



SOUTH BAY CITIES
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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January 21, 2020

The Honorable Scott Wiener
Senator, California State Senate
State Capitol Building, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 50 (Wiener) Planning and Zoning. Housing Development Incentives
Request Delay – Current Position: Oppose Unless Amended (as amended 01/06/2020)

Dear Senator Wiener:

On behalf of the South Bay Cities Council of Governments (SBCCOG) I am writing to express our continued opposition to SB 50 (Wiener) and request that the bill be held for this session.

The SBCCOG has opposed SB 50 on the grounds that it is unlikely to meet stated goals and is likely to create a number of unintended consequences, in particular producing excessive amounts of VMT, GHG emissions and congestion. SB 50 will alter the ecology of 75% of the neighborhoods in the state – forever. An action this consequential should be based on a solid foundation of facts and analyses. Single family densification is an experiment that can and should be thoroughly studied before it becomes state law. The request for delay on densification is being proposed in order to allow the state (OPR, HCD) time for the following to:

- Assess the impacts of the package of bills that became law on January 1, 2020 making it much easier to build Accessory Dwelling Units by enacting state-mandated rules which invalidate local ADU ordinances. This is the “starter” version of density policy that SB 50 unfortunately takes to an extreme. It would be prudent to first understand the impacts of encouraging ADUs in single family neighborhoods on the volume of units that are added, what the contributions will be towards affordable units, parking issues, VMT reductions, and so forth, before invalidating even more local regulations.
- Monitor the impacts of densification in other jurisdictions that have already adopted policies similar to what SB 50 would introduce in California. This includes Minneapolis, MN and the State of Oregon. We should know more about how densification policies are working elsewhere before wide-spread adoption in California.
- Evaluate the performance of public transit as the foundational mobility strategy for reducing GHG emissions per household and managing congestion. Transit ridership has been declining for years across the nation, especially in Los Angeles County. Since SB 50 directs housing development to be transit-adjacent it would be prudent to have a realistic understanding on the performance of existing transit-oriented housing and, where successful, the conditions that contribute to that success.
- Assess the housing units built, especially at affordable prices, from redeveloping obsolete commercial strips and malls. Obsolete commercial districts are a problem for many cities, single family neighborhoods are not. Many jurisdictions have begun looking into this option for commercial

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redevelopment, including Orange County in addition to the South Bay cities. If progress toward satisfying RHNA targets can be made through this strategy, SB 50 may not be necessary. Commercial redevelopment can potentially create enough density to test the volume, price and sustainability promise of SB 50.

Results from those studies should guide the reformulation of SB 50 and other densification legislation proposals. Such a factual foundation should address the objections of many stakeholders and thereby lead to better overall policy serving the public interest.

Additionally, according to the American Community Survey (2013-2017), there are potentially over 90,000 vacant units in Los Angeles County. These vacancies demonstrate that the number of units isn't the only benchmark to be concerned with. Simply building more units, without requiring significant construction of truly affordable housing, will not provide the much needed affordable and/or permanent supportive housing for those who seek it.

Furthermore, by requiring greater density without funding the improved public transportation for localities, SB 50 is at odds with many state policies that encourage and incentivize more dense housing near transit so that individuals may become less dependent on automobiles. The SBCCOG continues to advocate for sustainable housing production that takes into consideration the travel patterns of residents, including the need to specifically fund micro-mobility options for first/last mile trips and local needs, so that the state's goal of greenhouse gas emission reductions are included.

A single state-wide strategy for producing "sustainable housing" will not work in every city or region. The SBCCOG previously submitted a letter of opposition accompanied by a SBCCOG White Paper that details the reasons we cannot support SB 50. The White Paper also includes suggestions that we believe, based on years of research, would work better. This White Paper is supplement to the original paper written in response to SB 827 (Weiner) during the previous legislative session. Both are available online at: <http://southbaycities.org/news/response-sb-50-resolving-housing-carbon-dilemma-state-policy-role-local-government>.

We encourage you to continue working with local governments and the League of California Cities to gather the facts on densification, transit-oriented developments and the actual impacts that they are having on the housing crisis. Delaying SB 50 to develop a fact-based dynamic policy that is adaptable to all regions of this diverse state will lead to legislation that can work and can gain support from stakeholders. However, at this time, the SBCCOG must remain opposed to SB 50 unless amended.

Should you have any questions, please contact SBCCOG Executive Director, Jacki Bacharach, at (310) 371-7222.

With gratitude,



Christian Horvath, SBCCOG Chair
Councilmember, City of Redondo Beach

CC: South Bay Senators: Allen, Bradford, and Mitchell
South Bay Assembly Members: Muratsuchi, Burke, Gipson, and O'Donnell
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