

Step 1: What is your proposal and the desired results and outcomes?

The 2023 Housing Element aligns Sonoma County’s housing policies with state law, proposes policies to make housing more equitable, and identifies sites that can be rezoned for additional housing over the next eight years. The County is required by state law to update its 2014 Housing Element to cover the planning period between 2023 – 2031 during which the County must facilitate meeting the Regional Housing Needs Allocations (RHNA). The RHNA is a number of housing units assigned to the county.

The 2023-2031 Housing Element update project will facilitate and encourage housing development following adoption and ending in early 2031. The County prepared the 2023-2031 Housing Element to affirmatively further fair housing and to accommodate the County’s 3,824-unit Regional Housing Needs Allocation for the 2023-2031 Housing Element period. The Housing Element demonstrates how its identified local housing needs will be met, including those of special needs populations, through new and revised policies and programs. Extensive public participation, including from a Housing Advisory Committee and equity priority populations was critical to the policy development during the Housing Element Update. Additional information on outreach is contained in the Housing Element Appendix A and the mandatory Housing Element Technical Background Report.

The Housing Element helps direct the location of new housing development within the unincorporated county by establishing an inventory of properties countywide designated for future housing development. The Housing Element policies will advance and support equitable and affordable housing for the next eight-year Housing Element cycle. The state’s TCAC opportunities maps were used to locate affordable housing in high resource areas, improving life outcomes for children and youth in those areas. Extensive community outreach was conducted for the Housing Element policy development. Coordination and outreach with community-based organizations and other stakeholders will be ongoing through implementation of the Housing Element programs, as described in Program 31.

Step 2: What’s the data? What does the data tell us?

The geographic impacts of the Housing Element are focused on the proposed inventory sites for multifamily residential. As mandated by state law, the proposed sites for affordable housing are located in areas designated by the HCD Opportunity Area maps as high resource areas. These areas are characterized by high levels of income, education, and environmental resources.

1. What does population level data, including quantitative and qualitative data, tell you about existing racial inequities? What does it tell you about root causes or factors influencing racial inequities?

In 2020, unincorporated Sonoma County was 65% White, 24% Latino, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Black. Analysis from the 2021 update of the Portrait of Sonoma reveals that the County’s overall Human Development Index (HDI) score, comprised of health, education and earnings measures, is 6.19 out of a maximum total score of 10.00. The HDI score for the four largest racial/ethnic groups are as follows: White 6.74, Latino 4.93, Asian 6.86, and Black 3.99. Multiple factors, including access/affordability of housing, immigration status, racial discrimination, employment stability and wages, language barriers, access to health care, and access to education, can be attributed to the

differences in these scores.

Land use and zoning laws play a significant role in a variety of fair housing issues related to racial inequity. Specifically, overly restrictive zoning to retain low-density development has suppressed the production of affordable housing resulting in the exclusion of low-income individuals from many parts of the area. Many low-income residents, particularly people of color, disproportionately occupy high-density housing because it tends to be more affordable than the purchase or rental of a single-family home. High density housing can generally be built only in areas zoned for multi-family homes or mixed-use development. These relationships typically result in segregation by race and income level. Additionally, these restrictive laws are more likely to generate disproportionately high rates of housing cost burden and overcrowding among some racial and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, and large families.

As part of the Housing Element update process, staff conducted broad outreach holding eight focus groups with community-based organizations and the populations they served in order to get insight on their lived experience related to housing. Farmworkers and Latino groups identified obstacles to housing such as language barriers a lack of access to credit, poor housing conditions, and fear of retaliation from landlords. People with a lived experience of being homeless cited landlord refusal to accept Section 8 applications, lack of income, rental history, and credit as obstacles to secure housing. Black residents expressed that the lack of Black folks in Sonoma County would make them consider leaving county if they needed to find new housing. A stated desire for more and cheaper housing options, with access to services was very common among focus groups.

Another source of local knowledge utilized throughout this analysis are the Sonoma County Housing Advisory Committee (HAC), consisting of local residents, renters, builders, and non-profits. The group discussed barriers, obstacles, and constraints to providing affordable housing within Sonoma County and developed recommendations for addressing these issues.

Constraints to the development of housing in the Unincorporated County were also determined through the collection and analysis of data related to County permitting processes, costs, and timelines.

The greatest constraints identified are housing and land costs. Many factors have contributed to increased prices, including supply chain issues, supply and labor shortages made worse by the rebuilding needs following the wildfires in 2017, 2019, and 2020, and the shortage of skilled trades in the North Bay as they are needed for rebuilding efforts across the state.

The next largest constraint is the lack of available land with access to sewer service. Densities of more than two units per acre cannot be achieved without public sewer. This means that all land zoned for higher-density affordable housing must be in areas where sewer is available, which are very limited in the Unincorporated County.

Other non-governmental constraints that impact housing development include environmental factors: high wildfire hazard areas, lack of groundwater availability, steep slopes, earthquake and landslide hazard zones, flood hazard zones, and environmental protection for special status species and habitats. Most of Sonoma County's rural lands are impacted by one or more of these environmental constraints.

The Housing Element describes the accomplishments of the programs in the 2014 Housing Element. Achievements of the last 8-year Housing Element cycle include, but are not limited to:

- Adopting of protections for residents of mobile home parks
- Establishing new multifamily residential density standards supporting smaller, more affordable units
- Codifying a new multifamily housing type, Cottage Housing Developments
- Adopting multiple revisions to the Vacation Rental Ordinance to limit the use of homes as vacation rentals, and to protect urban residential lands for permanent residential uses
- Adopting a Workforce Housing (WH) Combining District which allows high-density residential development on commercial- or industrial-zoned land. The WH is applied to sites in this Housing Element Sites Inventory to facilitate housing development near jobs and transit.
- Processed a zoning change to remove the "Z" Accessory Dwelling Unit Exclusion Combining District from 1,924 parcels countywide.
- Added the AH Affordable Housing Combining Zone to multiple sites countywide, which allows 24 units per acre for 100 percent affordable housing projects.
- Permitted 46 farm family and agricultural employee housing units.
- Permitted 6 farmworker bunkhouse projects with 183 beds.
- The Community Development Commission (CDC) provided low-cost rehabilitation loans to owner-occupied and rental properties. Throughout the planning period, the CDC provided \$2,913,433 in rehabilitation assistance to 61 mobile homes and nine single-family homes.

Data on long-term outcomes or effectiveness of housing policies in addressing racial inequity is not available. Data on tenancy demographics of affordable housing would support long-term data collection. Housing Element Program 31, the Housing Equity and Action Plan, includes ongoing coordination with service providers and Community Based Organizations, identifying and prioritizing fair housing issues that arise during the planning period. This group's efforts will be focused especially on meeting the housing needs of vulnerable and marginalized residents, including special needs populations, veterans, and communities of color.

Step 3: How have communities been engaged? Are there opportunities to expand engagement?

The most affected community members include people with disabilities, seniors, farmworkers, day laborers, Latino populations, and African American populations. As part of the Housing Element outreach, staff conducted a focus group with each of eight community-based organizations and the populations they served in order to get insight on their lived experience related to housing. Outreach to affected community members would be ongoing through the implementation of Housing Element Program 31, the Housing Equity and Action Plan discussed above.

Farmworkers and Latino groups identified burdens such as language barriers a lack of access to credit, poor housing conditions, and fear of retaliation from landlords. People with a lived experience of being homeless cited landlord refusal to accept Section 8 applications, lack of income, rental history, and credit as obstacles to secure housing. Black residents expressed that the lack of Black folks in Sonoma County would make them consider leaving county if they needed to find new housing. A stated desire for more and cheaper housing options, with access to services was very common among focus groups.

Based on data collected for the Assessment of Fair Housing, local knowledge, and analysis, the County

and its public and stakeholder partners identified factors that contribute to local fair housing issues:

- Displacement of residents due to economic pressures
- Lack of affordable, accessible housing in a range of unit sizes
- Lack of public investments in specific neighborhoods, including services or amenities
- Lack of regional cooperation
- Lack of affected populations on boards and committees
- Lack of funding for local fair housing outreach and enforcement
- Community opposition

Step 4: What are your strategies for advancing racial equity? Programs

Racial minorities will benefit disproportionately from affordable housing policies and programs because racial minorities are disproportionately affected by high housing costs and scarcity of affordable housing. Future residents of affordable housing in high resource areas will benefit from these resources through improved life outcomes which are the basis of the HCD opportunity area map methodology.

The Housing Element policy development process was designed to reduce unintended consequences to the greatest degree possible. In addition to the broad and extensive outreach, the document is also informed by data collected on county demographics, segregation patterns, constraints to housing, local opportunities and resources. Implementation programs include ongoing communication with stakeholder groups and special needs populations, that will provide opportunities to improve and enhance implementation efforts.

Strategies for ongoing outreach will include participation in an annual housing fair and establishing and maintaining connections with community-based organizations, as well as outreach to developers, utility providers, and members of the public.

Step 5: What is your plan for implementation?

The proposed update includes a total of 32 implementation programs with numerous subprograms. There are 14 programs that are carried over from the 5th Cycle Housing Element, such as programs to preserve existing affordable units at risk of reverting to market rate rentals, and providing information on tenant rights assistance. To address the housing issues and barriers identified through public outreach and demographic analysis, there are 18 new programs in the Housing Element including:

- Incentivizing ADU and JADU development with additional allowances
- Reviewing and updating the Zoning Code for compliance with new state laws
- Implementing displacement avoidance policies
- Streamlining permitting procedures
- Participation in countywide bond financing program for affordable housing

As in prior Housing Element cycles, programs in the Housing Element include deadlines to complete before the end of the 8-year Housing Element cycle, although State law has added new timing requirements and further reporting obligations that apply during each cycle.

The Housing Action Plan contained in the Housing Element describes implementation programs with objectives and timelines for completion. These programs constitute a commitment to complete the programs in order for the Housing Element to remain in compliance with state land use law.

Mandatory annual reporting to the California Department of Housing and Community Development would document progress toward the goals identified in the action plan. The fiscal and staffing impacts of Housing Element implementation are described in the following sections of the Board Summary. Implementation of new programs may require additional staff, depending on the scope and scale of the program. During the course of the implementation, additional staffing and resources may be made available at the direction of management in order to meet the implementation obligations to the state.

Step 6: How will you ensure accountability, communicate, and evaluate results? Annual Reporting, programs

Progress on the 32 implementation programs included in the Housing Element must be reported to HCD on an annual basis as part of the mandatory Annual Progress Reports. The annual report includes data on the issuance of building permits for new housing and affordable units. Periodically through the 8-year Housing Element cycle, progress toward the RHNA goals will be evaluated. If the pace of new housing development is not sufficient to achieve the RHNA goals, additional actions may be taken such as streamlining permitting of affordable housing through SB 35, or the identification of additional sites in the community for affordable housing development. Ongoing outreach to community-based organizations will provide meaningful feedback on the impact of programs, and what adjustments may be made to better serve special needs populations.

Program 32 of the Housing Element requires proactive outreach throughout the 8-year. In order to affirmatively further fair housing, increase awareness about housing programs, and address local housing needs, the County will establish and implement a proactive outreach program. Strategies for ongoing outreach will include participation in an annual housing fair and establishing and maintaining connections with community-based organizations, as well as outreach to developers, utility providers, and members of the public.

The County will continue to build and maintain its housing issues and interest email list and will provide an annual digital newsletter to subscribers, to include information about the County's housing programs, ADUs and JADUs, long-term residency of recreational vehicles and tiny homes, loan and funding opportunities, tenant rights and discrimination information, and opportunities for participation in upcoming events and policy decisions.