Housing Element Talking Points

YIMBY Talking Points for Fair Housing Elements

Every city in California is being given new housing production goals, aka Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). To meet these new higher goals, your city must change their "General Plan" to accommodate housing growth, updating where on the map they're planning for housing to go. Specifically, the city must update the "Housing Element" of their "General Plan" as part of the "RHNA Process." You can read about the technicalities here, but the important part is that this is a **huge opportunity for housing.**

Planning Departments must engage in public outreach to get input on these big city-wide zoning updates. At this stage in the process, it's not about technical details. **The goal is to ensure Planning Departments hear that there are local citizens that want more housing and to end exclusionary zoning.**

Our public input should drive at two key things we want to see in fair housing elements: **making apartments legal again throughout the entire city** (end single family home only zoning) and adopting housing elements that will **meet state housing production goals**.

When making these points, it's good to explain how they advance the bigger society goals of reducing displacement, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, etc.

"I think a citywide repeal of the multifamily housing ban is important because..."

> "I think we should legalize fourplexes everywhere because..."
>
> "I think it's important to build more homes because..."

You can also submit articles to the planning department or add them into the chat window of many meetings. Be sure to make "I statements" such as "This article informed a lot of my thinking" or "I thought this was interesting."

Listen carefully to what other participants are saying. **Don't argue or debate** with people. Do share your **personal experiences** that have shaped the way you think about housing.

Housing for Racial Equity

"I think it's important to end exclusionary zoning and build more in historically whiter neighborhoods. The history of our zoning is rooted in systemic racism, and it's time to end policies that exacerbate segregation."

Articles to support:

> America's racist housing rules really can be fixed
> "Exclusionary zoning laws essentially trap many Black families into low-income neighborhoods by pricing them out of richer ones."
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> Article on Berkeley ending exclusionary zoning
> "Real estate advertisements for Berkeley bragged about single-family zoning keeping out 'Negroes and Asiastics.' It's long past time we stop enabling segregation and allow the type of integration our country embraced at the end of the Jim Crow era."
>
> Why Bay Area neighborhoods are still racially segregated
> "As the proportion of single-family zoning increases in a city, so does its white population, while Black and Latinx populations decrease."

Housing for Economic Opportunity

"I think an important part of an equitable recovery is allowing more housing. Both affordable housing and missing middle housing will ensure people who work in our city can live in our city. People should be able to enjoy the opportunities found here, without having soul-crushing commutes."

"I think it's important to build housing in every neighborhood so that people don't get pushed out by high prices. People who grew up here should be able to stay and find jobs here, and their kids should be able to grow up here too."

"As our economy comes back, we have the opportunity to ensure working people can find affordable housing. I think we should adopt policies that allow fourplexes and apartments in every neighborhood to address this need for housing."

“We have a lot of economic opportunity in our city, and we need more housing to ensure people can take advantage of that opportunity without pushing anyone out.”

“More housing will help our city’s economic recovery, ensuring we have a more equitable recovery that benefits everyone. I think more housing means more opportunities for younger generations to stay and thrive in our city.”

Articles to support:

> How to convince a NIMBY to build more housing
> “There has been a lot written about the racism and classism embedded in zoning codes that dictate what can be built where. These rules were engineered to block people of color, and in particular Black Americans, from being able to live in higher-opportunity, predominantly white neighborhoods. And now, they effectively block low- and middle-income Americans from finding affordable housing, especially near well-funded schools and neighborhoods filled with amenities.”
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> “This will drive economic growth as more people will be able to move to high-opportunity regions with good jobs and will allow more Americans the opportunity to get affordable housing of their own, making it easier to start families.”
>
> Four Tools for Stimulating Economic Recovery
> “High housing prices threaten California’s future. Today, over three million California renters spend more than 30% of their income on rent, with an additional 1.7 million paying more than 50%. These cost burdens continue to push people, particularly people of color, out of neighborhoods, cities and, in many cases, out of California entirely. COVID-19 will make this situation even worse. 2.3 million households in California are likely to be impacted by the economic fallout from this new crisis, and half of those households were already struggling to pay rent.”
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> Study: Increased housing density helps combat climate change
> “According to a 2017 study, living closer to jobs, schools, and increased transit options decreases a resident’s monthly spending on driving costs and utilities, saves the average renter $312 per year, and saves a homeowner $156. California

would experience an $800 million increase in annual economic growth as a result of increased infill housing."

Housing for Sustainable Communities

"I think we need to allow more apartments to help more people live close to the jobs and opportunities of our city. This will help reduce regional commuting and bring down carbon emissions."

"If we allow more apartments in single family home only neighborhoods, we have more people to support transit, our local small businesses, and encourage walkability."

"Coastal California is one of the most environmentally-friendly places for people to live, due to our low heating and air-conditioning needs. I think in order to fight climate change, we should want as many people as possible to live here instead of in higher-energy-use climates, but to accomplish that we need more housing.

Articles to support:

Study: Increased housing density helps combat climate change
"A 2017 study of LA showed that residents living in infill areas would drive 18 fewer miles per weekday and a total of 90 fewer miles per week. That would result in an annual reduction of 1.79 million metric tons in greenhouse gas emissions, the equivalent of removing 378,000 cars off the road."

Infill housing is critical for a healthy region and climate
"Infill housing supports the environment and represents a critical solution to both the climate and housing crises. Building more housing in existing communities will allow more people to live in walkable neighborhoods, reducing traffic and opening the possibility of returning urban space from cars to people and trees. Eliminating mandatory parking requirements and instead charging fair prices for use of public street space are key steps to ensure this outcome."

How zoning keeps the number of low-emission neighborhoods artificially low

“Millions more Americans want to live in compact, transit-connected communities than can find or afford a home in one… In fact, it’s illegal to build anything except single-family detached houses on roughly 75 percent of land in most cities—which might explain why in the 30 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S., walkable neighborhoods account for between 0.04 percent and 1.2 percent of land area.

…it’s an immense challenge to efficiently serve a neighborhood of only single-family homes by transit. This fact, combined with the way that destinations spread farther apart, trips become longer or more frequent, and roads become wider and less safe to walk along or cross, results in more greenhouse gas emissions. Driving contributes the majority of transportation sector emissions in the United States, making transportation the largest source of U.S. carbon emissions and the only sector of the economy where emissions are rising, not decreasing.”

There’s an easier way for California to build greener housing: just build more homes

California is so green for two main reasons. Its electricity mix is heavily tilted toward clean sources already. Second, the mild climate means Californians expend much less energy heating and cooling their homes than those of us with less blessed weather.

The upshot is that if a person moves from Ohio or Missouri to California, their CO2 emissions fall by half or more. And it’s not as if moving from Missouri to the Golden State is a terrible deal in other ways. The median cashier earns about $1.90 an hour more in California, the median food service worker earns over $2 more, and an elementary school teacher earns a salary that’s nearly 50 percent higher.

Yet while California’s population is growing thanks to international immigration, among native-born Americans, more people leave the state each year than move in, despite the high wages and nice weather.

That’s because living in California is expensive, primarily because of very high house prices.