

From: [David Kellogg](#)
To: Housing.Elements@HCD
Subject: Public Comment on Housing Element
Date: Friday, November 18, 2022 5:35:58 PM
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Nov 18, 2022

On behalf of David Kellogg (a Contra Costa County resident), 350 Contra Costa, Greenbelt Alliance, CaRLA, Scott O'Neil (a resident of Palo Alto), Watson Ladd (a resident of Berkeley), Marven Normal (a resident of San Bernadino), Dara Dadachanji (a resident of San Francisco), and George Grohwin (a resident of San Francisco), we provide the following comment on the Housing Element from SARATOGA.



Issue

- The Housing Element from SARATOGA fails to adequately analyze compliance with one of the state's fundamental streamlining laws.
- Under PRC 21080.1 & 21080.2, a lead agency must determine if a housing development is exempt from CEQA within 30 days of completeness, or if an EIR or other CEQA document will be required.
- For CEQA-exempt housing, this CEQA determination then triggers a 60-day approval clock (with deemed approved remedies) under the Permit Streamlining Act. Thus, if state housing laws were followed, CEQA-exempt housing projects should generally receive approvals in about 120 days.
 1. 30 days to determine completeness
 2. 30 days for CEQA review
 3. 60 days for approval.
- SARATOGA does not appear to issue determinations of CEQA-exemption within 30 days of completeness. As a result, **builders and the public are denied the right to the timely approval of housing**. Additionally, the builders are forced into an unreasonable bargaining position, as they lack the "deemed approved" options they should have. This improperly empowers jurisdictions to treat builders arbitrarily in the entitlement process.
- Moreover, SARATOGA has no apparent good-faith basis for delaying CEQA-exemption determinations beyond the allowance of Public Resources Code 21080.1 & 21080.2. In

the vast majority of instances, these exemptions are uncontested and straightforward.

Recommendation

- The Housing Element from SARATOGA should include an analysis of compliance in its approval process with PRC 21080.1 & 21080.2.
- The Housing Element from SARATOGA should add a program to specify (i) who is responsible for making the CEQA determination of PRC 21080.1, specify (ii) that their decision will be made within the timeframe permitted by PRC 21080.2, and specify that (iii), when they determine a project is exempt from CEQA, their determination triggers the Permit Streamlining Act (PSA) 60-day deadline (Gov. Code 65950(a)(5)). If existing local practices or regulations are incompatible with these state laws, the program should commit to enacting reforms necessary to achieve compliance within a reasonable and definite timeline.

HCD Technical Assistance Letter

- The CEQA issues mentioned herein are discussed in the June 3, 2022 Technical Assistance letter sent to Berkeley by Shannan West, Housing Accountability Unit Chief (copy included below).
- In the letter, HCD notes that Berkeley had been issuing “recommendations” of CEQA-exemption and that the actual “determinations” were made more than 30 days beyond the completeness date. HCD notes that such practice was in violation of PRC 21080.1 & 21080.2 and “may act as a governmental constraint on housing.”

**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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June 3, 2022

Sharon Gong, Senior Planner
City of Berkeley
1947 Center Street, 2nd Floor
Berkeley, CA 94704

Dear Sharon Gong:

RE: Berkeley – Letter of Technical Assistance

The purpose of this letter is to provide technical assistance to the City of Berkeley (City). The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) has become aware of potential conflicts between the practices of the City's Zoning Adjustments Board (ZAB) concerning determinations for projects determined to be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and timelines pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.1, subdivision (a), and Public Resources Code section 21080.2. HCD is concerned that these actions may act as a governmental constraint on housing development and requests the City review the CEQA determination process in Berkeley's 6th Cycle Housing Element and include programs to mitigate or remove constraints as necessary.

Obligations Under Public Resources Code sections 21080.1 & 21080.2

HCD has been made aware of at least five development applications where the final ZAB determination was made more than 30 days after the relevant permit was determined to be complete. As the City is aware, under the Public Resources Code, a lead agency must make a determination under CEQA for projects exempt from environmental review within 30 days of a project application being deemed complete. These provisions are critical to meeting the Permit Streamlining Act requirement set in Government Code section 65950, subdivision (a) (5), and generally facilitate the processing of housing developments.

6th Cycle Housing Element

As Berkeley is updating its 6th Cycle Housing Element, the City must describe and analyze the permit process from application to approvals, including a discussion on timeframes for each step in the process, impediments, and how it addresses the

Sharon Gong, Senior Planner
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application of state law on application processing pursuant to Government Code section 65583, subdivision (a)(5). In addition, the element must also demonstrate local efforts to remove governmental constraints that hinder the locality from meeting its share of the regional housing need and include program actions to remove or mitigate identified constraints pursuant to Government Code section 65583, subdivision (c)(3). Excessive CEQA review timeframes can delay project approval and pose a constraint to the development of housing and should be reviewed as part of the City's housing element update.

Conclusion

HCD understands that the City is currently reviewing its compliance with these provisions and is looking at strategies to transparently document the process to ensure timely approval of CEQA determinations and provide additional transparency. HCD supports these efforts and encourages the City to take meaningful steps to ensure that its processes comply with provisions of state housing law.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Kevin Hefner at Kevin.Hefner@hcd.ca.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannan West". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shannan West
Housing Accountability Unit Chief