

# Kennedy Commission Housing Element Campaign

In California, municipalities are required by law to plan for their fair share of affordable housing. Will this solve our housing affordability crisis? Not quite. There is a big difference between a general state mandate and solving the housing crisis. But the requirement provides a way for Orange County communities and housing advocates to get their issues on the table – and a means of working with municipalities to address their housing needs.

All cities and counties in California must have a general plan that includes a housing plan – known as the “housing element.” The general plan serves as the local constitution for land use and development. Once adopted, it has the force of law – a local government cannot legally act inconsistently with its general plan.

Housing elements must be updated every five years. First, the regional council of governments allocates to each city and county a number of new housing units that it must plan for, broken down into five income categories from “extremely low” to “above moderate.” In the County of Orange, for example, over eighty thousand new homes are needed by 2014. While the law does not require cities and counties to build these new homes themselves, their housing elements must:

- Establish housing programs and policies – from public or land use policies to funding affordable housing developers – that encourage affordable housing for people of all incomes and those with special needs.
- Demonstrate that they have enough land zoned for multifamily housing to build all of the homes needed for lower-income families.
- Reduce obstacles to housing development, such as density limits, excessive requirements for parking spaces, even community opposition.
- Describe how they will use available funding for affordable housing.

Plans must be certified by the state, which can require changes if they do not comply with state mandates.

Updated plans for Orange County cities are due to the State Department of Housing and Community Development by June 2008. We view the Housing Element revision process as an opportunity to get good housing measures implemented into our local communities. The Kennedy Commission has launched the Orange County Housing Element Campaign. The campaign’s goals are threefold:

- Educate cities and citizens about workable solutions to the affordable housing shortage (and, especially, show cities that have not built enough affordable housing how other cities have been more successful).
- Get these proven strategies into cities’ housing elements, where they become enforceable commitments.
- Get more people and more organizations involved in housing advocacy locally and regionally for the long term.

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