



MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 11, 2021
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: John Swiecki, Community Development Director
SUBJECT: **Study Session: SB2 Planning Grant Implementation Program and Objective Design and Development Standards (ODDS) for New Residential Development**

Tonight's study session will provide a comprehensive overview of the City's SB2 Planning Grant Implementation Program (PGIP) for objective design and development standards (ODDS) for new residential development, including:

- Overview of the State requirements and expectations,
- Proposed process to comply with the requirements,
- Overview of subjective versus objective standards,
- Outline of upcoming community outreach and engagement efforts,
- Overall Program Schedule, and
- Planning Commission questions and feedback.

Background

Due to several changes in State Law since 2017, specifically Senate Bill 35 and the Housing Accountability Act (Attachments A and B), California cities must streamline the process for reviewing certain housing development proposals. In general, the State now requires that cities "front-load" their housing development review discretion through the adoption of clear design rules, regulations, planning documents and guidelines, otherwise known as Objective Design and Development Standards (ODDS). ODDS provide predictability to the community and developers upfront in the development process, and require no interpretation or personal judgment, as opposed to subjective standards that are subject to interpretation and which may cause different people to disagree based on their personal perspectives and opinions.

The State made grant funds available to cities in 2019 to cover the cost of compliance with these new requirements. The City successfully applied for grant funds in the fall of 2019 and received approval in early 2020.

In addition to the ODDS Program which is the focus of tonight's study session, the grant funding will also support several technical activities which will not involve formal Planning Commission action. These include biological studies for parcels in the SCRO-1 zoning district located within the San Bruno Mountain Habitat Conservation Plan area, an update to the City's subdivision regulations, and a fee study to enable the City to impose affordable housing fees on new commercial development.

The City hired consultants Good City Co. in August 2020 to assist with the ODDS Program. The work program will include community outreach to understand the community's design preferences, studies of opportunities and constraints to residential development in zoning districts with subjective development standards and drafting updated zoning ordinance language that will be subject to Planning Commission review and City Council adoption later this year.

The attached Frequently Asked Questions (Attachment C) provides answers to commonly asked questions regarding the ODDS that will be developed as a result of this process. The concept of ODDS is not new to the City either. The City recently went through a process to adopt ODDS as part of the Parkside at Brisbane Village Precise Plan project (Attachment F), which are applicable to the development of new housing in the Parkside residential overlay zoning districts but do not apply to other residential districts in the City.

If the City does not adopt ODDS, the City will have very little control over the design of new housing developments. The Planning Commission would continue to review projects under the current Design Review regulations but would not be able to deny or reduce the number of units within housing development proposals based on noncompliance with subjective Design Review findings. For certain projects submitted to the City under SB 35 streamlining, the City would be required to review the application under a ministerial process, without any discretionary review or local guidance on design and standards.

Discussion:

Currently, in Brisbane, Design Review for housing development is required for single-family homes on ridgelines, developments of three or more housing units in a multi-family development, and new mixed-use buildings with one or more housing units. Some zoning districts also require a use permit approval for residential development. Single-family homes (not on ridgelines), accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and duplexes do not require design review and are processed administratively through a building permit.

While each zoning district has development standards that control the location, height, and square footage of buildings, the City does not have objective design guidelines for residential or mixed-use developments. Instead, the Design Review findings of approval in BMC Chapter 17.42 are largely subjective and do not provide objective criteria for approval. Additionally, the Design Review findings are applicable to any type of development that triggers design review (including commercial projects), and do not provide specific design objectives or requirements for residential development.

Below are some examples of subjective and objective standards.

Subjective Standards:

Brisbane Municipal Code Section 17.42.040 - Findings required for issuance of design permit.

- The proposal's scale, form, and proportion are harmonious, and the materials and colors used complement the project.
- The orientation and location of buildings, structures, open spaces, and other features integrate well with each other and maintain a compatible relationship to adjacent development.

Key subjective words and terms in the findings above include "harmonious," "material and colors complement each other," "features integrate well," and "maintain a compatible relationship". These

terms are subjective because reasonable people could have different opinions on what these terms mean when reviewing a housing proposal. Given the findings could be interpreted in multiple ways, and there are no qualifiable or measurable ways to determine which opinion is correct, they are considered subjective findings.

Objective Standards:

Objective standards are easily quantifiable and measurable in nature. For example, a building either meets the height limit, or it does not. A building facade is articulated in a specific way, or it is not. A building is set back a certain number of feet from a property line or adjacent building, or it is not.

These are some objective standards from the City’s Parkside Precise Plan (2017)

- Third stories shall be set back at least five feet from the wall plane of the second and first stories below.
- At least 50% of the planes of the exterior walls along public streets shall vary in depth and/or direction through the use of cornices, recesses, bay windows, and overhangs.
- Garage doors must have an equivalent or greater setback as the predominant building wall on the relevant building side.

The work program will also include special studies of the Southwest Bayshore Commercial (SCRO-1) District and the Neighborhood Commercial- Downtown Brisbane (NCRO-2) District, where the City anticipates most non-Baylands new housing development in Brisbane will occur in the future based on current trends. The establishment of objective development standards for housing proposed in the Baylands will be addressed in the Baylands Specific Plan and is not included within this work program.

Project Timeline

The first community workshop will occur virtually in early April 2021, followed by one or more virtual Planning Commission-hosted workshops, surveys for residents and property owners, and two more community workshops. Depending on the timing of the remaining community workshops and status of regional health orders, summer workshops may be virtual or in-person.



The community outreach and engagement process will include steps to:

1. Educate the community regarding legal requirements for the City's review of residential projects.
2. Engage the community to determine community preferences for the physical design of new residential developments, including building articulation, relationship of buildings to neighboring structures, building height, etc.
3. Engage property owners within the boundaries of the SCRO-1 and NCRO-2.

The City kicked off community engagement with the Residential Design Visual Preference Survey (See Attachment D) which has been advertised and posted on the City's website. The survey results will be shared at future public workshops after the response deadline closes on March 1st and will act as the foundation for building the ODDS. Following the community engagement process, draft ODDS and zoning ordinance amendments will be released in the fall, followed by public hearings at the Planning Commission and the City Council. Updated regulations must be adopted by February 2022 per the terms and conditions of the State grant.

Attachments:

- A. Senate Bill 35 Fact Sheet
- B. Housing Accountability Act Memorandum from the Department of Housing and Community Development
- C. [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (hyperlink)
- D. [Visual Preference Survey](#) (hyperlink)
- E. [BMC Chapter 17.42, Design Review](#) (hyperlink)
- F. [Parkside at Brisbane Village Precise Plan](#) (hyperlink)



Senator Scott Wiener, 11th Senate District

Senate Bill 35 – *Housing For A Growing California:* Housing Accountability & Affordability Act

SUMMARY

Senate Bill 35 ensures that all communities in California create the housing we desperately need to address our statewide housing shortage, and spur the creation of affordable housing in California by streamlining the approval process.

BACKGROUND/EXISTING LAW

California is in the depths of a housing shortage. Our State's housing production has not kept pace with population growth, particularly for low and middle income residents. California households in the bottom quarter of the income distribution—the poorest 25 percent of households—report spending four times more of their income (67 percent, on average) than households in the top quarter of the income distribution (16 percent, on average).

Every 8 years, each California city receives a Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) goal from the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) for how many future units of housing the city must include in its zoning plan. However, HCD cannot require cities to follow through with producing the housing in their own zoning plan, and too many communities either ignore RHNA or make inadequate efforts to comply with it. HCD does not comprehensively track housing production data.

PROBLEM

The negative impacts of California's housing shortage threaten our state's economic growth, environmental well-being, and diversity. It is far too expensive to rent or buy a home in California, which results in displacement, evictions, and families being pushed out as they grow. Teachers, retail workers, first responders, and other middle-income professionals often have crushing commutes as they increasingly cannot afford to live near their jobs.

California has a long tradition of broad local control, and in many areas, local communities are in the best position to judge what makes sense for their residents. However, when local communities refuse to create enough housing—instead punting housing creation to other communities—then the State needs to

ensure that all communities are equitably contributing to regional housing needs. Local control must be about how a community meets its housing goals, not whether it meets those goals. Too many communities either ignore their housing goals or set up processes designed to impede housing creation.

Allowing local communities to ignore their responsibility to create housing has led to a housing disaster—triggering huge economic, environmental, and social problems.

SOLUTION

Under SB 35, as amended, cities that are on track to meet their RHNA housing production goals at all income levels will retain full local control over how they approve housing. When cities do not meet their housing obligations, approval of qualified housing projects will be streamlined until cities do meet their goals.

For streamlining to apply, a project must include housing for certain income levels where there is a shortage of production, pay a prevailing wage for construction labor, and meet all objective affordability, density, zoning, historic, and environmental standards outlined in the bill.

The new, streamlined approval process will require localities to approve projects only on the basis of whether the project complies with the objective SB 35 qualifying criteria and pass design review. The streamlined process applies only when unmet income-based categories are addressed. For example, if a city is meeting its market rate housing RHNA goals but not its low income housing goals, streamlining will apply only to those projects that add low income units.

This bill also requires all charter cities to report their annual housing production to HCD, and will require HCD to ensure housing production data is detailed, up-to-date, and publicly accessible on the internet. Currently, general law cities must report their housing production, but charter cities and city/counties are not required by law to do so.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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September 15, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR: Planning Directors and Interested Parties

FROM: Megan Kirkeby, Deputy Director
Division of Housing Policy Development

SUBJECT: **Housing Accountability Act Technical Assistance
Advisory (Government Code Section 65589.5)**

The Housing Accountability Act (HAA), Government Code section 65589.5, establishes limitations to a local government's ability to deny, reduce the density of, or make infeasible housing development projects, emergency shelters, or farmworker housing that are consistent with objective local development standards and contribute to meeting housing need. The Legislature first enacted the HAA in 1982 and recently amended the HAA to expand and strengthen its provisions as part of the overall recognition of the critically low volumes of housing stock in California. In amending the HAA, the Legislature made repeated findings that the lack of housing and the lack of affordable housing, is a critical problem that threatens the economic, environmental, and social quality of life in California. This Technical Assistance Advisory provides guidance on implementation of the HAA, including the following amendments.

Chapter 368, Statutes of 2017 (Senate Bill 167), Chapter 373, Statutes of 2017 (Assembly Bill 678) - Strengthens the HAA by increasing the documentation necessary and the standard of proof required for a local agency to legally defend its denial of low-to-moderate-income housing development projects, and requiring courts to impose a fine of \$10,000 or more per unit on local agencies that fail to legally defend their rejection of an affordable housing development project.

Chapter 378, Statutes of 2017 (Assembly Bill 1515) – Establishes a reasonable person standard for determining conformance with local land use requirements.

Chapter 243, Statutes of 2018 (Assembly Bill 3194) -Expands the meaning of zoning consistency to include projects that are consistent with general plan designations but not zoning designation on a site if that zone is inconsistent with the general plan.

Chapter 654, Statutes of 2019 (Senate Bill 330) - Defined previously undefined terms such as objective standards and complete application and set forth vesting rights for projects that use a new pre-application process. Most of these provisions sunset on January 1, 2025, unless extended by the Legislature and Governor.

If you have any questions, or would like additional information or technical assistance, please contact the Division of Housing Policy Development at (916) 263-2911.

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↖ Click hyperlink to access online

What is the Housing Accountability Act?

The Housing Accountability Act (HAA) (Government Code Section 65589.5), establishes the state's overarching policy that a local government may not deny, reduce the density of, or make infeasible housing development projects, emergency shelters, or farmworker housing that are consistent with objective local development standards. Before doing any of those things, local governments must make specified written findings based upon a preponderance of the evidence that a specific, adverse health or safety impact exists. Legislative intent language indicates that the conditions that would give rise to such a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety would occur infrequently.

Subdivision (d) of the HAA describes requirements applicable to housing development projects that include units affordable to very- low, low- and moderate-income households (including transitional and supportive housing) as well as emergency shelters and farmworker housing. Subdivision (j) describes requirements applicable to all housing development projects, including both market-rate and affordable housing developments. Subdivisions (k), (l), and (m) expand the potential consequences for violations of the HAA. In 2017, the Legislature also granted the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) authority to refer HAA violations to the Office of the Attorney General in Government Code section 65585.

The HAA was originally enacted in 1982 to address local opposition to growth and change. Communities resisted new housing, especially affordable housing, and, consequently, multiple levels of discretionary review often prevented or delayed development. As a result, developers had difficulty ascertaining the type, quantity, and location where development would be approved. The HAA was intended to overcome the lack of certainty developers experienced by limiting local governments' ability to deny, make infeasible, or reduce the density of housing development projects.

Recognizing that the HAA was falling short of its intended goal, in 2017, 2018, and again in 2019, the Legislature amended the HAA no less than seven times to expand and strengthen its provisions. Key restrictions on local governments' ability to take action against housing development projects are set out in Government Code section 65589.5, subdivisions (d) and (j). The law was amended by Chapter 368 Statutes of 2017 (Senate Bill 167), Chapter 373 Statutes of 2017 (Assembly Bill 678) and Chapter 378 Statutes of 2017 (Assembly Bill 1515), as part of the California 2017 Housing Package. The law was further amended by Chapter 243, Statutes of 2018 (Assembly Bill 3194) and Chapter 654, Statutes of 2019 (Senate Bill 330).

Why Do We Need the Housing Accountability Act?

The Housing Accountability Act has been in effect since 1982. Since that time, California's housing supply has not kept up with population and job growth, and the affordability crisis has grown significantly due to an undersupply of housing, which compounds inequality and limits economic and social mobility. Housing is a fundamental component of a healthy, equitable community. Lack of adequate housing hurts millions of Californians, stifles economic opportunities for workers and businesses, worsens poverty and homelessness, and undermines the state's environmental and climate goals and compounds the racial equity gaps faced by many communities across the state.

The legislative intent of the HAA was to limit local governments' ability to deny, make infeasible, or reduce the density of housing development projects. After determining that implementation of the HAA was not meeting the intent of the statute, the Legislature has amended the HAA to expand its provisions, strengthening the law to meaningfully and effectively curb the capacity of local governments to deny, reduce the density or render housing development projects infeasible.

Legislative Housing Accountability Act Interpretation Guidance

"It is the policy of the state that this section (HAA) should be interpreted and implemented in a manner to afford the fullest possible weight to the interest of, and the approval and provision of, housing." Government Code Section 65589.5 (a)(2)(L)

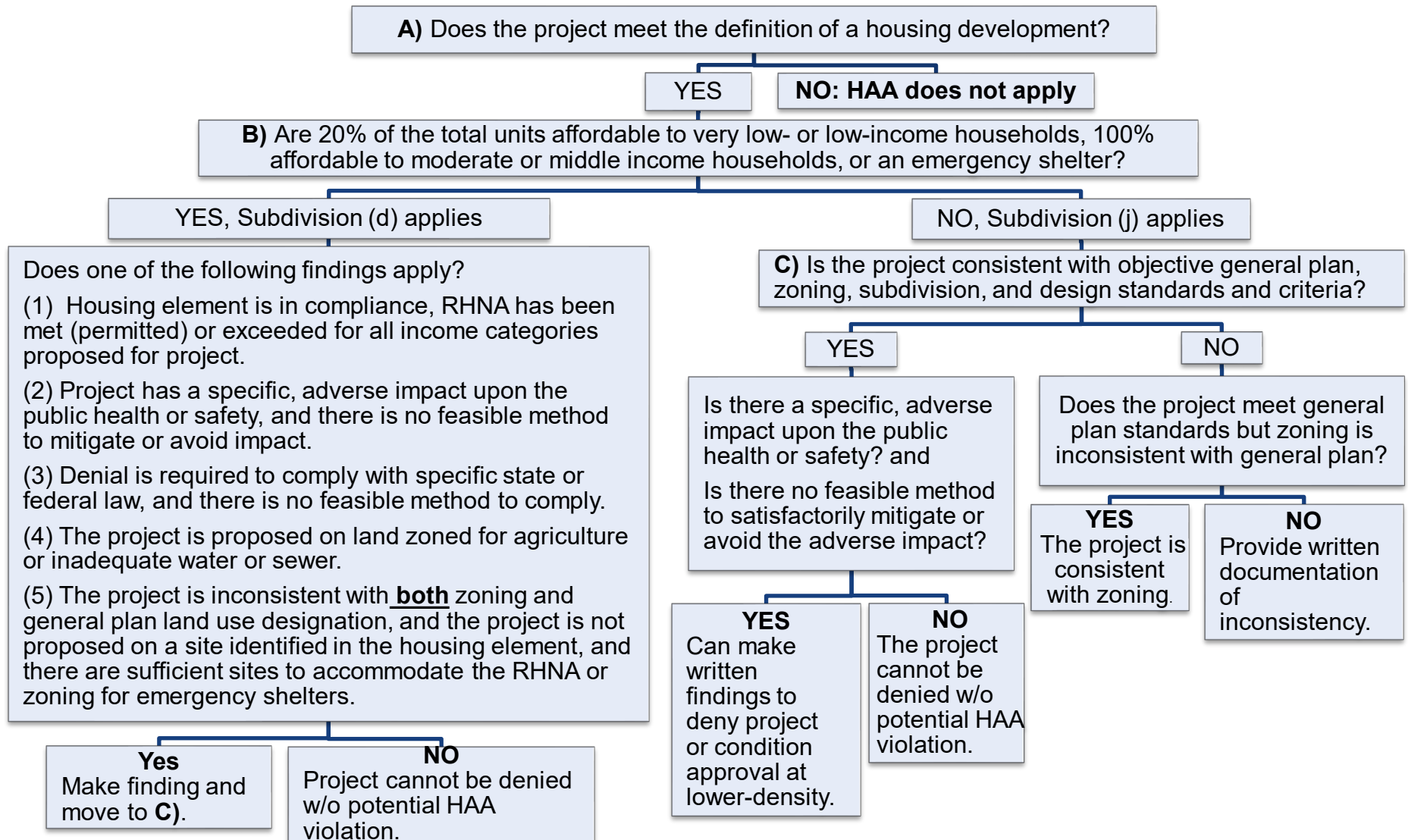
The following are findings and declarations found in the HAA pursuant to Government Code sections 65589.5(a):

- The lack of housing, including emergency shelters, is a critical problem that threatens the economic, environmental, and social quality of life in California.
- California housing has become the most expensive in the nation. The excessive cost of the state's housing supply is partially caused by activities and policies of many local governments that limit the approval of housing, increase the cost of land for housing, and require that high fees and exactions be paid by producers of housing.
- Among the consequences of those actions are discrimination against low-income and minority households, lack of housing to support employment growth, imbalance in jobs and housing, reduced mobility, urban sprawl, excessive commuting, and air quality deterioration.
- Many local governments do not give adequate attention to the economic, environmental, and social costs of decisions that result in disapproval of housing development projects, reduction in density of housing projects, and excessive standards for housing development projects.
- California has a housing supply and affordability crisis of historic proportions. The consequences of failing to effectively and aggressively confront this crisis are hurting millions of Californians, robbing future generations of the chance to call California home, stifling economic opportunities for workers and businesses, worsening poverty and homelessness, and undermining the state's environmental and climate objectives.

- While the causes of this crisis are multiple and complex, the absence of meaningful and effective policy reforms to significantly enhance the approval and supply of housing affordable to Californians of all income levels is a key factor.
- The crisis has grown so acute in California that supply, demand, and affordability fundamentals are characterized in the negative: underserved demands, constrained supply, and protracted unaffordability.
- According to reports and data, California has accumulated an unmet housing backlog of nearly 2,000,000 units and must provide for at least 180,000 new units annually to keep pace with growth through 2025.
- California's overall homeownership rate is at its lowest level since the 1940s. The state ranks 49th out of the 50 states in homeownership rates as well as in the supply of housing per capita. Only one-half of California's households are able to afford the cost of housing in their local regions.
- Lack of supply and rising costs are compounding inequality and limiting advancement opportunities for many Californians.
- The majority of California renters, more than 3,000,000 households, pay more than 30 percent of their income toward rent and nearly one-third, more than 1,500,000 households, pay more than 50 percent of their income toward rent.
- When Californians have access to safe and affordable housing, they have more money for food and health care; they are less likely to become homeless and in need of government-subsidized services; their children do better in school; and businesses have an easier time recruiting and retaining employees.
- An additional consequence of the state's cumulative housing shortage is a significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions caused by the displacement and redirection of populations to states with greater housing opportunities, particularly working- and middle-class households. California's cumulative housing shortfall therefore has not only national but international environmental consequences.
- California's housing picture has reached a crisis of historic proportions despite the fact that, for decades, the Legislature has enacted numerous statutes intended to significantly increase the approval, development, and affordability of housing for all income levels, including this section.

Housing Accountability Act Decision Matrix

This decision tree generally describes the components of the HAA. Both affordable and market-rate developments are protected by components of the HAA. The statute contains detailed requirements that affect the applicability of the HAA to a specific housing project based on its characteristics.



Key Provisions of the Housing Accountability Act

The HAA sets out restrictions on local governments' ability to take action against housing development projects in Government Code section 65589.5, subdivisions (d) and (j). Subdivision (d) describes requirements applicable to housing development projects that include units affordable to very-low, low-, and moderate-income households (including transitional and supportive housing) as well as emergency shelters and farmworker housing. Subdivision (j) describes requirements applicable to all housing development projects, including both market-rate and affordable housing developments¹. In sum, the HAA significantly limits the ability of a local government to deny an affordable or market-rate housing project that is consistent with planning and zoning requirements. This table describes the various component parts of the HAA for ease of reference.

Topic	Subdivisions of Government Code Section 65589.5
Declarations and legislative intent	(a), (b), (c)
Provisions for housing affordable to very low, low-, or moderate-income households, or an emergency shelter	(d), (i)
Applicability of the statute to coastal zones, local laws, and charter cities	(e), (f), (g)
Definitions	(h)
Provisions relating to all housing developments	(j)
Consequences for violation	(k), (l), (m), (n)
Vesting rights for pre-applications (SB 330)	(o)

The following is an overview of key provisions of the HAA focusing on project qualifications, applicability of local standards, provisions that relate to all housing projects, provisions that relate just to housing affordable to lower- and moderate-income households and emergency shelters, and consequences for violation of the HAA. Appendix A includes a list of definitions of terms referenced throughout the HAA and Appendix B includes information related to the Preliminary Application Process pursuant to Senate Bill 330.

Housing Development Project Qualifications

In order for a development to qualify for the protections under the HAA it must meet the definition of a "housing development project". Furthermore, for a project to qualify for the affordable housing protections, it must also meet the definition of "Housing for very low-, low-, or moderate-income households".

¹ *Honchariw v. County of Stanislaus* (2011) 200 Cal.App.4th 1066, 1072-1073

Housing Development Project Definition

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (h)(2).

A “housing development project” means a use consisting of residential units only, mixed use developments consisting of residential and non-residential uses with at least two-thirds of the square footage designated for residential use, or transitional or supportive housing. Because the term “units” is plural, a development must consist of more than one unit to qualify under the HAA. The development can consist of attached or detached units and may occupy more than one parcel, so long as the development is included in the same development application.

Housing for Very Low, Low-, or Moderate-Income Households

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (h)(3).

In order to qualify as a housing development affordable to lower- or moderate- income households, the project must meet one of the following two criteria:

- At least 20 percent of the total units shall be sold or rented to lower income households. Lower-income households are those persons and families whose income does not exceed that specified by Health and Safety Code, § 50079.5, 80 percent of area median income.
- 100 percent of the units shall be sold or rented to persons and families of moderate income, or persons and families of middle income. Moderate-income households are those persons and families whose incomes are 80 percent to 120 percent of area median income (Health and Safety Code, § 50093.) Middle-income households are those persons and families whose income does not exceed 150 percent of area median income (Gov. Code, § 65008 subd. (c).)

In addition, the rental or sales prices of that housing cannot exceed the following standards:

- Housing units targeted for lower income households shall be made available at a monthly housing cost that does not exceed 30 percent of 60 percent of area median income with adjustments for household size made in accordance with the adjustment factors on which the lower income eligibility limits are based.
- Housing units targeted for persons and families of moderate income shall be made available at a monthly housing cost that does not exceed 30 percent of 100 percent of area median income with adjustments for household size made in accordance with the adjustment factors on which the moderate-income eligibility limits are based.

Housing Developments Applying for the Streamlined Ministerial Approval Process Pursuant to Government Code Section 65913.4.

To facilitate and expedite the construction of housing, Chapter 366, Statutes of 2017 (SB 35, Wiener) established the availability of a Streamlined Ministerial Approval Process for developments in localities that have not yet made sufficient progress towards their allocation of the regional housing need (RHNA). Recent amendments to the law clarified that projects utilizing the Streamlined Ministerial Approval Process qualify for the protections under the HAA (Gov. Code, § 65913.4, subd. (g)(2).)

Applicability of Local Standards

In addition to limiting the conditions for which a housing development project can be denied, the HAA also sets parameters around aspects of the approval process. Specifically, it defines:

- The type of development standards, conditions, and policies with which a housing development or emergency shelter can be required to comply
- Parameters for fees and exactions that can be imposed
- Standards that can be applied once an application is deemed complete
- Actions by a local government that would constitute a denial of a project or impose development conditions

These requirements are intended to provide developers with greater transparency and clarity in the entitlement process.

Objective Development Standards, Conditions, Policies, Fees, and Exactions

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (f)

Local governments are not prohibited from requiring a housing development project or emergency shelter to comply with objective, quantifiable, written development standards, conditions, and policies (subject to the vesting provisions of the HAA and other applicable laws). However, those standards, conditions, and policies must meet the following criteria:

- Be appropriate to, and consistent with, meeting the local government's share of the RHNA or meeting the local government's need for emergency shelters as identified in the housing element of the general plan.
- Be applied to facilitate and accommodate development at the density permitted on the site and proposed by the development or to facilitate and accommodate the development of the emergency shelter project.
- Meet the definition of "objective". Objective standards are those that involve no personal or subjective judgment by a public official and being uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant or proponent and the public official.

The intent of these provisions of the HAA is that developers are given certainty in what standards, conditions, and policies apply to their project and how those standards can be met. Local governments that deny a project due to a failure to meet subjective standards (those standards that are not objective as defined) could be in violation of the HAA. In addition, objective standards that do apply should make it feasible for a developer to build to the density allowed by the zoning and not constrain a local government's ability to achieve its RHNA housing targets.

Nothing in the statute generally prohibits a local government from imposing fees and other exactions otherwise authorized by law that are essential to provide necessary public services and facilities to the housing development project or emergency shelter. However, the HAA does impose limitations on the fees and exactions that can be imposed on a specific housing development project once a preliminary application is submitted (see Appendix C).

Determination of Application Completeness

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivisions (d)(5), (h)(5) and (9), and (j)(1).

The process of submitting an application for a housing development project can be iterative. For example, applications that are missing information cannot be fully evaluated by a local government for compliance with local objective standards. Therefore, an application is not typically processed until it is “determined to be complete”. The HAA currently uses two terms related to completeness, “deemed complete” and “determined to be complete.”

Deemed Complete: For the purposes of the HAA, until January 1, 2025, “deemed complete” means the date on which a preliminary application was submitted under the provisions of Government Code section 65941.1. Submittal of a preliminary application allows a developer to provide a specific subset of information on the proposed housing development before providing the full information required by the local government for a housing development application. Submittal of this information allows a housing developer to “freeze” the applicable standards for their project while they assemble the rest of the material necessary for a full application submittal. This ensures development requirements do not change during this time, potentially adding costs to a project. No affirmative determination by a local government regarding the completeness of a preliminary application is required. (See Appendix C).

The term “deemed complete” triggers the “freeze date” for applicable development standards, criteria, or condition that can be applied to a project. Changes to the zoning ordinance, general plan land use designation, standards, and criteria, subdivision ordinance, and design review standards, made subsequent to the date the housing development project preliminary application was “deemed complete”, cannot be applied to a housing development project or used to disapprove or condition approval of the project.

However, if the developer does not submit a preliminary application, the standards that must be applied are those that are in effect when the project is determined to be complete under the Permit Streamlining Act (Gov. Code § 65943).

Determined to be complete: Until January 1, 2025, the full application is “determined to be complete” when it is found to be complete under the Permit Streamlining Act (Gov. Code § 65943). This phrase triggers the timing provisions for the local government to provide written documentation of inconsistency with any applicable plan, program, policy, ordinance, standard, requirement, or other similar provision (see page 10 below for inconsistency determinations).

Completeness Determination of Development Application

Government Code section 65943 states that local governments have 30 days after an application for a housing development project is submitted to inform the applicant whether or not the application is complete. If the local government does not inform the applicant of any deficiencies within that 30-day period, the application will be “deemed complete”, even if it is deficient.

If the application is determined to be incomplete, the local government shall provide the applicant with an exhaustive list of items that were not complete pursuant to the local government’s submittal requirement checklist. Information not included in the initial list of deficiencies in the application cannot be requested in subsequent reviews of the application.

A development applicant who submitted a preliminary application has 90 days to complete the application after receiving notice that the application is incomplete, or the preliminary application will expire. Each time an applicant resubmits new information, a local government has 30 calendar days to review the submittal materials and to identify deficiencies in the application.

Please note, Government Code section 65943 is triggered by an application submitted with all of the requirements on lists compiled by the local government and available when the application was submitted that specifies in detail the information that will be required from any applicant for a development project pursuant to Government Code section 65940. This is not the “preliminary application” referenced in Government Code section 65941.1.

Triggers for a Disapproval of a Housing Development Project

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivisions (h)(6)

The HAA does not prohibit a local government from exercising its authority to disapprove a housing development project, but rather provides limitations and conditions for exercising that authority. The HAA defines disapproval as when the local government takes one of the following actions:

- Votes on a proposed housing development project application and the application is disapproved. This includes denial of other required land use approvals or entitlements necessary for the issuance of a building permit. Examples include, but are not limited to, denial of the development application, tentative or final maps, use permits, or design review. If the project is using the Streamlined Ministerial Approval Process, disapproval of the application would trigger the provisions of the HAA.
- Fails to comply with decision time periods for approval or disapproval of a development application². Until 2025, the following timeframes apply:
 - 90 days after certification of an environmental impact report (prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act) by the lead agency for a housing development project.
 - 60 days after certification of an environmental impact report (prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act) by the lead agency for a housing development project where at least 49 percent of the units in the development project are affordable to very low or low-income households³, and where rents for the lower income units are set at an affordable rent⁴ for at least 30 years and owner-occupied units are available at an affordable housing cost⁵, among other conditions (see Gov Code § 65950).
 - 60 days from the date of adoption by the lead agency of a negative declaration.
 - 60 days from the determination by the lead agency that the project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act.

² Timeframes are pursuant to Government Code section 65950

³ As defined by Health and Safety Code sections 50105 and 50079.5

⁴ Pursuant to Section 50053 of the Health and Safety Code

⁵ Pursuant to Section 50052.5 of the Health and Safety Code

Imposition of Development Conditions

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivisions. (d), (h)(7), and (i)

Like the ability to deny a project, the HAA does not prohibit a local government from exercising its authority to condition the approval of a project, but rather provides limitations and conditions for the application of certain conditions. Specifically, the HAA limits the application of conditions that lower the residential density of the project, and, for housing affordable to lower- and moderate-income households and emergency shelters, conditions that would have a substantial adverse impact on the viability or affordability of providing those units unless specific findings are made and supported by a preponderance of the evidence in the record⁶.

For purposes of the HAA, “lower density” includes any conditions that have the same effect or impact on the ability of the project to provide housing. This could include a condition that directly lowers the overall number of units proposed (e.g., the development proposes 50 units, but the local government approves only 45 units). It could also include indirect conditions that result in a lower density (e.g., a development proposes 50 units at 800 square feet per unit but the local government conditions the approval on the provision of 850 square feet per unit, resulting in the project having to provide fewer units to accommodate the increase in square footage). Another example would be a reduction in building height that would result in the project being able to provide fewer units than originally proposed.

Local governments must also consider if imposed conditions of approval would have an adverse effect on a project’s ability to provide housing for very low-, low-, or moderate-income households at the affordability levels proposed in the housing development project. This includes provisions that would render the project for very low-, low-, or moderate-income households infeasible or would have a substantial adverse effect on the viability or affordability of the proposed housing. For example, project approval for an affordable housing development might be conditioned on the need to use specific materials that significantly increase the cost of the project. This additional cost could either render the project financially infeasible altogether or require substantial changes to the affordability mix of the units where fewer very low-income units could be provided. In these cases, it is possible that the conditions would violate the HAA.

Conditions that should be analyzed for their effect on density and project feasibility (for affordable projects) include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Design changes
- Conditions that directly or indirectly lower density
- Reduction of the percentage of a lot that may be occupied by a building or structure under the applicable planning and zoning.

⁶ See Page13 for more information on the preponderance of the evidence standard.

Housing Accountability Act Provisions That Apply to All Housing Projects

The following provisions apply to all housing development projects regardless of affordability.

Determination of Consistency with Applicable Plans, Standards, or Other Similar Provision Based on the Reasonable Person Standard

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (f)(4)

A key component of the HAA is the determination as to whether or not the proposed housing development project is consistent, compliant and in conformity with all applicable plans, programs, policies, ordinances, standards, requirements, and other similar provisions.

Traditionally, this determination is made by local government, which is given significant deference to interpret its own plans, programs, policies, ordinances, standards, requirements, and other similar provisions. In most planning and zoning matters, courts traditionally uphold an agency's determination if there is "substantial evidence" to support that determination. If substantial evidence supports the agency's decision, an agency can reach a conclusion that a development project is inconsistent with applicable provisions, even if there is evidence to the contrary.

Departing from these traditional rules, the HAA sets forth its own standard for determining consistency with local government rules for housing development projects and emergency shelters. A housing development project or emergency shelter is deemed consistent, compliant, and in conformity with an applicable plan, program, policy, ordinance, standard, requirement, or other similar provision if there is substantial evidence that could allow a *reasonable person* to conclude that the housing development project or emergency shelter is consistent, compliant, or in conformity with applicable standards and requirements. The intent of this provision is to provide an objective standard and increase the likelihood of housing development projects being found consistent, compliant and in conformity.

Applicability of Density Bonus Law

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (j)(3)

The receipt of a density bonus pursuant to Density Bonus Law (Government Code § 65915) does not constitute a valid basis on which to find a proposed housing development project is inconsistent, not in compliance, or not in conformity, with an applicable plan, program, policy, ordinance, standard, requirement, or other similar provision. Receipt of a density bonus can include a bonus in number of units, incentives, concessions, or waivers to development standards allowed under Density Bonus Law.⁷

General Plan and Zoning Consistency Standard

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (j)(4)

For various reasons, there is at times inconsistency between standards in a general plan and zoning standards. For example, a local government may have amended the general plan, but

⁷ Please note pursuant to Government Code § 65915, subd. (f) a receipt of a density bonus does not require an increase in density. An applicant can elect to ask for just the concessions, incentives, and waivers that the project qualifies for under State Density Bonus Law.

has not yet amended all of its municipal ordinances to assure vertical consistency⁸. Recognizing this, the HAA clarifies that if the zoning standards and criteria are inconsistent with applicable, objective general plan standards, but the development project is consistent with the applicable objective general plan standards for the site, then the housing development project cannot be found inconsistent with the standards and criteria of the zoning. Further, if such an inconsistency exists, the local agency may not require rezoning prior to housing development project approval.

However, the local agency may require the proposed housing development project to comply with the objective standards and criteria contained elsewhere in the zoning code that are consistent with the general plan designation. For example, if a site has a general plan land use designation of high density residential, but the site is zoned industrial, then a local government can require the project to comply with objective development standards in zoning districts that are consistent with the high density residential designation, such as a multifamily high density residential zone.

However, under the HAA, the standards and criteria determined to apply to the project must facilitate and accommodate development at the density allowed the general plan on the project site and as proposed by the housing development project.

Written Notification of Inconsistency

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (j)(2)

If a local government considers a proposed housing development project to be inconsistent, non-compliant, or not in conformity with any applicable plan, program, policy, ordinance, standard, requirement, or other similar provision, the local government must provide written notification and documentation of the inconsistency, noncompliance, or inconformity. This requirement applies to all housing development projects, regardless of affordability level. The documentation must:

- Identify the specific provision or provisions and provide an explanation of the reason or reasons why the local agency considers the housing development to be inconsistent, non-compliant, or non-conformant with identified provisions.
- Be provided to the applicant within 30 days of a project application being deemed complete for projects containing 150 or fewer housing units.
- Be provided to the applicant within 60 days of a project application being deemed complete for projects containing over 150 units.

Consequence for Failure to Provide Written Documentation

If the local government fails to provide the written documentation within the required timeframe, the housing development project is deemed consistent, compliant and in conformity with applicable plans, programs, policies, ordinances, standards, requirements, or other similar provisions.

⁸ Pursuant to Government Code § 65860, city and county, including a charter city, zoning ordinances must be consistent with the adopted general plan. This is known as vertical consistency.

Denial of a Housing Project that is Consistent with Applicable Plans, Standards, or Other Similar Provisions Based on the Preponderance of the Evidence Standard

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (j)(1)

When a proposed housing development project complies with applicable, objective general plan, zoning, and subdivision standards and criteria, including design review standards, in effect at the time that the application was deemed complete, but the local agency proposes to disapprove the project or to impose a condition that the project be developed at a lower density, the local agency shall base its decision regarding the proposed housing development project upon written findings supported by a preponderance of the evidence on the record that both of the following conditions exist:

- The housing development project would have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health or safety unless the project is disapproved or approved upon the condition that the project be developed at a lower density.

A “**specific, adverse impact**” means a significant, quantifiable, direct, and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified written public health or safety standards, policies, or conditions as they existed on the date the application was deemed complete. Pursuant to Government Code section 65589.5 (a)(3) it is the intent of the Legislature that the conditions that would have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety arise infrequently.

An example of a condition that does not constitute a specific, adverse impact would be criteria that requires a project to conform with “neighborhood character”. Such a standard is not quantifiable and therefore would not meet the conditions set forth under the HAA.

- There is no feasible method to satisfactorily mitigate or avoid the adverse impact, other than the disapproval of the housing development project or the approval of the project upon the condition that it be developed at a lower density. Feasible means capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, social, and technological factors.

Preponderance of the Evidence Standard

In most actions, a local government is tasked with making findings or determinations based on “substantial evidence.” Under the substantial evidence standard, local government is merely required to find reasonable, adequate evidence in support of their findings, even if the same or *even more* evidence supports a finding to the contrary.

Findings or determinations based on a “preponderance of the evidence” standard require that local governments weigh the evidence and conclude that the evidence on one side outweighs, preponderates over, is more than the evidence on the other side, not necessarily in the number or quantity, but in its convincing force upon those to whom it is addressed⁹. Evidence that is substantial, but not a preponderance of the evidence, does not meet this standard.

⁹ People v. Miller (1916) 171 Cal. 649, 652. Harris v. Oaks Shopping Center (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 206, 209 (“Preponderance of the evidence’ means evidence that has more convincing force than that opposed to it.”).

Provisions Related to Housing Affordable to Very Low-, Low-, or Moderate-Income Household, Emergency Shelters, and Farmworker Housing

State Policy on Housing Project Approval

“It is the policy of the state that a local government not reject or make infeasible housing development projects, including emergency shelters, that contribute to meeting the need determined pursuant to this article (RHNA) without a thorough analysis of the economic, social, and environmental effects of the action and without complying with subdivision (d)” Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (b).

The HAA provides additional protections for projects that contain housing affordable to very low-, low- or moderate-income households, including farmworker housing, or emergency shelters. State policy prohibits local governments from rejecting or otherwise making infeasible these types of housing development projects, including emergency shelters, without making specific findings.

Denial or Conditioning of Housing Affordable to Very Low-, Low- or Moderate-Income Households, Including Farmworker Housing, or Emergency Shelters

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (d) and (i)

The HAA specifies findings that local governments must make, in addition to those in the previous section, if they wish to deny a housing development affordable to very low-, low-, or moderate-income housing (including farmworker housing) or emergency shelters. These requirements also apply when a local government wishes to condition such a project in a way that it would that render it infeasible or would have a substantial adverse effect on the viability or affordability of a housing development project for very low-, low-, or moderate-income households. In addition to the findings, described above, that apply to all housing development projects, a local government must also make specific findings based upon the preponderance of the evidence of one of the following:

- (1) The local government has an adopted housing element in substantial compliance with California’s Housing Element Law, contained in Article 10.6 of Government Code, *and* has met or exceeded development of its share of the RHNA in all income categories proposed in the housing development project. In the case of an emergency shelter, the local government shall have met or exceeded the need for emergency shelters as identified in the housing element. This requirement to meet or exceed its RHNA is in relationship to units built in the local government, not zoning. A local government’s housing element Annual Progress Report pursuant to Government Code section 65400 can be used to demonstrate progress towards RHNA goals.
- (2) The housing development project would have a specific, adverse impact upon public health or safety and there is no feasible method to mitigate or avoid the impact without rendering the housing development project unaffordable or financially infeasible. Specific to housing development projects affordable to very low-, low-, or moderate-income housing (including farmworker housing) or emergency shelters, specific, adverse impacts do not include inconsistency with the zoning ordinance or general plan land use designation or eligibility to claim a welfare exemption under subdivision (g) of Section 214 of the Revenue and Taxation Code.
- (3) Denial of the housing development project or the imposition of conditions is required to comply with specific state or federal law, *and* there is no feasible method to comply without

rendering the development unaffordable to low- and moderate-income households or rendering the development of the emergency shelter financially infeasible.

- (4) The housing development project is proposed on land zoned for agriculture or resource preservation that is either: (a) surrounded on two sides by land being used for agriculture or resource preservation; or (b) does not have adequate water or wastewater facilities to serve the housing development project.
- (5) The housing development project meets both the following conditions:
- Is inconsistent with both the local government’s zoning ordinance and the general plan land use designation as specified in any element of the general plan as it existed on the date the application was deemed complete. This means this finding cannot be used in situations where the project is inconsistent with one (e.g., the general plan designation), but is consistent with the other (e.g., zoning ordinance).
 - The local government has an adopted housing element in substantial compliance with housing element Law.

Finding (5) *cannot* be used when any of the following occur:

- The housing development project is proposed for a site identified as suitable or available for very low-, low-, or moderate-income households within a housing element and the project is consistent with the specified density identified in the housing element.
- The local government has failed to identify sufficient adequate sites in its inventory of available sites to accommodate its RNHA, and the housing development project is proposed on a site identified in any element of its general plan for residential use or in a commercial zone where residential uses are permitted or conditionally permitted.
- The local government has failed to identify a zone(s) where emergency shelters are allowed without a conditional use or other discretionary permit, or has identified such zone(s) but has failed to demonstrate that they have sufficient capacity to accommodate the need for emergency shelter(s), and the proposed emergency shelter is for a site designated in any element of the general plan for industrial, commercial, or multifamily residential uses.

Any of these findings must be based on a preponderance of the evidence. For details, see “Preponderance of the evidence standard” on page 12 for further information.

Violations of Housing Accountability Act

The courts are the primary authority that enforces the HAA. Actions can be brought by eligible plaintiffs and petitioners to the court for potential violations of the law. Similarly, HCD under Government Code section 65585 (j), can find that a local government has taken an action in violation of the HAA. In that case, after notifying a local government of the violation, HCD would refer the violation to the Office of the Attorney General who could file a petition against a local government in the Superior Court.

Eligible Plaintiffs and Petitioners

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (k)(1)(A) and (k)(2)

The applicant, a person eligible to apply for residency in the housing development project or emergency shelter, or a housing organization may bring action to enforce the HAA. A housing organization, however, may only file an action to challenge the disapproval of the housing development project and must have filed written or oral comments with the local government prior to its action on the housing development project.

“Housing organizations” means a trade or industry group engaged in the construction or management of housing units or a nonprofit organization whose mission includes providing or advocating for increased access to housing for low-income households. A housing organization is entitled to reasonable attorney fees and costs when prevailing in an action. Labor unions, building associations, multifamily apartment management companies, and legal aid societies are examples of housing organizations.

Remedies

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (k)(1)(A)

If the plaintiff or petitioner prevails, the court must issue an order compelling compliance with the HAA within 60 days. The court’s order would at a minimum require the local agency to take action on the housing development project or emergency shelter during that time period. The court is further empowered to issue an order or judgment that actually directs the local government to approve the housing development project or emergency shelter if the court finds that the local agency acted in bad faith when it disapproved or conditionally approved the housing development or emergency shelter in violation of the HAA. “Bad faith” includes, but is not limited to, an action that is frivolous or otherwise entirely without merit.

If the plaintiff or petitioner prevails, the court shall award reasonable attorney fees and costs of the suit to the plaintiff or petitioner for both affordable and market-rate housing development projects,¹⁰ except in the “extraordinary circumstances” in which the court finds that awarding fees would not further the purposes of the HAA.

Local Agency Appeal Bond

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (m)

If the local agency appeals the judgment of the trial court, the local agency shall post a bond, in an amount to be determined by the court, to the benefit of the plaintiff if the plaintiff is the project applicant. In this provision, the Legislature has waived, to some degree, the immunity from damages that normally extends to local agencies, recognizing that the project applicant incurs costs due to the delay of its project when a local agency appeals. (Contrast Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (m), with Code Civ. Proc., § 995.220, subd. (b) [local public entities do not have to post bonds].)

¹⁰ / *Honchariw v. County of Stanislaus* (2013) 218 Cal.App.4th 1019, 1023–1024, which ruled to the contrary, was superseded by statutory changes in Senate Bill 167 (Stats. 2017, ch. 368, § 1), Assembly Bill 678 (Stats. 2017, ch. 373, § 1), and Senate Bill 330 (Stats. 2019, ch. 654, § 3).

Failure to Comply with Court Order

Government Code, § 65589.5, subdivision (k)(1)(B)(i), (k)(1)(C), and (l)

If the local government fails to comply with the order or judgment within 60 days of issuance, the court must impose a fine on the local government. The *minimum* fine that may be imposed is \$10,000 per housing unit in the housing development project as proposed on the date the application was deemed complete. Please note, the use of the term “deemed complete” in this instance has the same meaning as “determined to be complete” as referenced on page 7. The monies are to be deposited into the State’s Building Homes and Jobs fund or the Housing Rehabilitation Loan fund. In calculating the amount of the fine in excess of the minimum, the court is directed to consider the following factors:

- The local government’s progress in meeting its RHNA and any previous violations of the HAA.
- Whether the local government acted in bad faith when it disapproved or conditionally approved the housing development or emergency shelter in violation of the HAA. If the court finds that the local government acted in bad faith, the total amount of the fine must be multiplied by five.

The court may issue further orders as provided by law to ensure that the purposes and policies of this section are fulfilled, including, but not limited to, an order to vacate the decision of the local agency and an order to approve the housing development project.

Court-Imposed Fines

Court-imposed fines begin at \$10,000 per housing unit and could be much higher. If the court determines the local government acted in bad faith, the fine is multiplied by five. This equates to a minimum fine of \$50,000 per unit.

Bad faith includes, but is not limited to, an action that is frivolous or otherwise entirely without merit. For example, in a recent Los Altos Superior Court order, the court issued an order directing the local agency to approve the housing development project and found that the local agency acted in bad faith when it disapproved the housing development because its denial was entirely without merit. The city’s denial letter did not reflect that the city made a benign error in the course of attempting, in good faith, to follow the law by explaining to the developer how the project conflicted with objective standards that existed at the time of application; instead, the city denied the application with a facially deficient letter, employed strained interpretations of statute and local standards, and adopted a resolution enumerating insufficient reasons for its denial¹¹. Bad faith can be demonstrated through both substantive decisions and procedural actions. In the Los Altos case, the court found that demanding an administrative appeal with less than a days’ notice revealed bad faith. Repeated, undue delay may likewise reveal bad faith.

¹¹ Order Granting Consolidated Petitions for Writ of Mandate, 40 Main Street Offices, LLC v. City of Los Altos et al. (Santa Clara Superior Court Case No. 19CV349845, April 27, 2020), p. 38

APPENDIX A: Frequently Asked Questions

What types of housing development project applications are subject to the Housing Accountability Act (HAA)?

The HAA applies to both market rate and affordable housing development projects. (*Honchariw v. County of Stanislaus* (2011) 200 Cal.App.4th 1066, 1073.) It applies to housing development projects that consist of residential units and mixed-use developments when two-thirds or more of the square footage is designated for residential use. It also applies to transitional housing, supportive housing, farmworker housing, and emergency shelters. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subs. (d) and (h)(2).)

Does the Housing Accountability Act apply to charter cities?

Yes, the HAA applies to charter cities (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (g).)

Does the Housing Accountability Act apply to housing development projects in coastal zones?

Yes. However, local governments must still comply with the California Coastal Act of 1976 (Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000) of the Public Resources Code) (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (e).)

Are housing developments still subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) if they qualify for the protections under the Housing Accountability Act?

Yes. Jurisdictions are still required to comply with CEQA (Division 13 (commencing with Section 21000) of the Public Resources Code) as applicable to the project. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (e).)

Does the California Department of Housing and Community Development have enforcement authority for the Housing Accountability Act?

Yes. HCD has authority to find that a local government's actions do not substantially comply with the HAA (Gov. Code, § 65585, subd. (j)(1).) In such a case, HCD may notify the California State Attorney General's Office that a local government has taken action in violation of the HAA.

If approval of a housing development project triggers the No-Net Loss Law, may a local government disapprove the project?

No. Triggering a required action under the No-Net Loss Law is not a valid basis to disapprove a housing development project. (Gov. Code, § 65863, subd. (c)(2).) The only valid reasons for disapproving a housing development project are defined in the HAA under subdivisions (d) and (j). Subdivision (j) contains requirements that apply to all housing development projects; subdivision (d) contains additional requirements for housing development projects for very low-, low- or moderate-income households or emergency shelters.

Does the Housing Accountability Act apply to a residential development project on an historic property?

Yes. The HAA does not limit the applicability of its provisions based on individual site characteristics or criteria. The local government may apply objective, quantifiable, written development standards, conditions, and policies related to historic preservation to the housing development project, so long as they were in effect when the application was deemed

complete¹². The standards should be appropriate to, and consistent with, meeting the local government's regional housing need and facilitate development at the permitted density. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (f)(1).) However, it should be noted that compliance with historic preservation laws may otherwise constrain the approval of a housing development.

Under the Housing Accountability Act, is the retail/commercial component of a mixed-use project subject to review when the housing component must be approved?

Yes. The local government may apply objective, quantifiable, written development standards, conditions and policies to the entirety of the mixed-use project, so long as they were in effect when the application was deemed complete. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (f)(1).)

Does the Housing Accountability Act apply to subdivision maps and other discretionary land use applications?

Yes. The HAA applies to denials of subdivision maps and other discretionary land use approvals or entitlements necessary for the issuance of a building permit (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd (h)(6).)

Does the Housing Accountability Act apply to applications for individual single-family residences or individual Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)?

No. A “housing development project” means a use consisting of residential units only, mixed use developments consisting of residential and non-residential uses with at least two-thirds of the square footage designated for residential use, or transitional or supportive housing. Because the term “units” is plural, a development has to consist of more than one unit to qualify under the HAA (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(2).)

Does the Housing Accountability Act apply to an application that includes both a single-family residence and an Accessory Dwelling Unit?

Yes. Since an application for both a single-family residence and an ADU includes more than one residential unit, the HAA applies (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(2).)

Does the Housing Accountability Act apply to an application for a duplex?

Yes. Since an application for a duplex includes more than one residential unit, the HAA applies. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(2).)

Does the Housing Accountability Act apply to market-rate housing developments?

Yes. Market-rate housing developments are subject to the HAA (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(2).) In *Honchariw v. County of Stanislaus* (2011) 200 Cal.App.4th 1066, the court found the definition of “housing development project” was not limited to projects involving affordable housing and extended to market-rate projects. Market-rate housing development projects are subject to the requirements of paragraph (j) (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (j).)

¹² For purposes of determination of whether a site is historic, “deemed complete” is used with reference to Government Code §65940. See Government Code § 65913.10.

Under the Housing Accountability Act, if a housing development project is consistent with local planning rules, can it be denied or conditioned on a density reduction?

Yes. However, a local government may deny a housing development that is consistent with local planning rules, or condition it on reduction in density, only under very specific circumstances. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subds. (j)(1)(A), (B).) The local government must make written findings based on a preponderance of the evidence that both:

- (1) The housing development project would have a specific, adverse impact upon public health or safety unless disapproved or approved at a lower density; and
- (2) There is no feasible method to satisfactorily mitigate or avoid the impact.

(See definition of and specific requirements for finding of “specific, adverse impact” discussed below.)

Under the Housing Accountability Act, can a housing development project affordable to very low-, low-, or moderate-income households (including farmworker housing) or emergency shelter that is inconsistent with local planning requirements be denied or conditioned in a manner that renders it infeasible for the use proposed?

Yes, but only under specific circumstances. The local government must make written findings based on a preponderance of the evidence as to specific criteria. However, inconsistency with zoning does not justify denial or conditioning if the project is consistent with the general plan. (See Page 11 for more details). See also Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subds. (d)(1)-(5).)

Is there a definition for “specific, adverse impact” upon public health and safety?

Yes. The HAA provides that a “specific, adverse impact” means a significant, quantifiable, direct, and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified written public health or safety standards, policies, or conditions as they existed on the date the application was deemed complete. Inconsistency with the zoning ordinance or general plan land use designation is not such a specific, adverse impact upon the public health or safety. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subds. (d)(2) and (j)(1)(A).)

The HAA considers that such impacts would be rare: “It is the intent of the Legislature that the conditions that would have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety, as described in paragraph (2) of subdivision (d) and paragraph (1) of subdivision (j), arise infrequently.” (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (a)(3).)

Appendix B: Definitions

Area median income means area median income as periodically established by the HCD pursuant to Section 50093 of the Health and Safety Code. The developer shall provide sufficient legal commitments to ensure continued availability of units for very low or low-income households in accordance with the provisions of this subdivision for 30 years. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(4).)

Bad faith includes, but is not limited to, an action that is frivolous or otherwise entirely without merit. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (l).) This definition arises in the context of the action a local government takes when it disapproved or conditionally approved the housing development or emergency shelter in violation of the HAA.

Deemed complete means that the applicant has submitted a preliminary application pursuant to Government Code section 65941.1 (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(5).) However, in Government Code section 65589.5(k)(1)(B)(i) deemed complete has the same meaning as “Determined to be Complete”.

Determined to be complete means that the applicant has submitted a complete application pursuant to Government Code section 65943 (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(9).)

Disapprove the housing development project means a local government either votes on a proposed housing development project application and the application is disapproved, including any required land use approvals or entitlements necessary for the issuance of a building permit, or fails to comply with specified timeframes in the Permit Streamlining Act. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(5).)

Farmworker housing means housing in which at least 50 percent of the units are available to, and occupied by, farmworkers and their households.

Feasible means capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, social, and technological factors. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(1).)

Housing development project means a use consisting of any of the following: (1) development projects with only residential units, (2) mixed-use developments consisting of residential and non-residential uses with at least two-thirds of the square footage designated for residential use, (3) transitional or supportive housing.

Housing organization means a trade or industry group whose local members are primarily engaged in the construction or management of housing units or a nonprofit organization whose mission includes providing or advocating for increased access to housing for low-income households and have filed written or oral comments with the local agency prior to action on the housing development project. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (k)(2).) This definition is relevant to the individuals or entities that have standing to bring an HAA enforcement action against a local agency.

Housing for very low-, low-, or moderate-income households means that either:

- At least 20 percent of the total units shall be sold or rented to lower income households, as defined in Section 50079.5 of the Health and Safety Code, or

- One hundred (100) percent of the units shall be sold or rented to persons and families of moderate income as defined in Section 50093 of the Health and Safety Code, or persons and families of middle income, as defined in Section 65008 of this code.

Housing units targeted for lower income households shall be made available at a monthly housing cost that does not exceed 30 percent of 60 percent of area median income with adjustments for household size made in accordance with the adjustment factors on which the lower income eligibility limits are based. Housing units targeted for persons and families of moderate income shall be made available at a monthly housing cost that does not exceed 30 percent of 100 percent of area median income with adjustments for household size made in accordance with the adjustment factors on which the moderate-income eligibility limits are based. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(3).)

Lower density (as used in the sense of “to lower density”) means a reduction in the units built per acre. It includes conditions that directly lower density and conditions that effectively do so via indirect means. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(7).)

Mixed use means a development consisting of residential and non-residential uses with at least two-thirds of the square footage designated for residential use. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(2)(B).)

Objective means involving no personal or subjective judgment by a public official and being uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant or proponent and the public official. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (h)(2)(B).)

Regional housing needs allocation (RHNA) means the share of the regional housing needs assigned to each jurisdiction by income category pursuant to Government Code section 65584 through 65584.6.

Specific adverse impact means a significant, quantifiable, direct, and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified written public health or safety standards, policies, or conditions as they existed on the date the application was deemed complete. Inconsistency with the zoning ordinance or general plan land use designation shall not constitute a specific, adverse impact upon the public health or safety. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subds. (d)(2), (j)(1)(A).) This definition is relevant to the written findings that a local agency must make when it disapproves or imposes conditions on a housing development project or an emergency shelter that conforms with all objective standards. It is the express intent of the Legislature that the conditions that would give rise to a specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety occur infrequently. (Gov. Code, § 65589.5, subd. (a)(3).)