

RHNA/Housing Element *Frequently Asked Questions*

- **How did RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Allocation) planning start?**
 - Since 1969, California has required that all local governments (cities and counties) adequately plan to meet the housing needs of everyone in the community. In order to create a housing plan (aka "housing element") showing that it could meet the local housing needs, a jurisdiction must first know how much housing it must plan for at a variety of affordability levels. The RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Allocation) plan specifies the housing needs for a jurisdiction. Many jurisdictions are now drafting their plans for their 6th 8-year RHNA cycle.
- **How are the housing needs of a city, county or other jurisdiction determined?**
 - The State of California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) determines housing needs using a process called the regional housing needs determination (RHND), which translates to the amount of housing each region needs allocated Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) plans. RHNA plans typically project housing needs 8 years into the future. The RHNA plan for each city and county is a projection of additional housing units needed to accommodate existing households and household growth of all income levels by the end of the housing element planning period, usually 8 years. This process is also known as "fair share" planning.
- **Why is a RHNA plan important to your city, county or region?**
 - RHNA plans for cities and counties set goals for housing a region's current and future workforce. RHNA plans are the basis for housing elements, which are a mandatory component of a jurisdiction's general plan. Housing policy in California rests largely on the effective implementation of local general plans and, in particular, local housing elements based on RHNA plans. Legally, housing elements approved by HCD must demonstrate that the private market can obtain the permits needed to build the housing Californians need.
- **What benefits follow from an approved housing element and general plan?**
 - A valid general plan, which must contain a housing element approved by HCD, enables a jurisdiction to issue building permits for renovation and new homes. In some cases, funding from state/federal housing programs, and increasingly transportation and climate programs, can **only** be accessed if the jurisdiction has a compliant housing element. In other cases those applying for funding will receive **extra points** on their application if they **do** have a compliant housing element (thereby increasing their chances in the competitive application process).
- **Who's responsible for what in the RHNA process?**
 - HCD determines the housing goals for each region. Then regions, represented by regional COGs (Councils of Governments representing counties and cities) assign

how many new homes each jurisdiction must plan for, then individual cities or individual counties prepare RHNA plans for each local jurisdiction. HCD then approves all local plans.

- **Can a city or county modify a housing element already approved by HCD?**
 - Cities or counties must first consult with HCD before modifying an approved housing element. Until HCD approves a modification, cities must approve development applications that conform to zoning in the approved housing element by right, that is without discretionary planning board or council hearings.
- **Does HCD monitor jurisdictions for compliance with their housing element?**
 - After a general plan is approved, cities and counties report annually on their progress to HCD and regularly update the plans, zoning, and development standards to maintain consistency with their RHNA plan. These updates must demonstrate that a jurisdiction provides opportunities for, without unduly constraining, housing development for all income groups.