

January 29, 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
Oppose Unless Amended *(as amended 01/06/2020)*

Dear Senator Wiener:

The City of Arroyo Grande recognizes that the shortfall of available affordable housing has risen to a crisis level. This housing imbalance is a threat to our economy, our families, and the very fabric of our diverse communities statewide. We applaud the Legislature's effort to take strong action to make headway toward development of housing that addresses this dire need.

That being said, the City of Arroyo Grande respectfully asks that SB 50 consider that the solutions appropriate for highly urbanized cities are not the same as those for suburban and small cities such as ours. SB 50 as written treats all municipalities as though they have the same access to mass transit, adequate water supply, and infrastructure resources. SB 50 as written, while it has good intentions, is punitive and destructive to small jurisdictions.

The City of Arroyo Grande has gone to great lengths to meaningfully engage the public in the process of updating our General Plan and its individual elements. We have considered the limitations of our infrastructure, and anticipated the needs created by future development. Our General Plan reflects our community's character, and the vision we have for our future, given the needs and constraints we face locally. The General Plan was created lawfully, and at no small cost relative to our General Fund. We have submitted it to the State of California periodically and have been found to be compliant.

We beg the Legislature's understanding that developers of certain housing projects should not be allowed to override locally developed (and HCD-approved) housing elements which identify "adequate" sites to accommodate a city's share of the regional housing need. We have taken seriously our responsibility to plan for future development and our share of RHNA numbers. We have considered our infrastructure, transit, and circulation realities and created plans that are legally and practically appropriate. SB 50 would undo that without adding in a local control provision to help small communities.

Specifically, we have two issues that SB 50 fails to consider. First and foremost, it does not address the sustainability of the local water supply. Water is the most critical resource for any jurisdiction, and its availability (or lack thereof) is highly variable from city to city. Indeed, San Luis Obispo County was one of the last areas to pull out of the historic drought just a few years ago. SB 50 must be amended to consider local water availability.

Second, much of SB 50 as written revolves around transit and job hubs to determine density and parking exemptions. This makes sense in urban areas where mass transit and large employers exist. However, in a small city like ours, public transit availability is simply not the same. Further, it must recognize that

local parking requirements take circulation and infrastructure limitations into account. SB 50 must be amended to prevent years of lawful planning and consideration being overturned.

Arroyo Grande is over a century old, and our historic character has been lovingly cared for as we develop our economy and our housing stock. The sweeping powers that SB 50 grants to developers will destroy small communities like ours. If it is enacted without amendment, every small city like ours will disappear, each one looking like the next as development is maximized. Historic character, tourism and agriculture are the backbone and heart of our town and are severely threatened by SB 50 as written. It will be economically and culturally devastating if enacted in its current form.

As such, we support the development of a multi-level process that considers small communities like ours. We applaud efforts that move toward a process that exempts cities with population densities that fall below a certain threshold. However, instead of arbitrarily establishing a population metric, it would be much more appropriate to consider the full range of community characteristics when determining which areas of the state SB 50 should apply.

The City of Arroyo Grande also conceptually supports recent amendments to SB 50 that attempt to create an alternative planning process for jurisdictions to develop a "local flexibility plan" that, if approved by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), would exempt cities from nearly all aspects of SB 50 with the exception of requiring fourplexes in single-family zones. (We reserve our support or opposition to these amendments until such time as the specific elements of the plan are clearly identified.)

Simply said, SB 50 as written is a one-size-fits-all approach that will be devastating to communities like ours. We respectfully, yet strongly, request that it be amended to recognize this reality.

For these reasons, the City of Arroyo Grande opposes SB 50 unless amended.

Sincerely,

Caren Ray Russom

Mayor

City of Arroyo Grande, on behalf of the Arroyo Grande City Council and 17,001 residents

cc. Honorable Senator Bill Monning
Honorable Assemblymember Jordan Cunningham
Dave Mullinax, Regional Director for League of California Cities
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