



March 5, 2019

The Honorable Scott Wiener
California State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

Re: SB 50 (Wiener) Planning and zoning: housing development: incentives – OPPOSE

Dear Senator Wiener,

I am writing to you on behalf of the California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA) to oppose SB 50. CARA is California's largest grassroots senior advocacy organization, representing over 1,000,000 seniors and their families through our 270 affiliated organizations. Affordable housing is one of our major priorities.

SB 50 interferes with thoughtful and responsible city planning required for sustainable development. Indeed, this bill is full of possibilities for developers to hijack city planning. It would allow developers to build much denser, taller housing near major transit hubs and transit corridors by exempting "transit-rich housing projects" from local regulations concerning zoning, density, floor area ratio, setbacks, design guidelines, and parking requirements.

SB 50 essentially eliminates grass roots participation in the majority of local land use planning decisions by superimposing a new 'as of right' project definition, "Job-rich housing project", which is based on fluctuating municipal conditions. Companies open and close and move, but high-density land use entitlements based on snapshots in time may be granted in perpetuity through this proposed law.

FAR, or floor area ratio, is a city's basic tool to control height and bulk of buildings. Use is a city's basic tool to determine what goes in those buildings. Moving FAR and use to Sacramento guts local planning processes. By doing this, SB 50 allows state government code to eviscerate local planning statewide and thereby increases financialization of land use; intensifies inequality; encourages predatory speculative activity; and masks massive wealth transfer by shifting property ownership opportunities away from small owners to corporate investors.

The bill forces cities to permit over the counter larger multi-family residential structures in "transit-rich" zones, regardless of limitations imposed by local community plans, specific plans, zoning restrictions or jurisdiction boundaries; it also forces cities to allow such

structures near “jobs-rich projects,” to be determined not on the local level but by State agencies in Sacramento. NCs and CCs would not get an opportunity to review or comment. This state control could be expanded without warning.

Some of these areas, which are close to transit stops, consist of disadvantaged communities that already face extreme pressure from gentrification. By imposing much higher density and taking over zoning from local governments, the bill could result in these communities losing protections that prevent economic pressures from driving people out of their homes, replacing single-family homes or rental properties with luxury units that are not available to people with moderate or low incomes. The increase in the cost of land from new luxury units can increase rents that further displacement.

SB 50 would benefit developers who profit from unlimited high-end housing production, without solving the need for affordable housing. Furthermore, it would foster displacement of existing residents. This bill makes no accommodation to protect disadvantaged residents including many seniors and people with disabilities who cannot afford to move.

Therefore, SB 50 could pose a significant threat to local control, democracy, and public engagement. Immense developments could be approved with hardly any public input.

For these reasons, CARA opposes SB 50 as written.

Sincerely,



Hene Kelly,
Legislative Director
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