



County of Santa Cruz

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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COUNTY BOARD APPROVES HOUSING ELEMENT

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday unanimously approved the 2015 Housing Element, a framework intended to help meet the future housing needs of the community.

As required by the state, local communities must approve a Housing Element every five to eight years, and it is one of seven required elements of the County's General Plan. It includes the community's goals, objectives and policies relevant to the maintenance, improvement and development of housing; as well as a program to implement those policies and achieve those objectives.

"We're pleased the Board passed the Housing Element with broad community support," Planning Director Kathy Previsich said. "This framework will benefit residents and the community as a whole in the coming years."

Residents, housing activists, faith-based organizations, low-income housing developers, community and business groups and local nonprofits all spoke in support of the Housing Element. The document shows there is capacity to accommodate 1,314 new housing units, the County's assigned "fair share" of new housing needed to meet the State's forecast of modest population growth across all income levels, through 2023. Local cities have their own Housing Elements.

"Housing is a social justice issue. This is an issue of equity. This is an issue of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots,' and of building the community that all of us want to live in – one that's inclusive for all members of the community," said Monica Martinez, chief executive officer of Encompass Community Services.



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The Housing Element outlines current challenges in the Santa Cruz County housing market, including the housing crisis, as well as a framework for solutions. Those challenges include a lack of affordability; homelessness; a rental housing shortage and rising rents; a lack of housing diversity and an aging housing stock.

“Not providing adequate housing can have dire consequences for a community. Unless we locate housing near jobs in the urban core, traffic will get worse as people commute farther and farther distances, and that can break down neighborhoods because people won’t be home to work as soccer coaches or volunteer at schools or elsewhere,” said Betsy Wilson, director of housing development for MidPen Housing Corporation, a low-income housing provider.

The Housing Element includes several objectives to meet the future housing needs of the community. They include diversifying the housing stock, encouraging accessory dwelling units, promoting mixed-use projects in the urban core, and creating housing options in line with the County’s environmental, health and livability goals by creating walkable communities located along transit corridors consistent with changing community demographics, including an aging population.

The Housing Element also identifies strategies to expand the number of affordable housing units throughout the county. The County Planning Department is also engaged in an ongoing effort to clarify and modernize local building codes, making it simpler to improve and expand upon the County’s housing stock

The need is great. Often-desperate residents are turning to Facebook and other online communities to find housing, and the National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates Santa Cruz County residents must earn \$33.77 an hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment, or more than \$70,000 a year.

In May 2015, there were 4,823 Santa Cruz County households on the Santa Cruz County Housing Authority waiting list for Section 8 housing vouchers. In 2014, 354 families got vouchers. At that rate, families with children currently in kindergarten will see those children go to college by the time they receive a voucher, despite the waiting list being closed for several years.

The Housing Element is available for public review at
<http://sccoplanning.com/PlanningHome/Housing/HousingElement.aspx>.