete analysis, the element should adjust residential capacity assumptions and add or modify programs, if appropriate.

Nonvacant Sites: The element describes various factors utilized to identify nonvacant sites and the potential for redevelopment such as improvement to land ratio, existing versus allow floor area and structural age. The element also discusses recent trends in redevelopment. However, the element should support the utilized factors based on recent redevelopment trends. For example, the element mentions the Boyes Food Center but could also discuss the improvement to land ratio, existing versus allow floor area and structural age of the prior use. In addition, HCD commends the County's approach to engage the development community in the identification of sites. The element should utilize this valuable process to discuss the development community's perspective on the extent existing uses impede additional development.

Sites Identified in Prior Planning Periods: Sites identified in prior planning periods shall not be deemed adequate to accommodate the housing needs for lower-income households unless a program, meeting statutory requirements, requires rezoning within three years. The element indicates sites from prior planning periods are identified toward the lower-income RHNA and a program is not necessary since the County already allows multifamily by-right. However, the element must demonstrate all by-right requirements are met, including appropriate densities (i.e., at least allowing 20 units per acre), permitting multifamily without discretionary action and requiring 20 percent affordability to lower-income households.

Environmental Constraints: The element generally describes environmental conditions within the County and their relationship to identified sites. However, the element should also discuss any other known environmental or other conditions (e.g., shape, easements, relocation, parking replacement) that could impact or preclude housing development in the planning period.

Infrastructure: The element generally describes water and sewer capacity available but should also evaluate the availability of existing and planned capacity to accommodate the RHNA. Given the varying planning areas and districts, this analysis should be conducted at a community plan, planning area, district or other level instead of County-Wide.

In addition, the element indicates the County is a water and sewer provider. If so, the element should describe whether the County has a written procedure to grant priority service to developments with units affordable to lower-income households and if not, add or modify programs as appropriate.

Environmental Constraints: While the element generally describes a few environmental conditions within the County, it must describe how these conditions relate to identified sites including any other known environmental or other conditions (e.g., shape, easements, relocation, parking replacement) that could impact or preclude housing development in the planning period.

Electronic Copy of the Sites Inventory: For your information, pursuant to Government Code section 65583.3, the County must submit an electronic sites inventory with its adopted housing element. The County must utilize standards, forms, and definitions adopted by HCD. Please see HCD's housing element webpage at <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/planning-and-community-development/housing-elements> for additional information.

Zoning for a Variety of Housing Types:

- *Emergency Shelters:* The element identifies a zone to permit emergency shelters by right, lists development standards and discuss available capacity. However, the element must clarify which zone permits larger emergency shelters without discretionary action. In addition, while the element includes a program to modify separation and parking requirements, the element should evaluate additional development standards and add or revise programs as appropriate. For example, use permit requirements may constrain capacity and bed limits may be a constraint if larger shelters are not permitted without discretionary action.

Please be aware Chapter 654, Statutes of 2022 (AB 2339), adds specificity on how cities and counties plan for emergency shelters and ensure sufficient and suitable capacity. Future submittals of the housing element may need to address these statutory requirements. For additional information and timing requirements, please see HCD's memo at <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/sites/default/files/docs/planning-and-community/ab2339-notice.pdf>.

- *By-right Permanent Supportive Housing:* Supportive housing shall be a use by-right in zones where multifamily and mixed uses are permitted, including nonresidential zones permitting multifamily uses pursuant to Government Code section 65651. The element must demonstrate compliance with this requirement and include programs as appropriate.

4. *An analysis of potential and actual governmental constraints upon the maintenance, improvement, or development of housing for all income levels, including the types of housing identified in paragraph (1) of subdivision (c), and for persons with disabilities as identified in the analysis pursuant to paragraph (7), including land use controls, building codes and their enforcement, site improvements, fees and other exactions required of developers, and local processing and permit procedures... (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (a)(5).)*

Land Use Controls: The element must identify and analyze all relevant land use controls impacts as potential constraints on a variety of housing types. The analysis should address setbacks and parking requirements for multifamily development. For example, guest parking requirements and setbacks based on height appear to be a constraint. The analysis should address impacts on cost, supply (number of units), feasibility and ability to achieve maximum densities and may engage the development community.

Constraints on Housing for Persons with Disabilities: The element briefly describes its reasonable accommodation procedures. However, the element should also describe the process and decision-making criteria such as approval findings and analyze any potential constraints on housing for persons with disabilities.

5. *An analysis of existing assisted housing developments that are eligible to change from low-income housing uses during the next 10 years due to termination of subsidy contracts, mortgage prepayment, or expiration of restrictions on use. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (a)(9).)*

The element lists two developments at-risk of conversion to market rate uses in the ten-year period. However, based on HCD records, there may be additional development at-risk of conversion. Namely, the Sonoma Valley Apartments and Sonoma Village Apartments appear to be at-risk of conversion. The element should reconcile these differences and add or modify programs, as appropriate. HCD will send records under separate cover.

C. Housing Programs

1. *Identify actions that will be taken to make sites available during the planning period with appropriate zoning and development standards and with services and facilities to accommodate that portion of the city's or county's share of the regional housing need for each income level that could not be accommodated on sites identified in the inventory completed pursuant to paragraph (3) of subdivision (a) without rezoning, and to comply with the requirements of Government Code section 65584.09. Sites shall be identified as needed to facilitate and encourage the development of a variety of types of housing for all income levels, including multifamily rental housing, factory-built housing, mobilehomes, housing for agricultural employees, supportive housing, single-room occupancy units, emergency shelters, and transitional housing. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (c)(1).)*

As noted in Finding B3, the element does not include a complete site analysis; therefore, the adequacy of sites and zoning were not established. Based on the results of a complete sites inventory and analysis, the County may need to add or revise programs to address a shortfall of sites or zoning available to encourage a variety of housing types.

In addition, to address the RHNA, the element includes this Program 4 (Actions to meet RHNA) to rezone sites. However, the Program states the County “intends” to rezone sites. To clarify, the County must rezone sites. In addition, while the Program mentions by-right requirements pursuant to Government Code section 65583.2, subdivision (i), the Program must also address Government Code section 65583.2, subdivision (h) which includes various provisions such as minimum densities and residential performance standards. In addition, the Program should clarify the shortfall of sites,

minimum acreage for all income groups, including lower-income RHNA, appropriate development standards to facilitate maximum densities and availability and accessibility of infrastructure.

2. *The Housing Element shall contain programs which assist in the development of adequate housing to meet the needs of extremely low-, very low-, low- and moderate-income households. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (c)(2).)*

While the element includes some actions to assist in the development of housing for lower-income households, including special needs households, actions should be added or modified based on a complete analysis of extremely low-income and special needs households, including farmworkers and persons experiencing homelessness. For example, the element must include specific actions, beyond bunk houses and community land trust, to assist in the development of housing for farmworkers.

3. *Address and, where appropriate and legally possible, remove governmental and nongovernmental constraints to the maintenance, improvement, and development of housing, including housing for all income levels and housing for persons with disabilities. The program shall remove constraints to, and provide reasonable accommodations for housing designed for, intended for occupancy by, or with supportive services for, persons with disabilities. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (c)(3).)*

As noted in Finding B4, the element requires a complete analysis of potential governmental and nongovernmental constraints. Depending upon the results of that analysis, the County may need to revise or add programs and address and remove or mitigate any identified constraints.

In addition, Program 15 (Review and Update Zoning Code) commits to amend zoning to permit group homes for seven or more persons the same as other residential dwellings of the same form. In addition, these amendments should not be limited to licensed group homes and the Program should clarify these uses will be permitted in all zones allowing residential uses.

4. *Promote and affirmatively further fair housing opportunities and promote housing throughout the community or communities for all persons regardless of race, religion, sex, marital status, ancestry, national origin, color, familial status, or disability, and other characteristics... (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (c)(5).)*

As noted in Finding B1, the element must include a complete assessment of fair housing. Based on the outcomes of that analysis, the element must add or modify programs. Programs should go beyond status quo actions, include specific commitment, discrete timing, geographic targeting and metrics or numerical targets and should, as appropriate, address housing mobility, encourage new housing choices in higher resource areas, improve place-based strategies toward community revitalization and protect existing residents from displacement.

5. *Develop a plan that incentivizes and promotes the creation of accessory dwelling units that can be offered at affordable rent... (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (c)(7).)*

The element includes Program 25 (Incentivize and Promote Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) and Junior ADU (JADU) Development) which commits to monitor ADU production and affordability every two years. However, the Program should commit to when alternative actions will be taken beyond once in the planning period (e.g., within six months of review) and alternative actions should be expanded (e.g., additional incentives, rezoning).

D. General Plan Consistency

The Housing Element shall describe the means by which consistency will be achieved with other general plan elements and community goals. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd. (c)(7).)

While the element discusses how internal consistency will be achieved with other elements of the general plan as part of the housing element update, it should also discuss how internal consistency will be maintained throughout the planning period.

E. Public Participation

Local governments shall make a diligent effort to achieve public participation of all economic segments of the community in the development of the Housing Element, and the element shall describe this effort. (Gov. Code, § 65583, subd.(c)(9).)

The County made diligent efforts to include the public through various methods, and summarized public comments received and identified how public concerns were addressed. However, HCD received comments on this review that should be addressed, including considering and incorporating comments as appropriate. Example of issues include the various comments related to persons experiencing homelessness.

Public participation in the development, adoption and implementation of the housing element is essential to effective housing planning. Throughout the housing element process, the County should continue to engage the community, including organizations that represent lower-income and special needs households, by making information regularly available and considering and incorporating comments where appropriate. Please be aware, any revisions to the element must be posted on the local government's website and to email a link to all individuals and organizations that have previously requested notices relating to the local government's housing element at least seven days before submitting to HCD.