

Berkeley's Real Need for Housing

Margot Smith, Dr.P.H.

I'm running for State Assembly to challenge the failed housing policies of our state. Because of them, people travel far from home to work, camp on the street, couch surf, live in cars as they cannot pay the high cost of housing.

The city of Berkeley is a victim: a victim of these failed policies. For example, the State, through its Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) mandates that Berkeley add almost 9,000 housing units to the city by 2030. If it does not, it can be fined.

RHNA housing needs are based on several errors; they are not true measures of reality:

1. RHNA uses 2017 Department of Finance population projections to determine the need for housing, which in 2017 stated that the population of California would increase by 12 million people by 2060. The state Department of Finance now finds that the 2023 California population of nearly 39 million will only grow by 1.3% to 39.5 million in 2060, that is, only 518,000 more people, not 12 million. RHNA has not changed its numbers.
2. RHNA demands that cities like Berkeley build, build, build, with the assumption that increasing supply will fill demand; more housing will lower rents, making housing more available to low-income people. That is not true for Bay Area housing: although Berkeley (and Oakland) have drastically increased their housing supply in the last 15 years, there is no decline in rents. We have no data on vacancy rates in the housing market, but rents are not lower.

RHNA Goals to 2030

<u>Very Low-Income Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Low-Income <50% AMI</u>	<u>Moderate-Income 50-80% AMI</u>	<u>Above Moderate 80-120% AMI</u>	<u>>120% AMI</u>	<u>Total</u>
Berkeley	2,446	1,408	1,416	3,664	8,934

Alameda County Housing & Community Development Department
Public Comment DRAFT – July 21, 2024

3. State housing policies are gifts to developers. With one sentence in a housing law, developers can bypass city council approval and ignore environmental laws. The law states **"changes proposed by this bill address a matter of statewide concern rather than a municipal affair and, therefore, apply to all cities, including charter cities."** Beware of this streamlining—it means bypassing councils and laws.

The State Auditor found City and County officials protesting the mandates find they have no voice in adjusting quotas to accommodate local conditions, even for environmental and community situations that would affect the success of additional housing. Cities like Berkeley have flood zones, fire hazard areas, hills and mountains with steep elevations, abandoned oil wells, narrow winding streets and other local conditions that limit housing options. The new laws speed up approvals for multi-family developments by forcing local authorities to rezone for density, and approve projects swiftly, without CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) or public input.

4. Berkeley is unique in that RHNA counts students in Berkeley's total population but *excludes* UC Berkeley housing in its determination of housing needs. UC Berkeley currently has more than 45,000 students and 8,618 beds. However, the housing units owned and the housing leased by UCB are not part of the RHNA inventory. UC

Berkeley's leased private buildings are taken off the Berkeley housing tax base.

Why do these policies continue? Follow the money. Developers and the building unions donate to political campaigns. And understand the language: when you hear people speak of "affordable" housing, know it is based on the Area Median Income, which in Alameda County is \$139,000. So *affordable* housing is for people who make \$100,000 a year; low income is \$84,000 a year and very low income, \$54,000 a year. Who can really afford affordable housing? And "streamlining" means letting developers build more housing faster.

Vote Margot Smith for Assembly, I do not accept corporate donations, and will work to bring housing legislation that will aim at housing workers, families, veterans, teachers, students, elders on Social Security. I also oppose charter schools, they take funds from public schools. See my website, <https://www.margotsmithforassembly.com/>