



TO: SACOG Region Planning Directors

FROM: Kendra Lewis, Executive Director  
Cathy Creswell, Board President

DATE: October 15, 2020

RE: 2021 Housing Element Update—Public Participation

The Sacramento Housing Alliance (SHA) urges all jurisdictions in the SACOG region to implement comprehensive and inclusive public engagement processes for the housing element update due May 2021. Our region is facing an unprecedented affordable housing crisis exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic. Communities of color suffer disproportionate harm from the pandemic and continue to suffer impacts from historic racial inequities in housing. As a result, it is more critical than ever, that local governments establish robust and inclusive public engagement processes to guide development of an effective housing element update.

State law recognizes the importance of engaging the public as reflected in the requirement that each local government make a diligent effort to achieve the public participation of all economic segments of the community in the development of the housing element. Broad participation and true engagement of the community will ensure the element reflects needs identified by community members and that critical affordable housing strategies consider the input and experience of communities and stakeholders. Meaningful participation can also create needed support for adopting effective affordable housing and land use strategies.

While we recognize the pandemic creates some challenges in engaging the public, it remains imperative that each community adopt meaningful processes to solicit and consider community input in the development of the housing element. Local government should also describe what the housing element IS, why it's important, and all the ways the community can participate in the development and review of the element. To ensure a robust public participation process, SHA recommends the following:

1. Engage community participation and feedback at all stages of the Housing Element update and adoption process. Participation should not be limited to public hearings. The *public* should have opportunities to:
  - ◆ provide input on the review and evaluation of the prior elements programs and policies, existing needs and conditions, barriers to addressing housing needs, the adequacy of the land inventory, potential new programs, etc. *before* release of a new draft element;
  - ◆ review and comment on a draft housing element;
  - ◆ review of how the jurisdiction has considered and incorporated public input;
  - ◆ review of the adopted element; and
  - ◆ provide input on the annual housing element progress report before it is submitted to the Council or Board of Supervisors for approval.
2. Conduct various methods of engagement to encourage public participation. It is likely that much of the public engagement will be “virtual”, however, access to computers and internet is not equitably available. For members of the public who lack those resources or who are unable to use video applications, consistently provide an adequate telephone option and generally ensure that members of the community who lack adequate technology can participate in meetings about the Housing Element review.
3. Ensure all materials and notices are provided in multiple languages appropriate to the community. Provide translation services for public meetings.
4. Look for opportunities to “meet people where they are.” For example, many community organizations, neighborhood associations, advocacy and industry groups hold regular meetings. Jurisdictions should ask to attend these meetings to describe the housing element process and solicit input. Other opportunities could include having a booth at area farmers markets or school district food distribution sites or other outdoor events to share information and collect input. Jurisdictions have a statutory obligation to make a “diligent” effort to achieve the participation of everyone in the community, including individuals and families of modest means. Advance planning and creativity will ensure local government can effectively meet this requirement.
5. Public participation and outreach opportunities should be meaningful. Jurisdictions must provide a feedback loop about how public input has been considered and incorporated into the housing element.
6. In addition to multiple outreach opportunities as described above, create a diverse Housing Element Working Group to provide input on the development of the housing element update AND to support and evaluate ongoing implementation.

October 15, 2020

RE: 2021 Housing Element Update—Public Participation

Page 3

7. Cities and counties should engage community organizations representing and advocating for families and individuals residing in lower-income communities to ensure that members of these communities can directly participate and that the jurisdiction considers their perspective as part of the evaluation and creation of the housing element.

SHA remains committed to working in partnership with the cities and counties in our region to ensure the housing element update process is as inclusive as possible and lays out an effective roadmap and plan to effectively address the affordable housing crisis plaguing our communities. All SACOG residents deserve a safe, accessible and affordable place to call home. The housing element update process provides the tools to do just that. We look forward to continuing this work with you. Please call if you have any questions or would like assistance.

cc: Paul McDougall, State Department of Housing and Community Development  
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Greg Chew, Sacramento Area Council of Governments