



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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NEWS RELEASE



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MAJOR COUNTY LAND USE, HOUSING UPDATES FINALIZED

The County of Santa Cruz is pleased to announce the completion of the County's 6th Cycle Housing Element and Sustainability Policy and Regulatory Update ("Sustainability Update"), marking the most significant improvements to land use and housing policy in the unincorporated area of Santa Cruz County in decades.

Reviewed by the Board of Supervisors Tuesday after approval by the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Housing Element meets State mandates to address local housing needs through efficient and sustainable land use policies intended to foster adequate housing supply for residents of all income levels in the community. The Sustainability Update – the first major General Plan update in nearly 30 years – received final endorsement by the Coastal Commission in March following Board approval in December 2022.

The new General Plan, including its Housing Element, will help the County achieve its strategic goals by making neighborhoods more vibrant and transit-friendly, and increasing housing options including affordable housing. The County's extraordinary lack of available housing -- only one new market-rate rental apartment development has been built in the unincorporated area in over two decades, and just 7 percent of housing stock in the unincorporated area was built in the last quarter-century -- has led to high home prices and rents, forcing out families and creating severe recruitment difficulties for local schools, health care providers, public safety agencies and businesses seeking to create the workforce needed to make Santa Cruz County a great place to live, work and play.

The Sustainability Policy will guide land use in the unincorporated area, which includes approximately half the County's population. The Sustainability Update incorporates updated State laws and includes a modernization of the County Code, new Design Guidelines, and policies on housing production, transportation, agriculture and resource conservation, commercial development, community services, sustainable communities and environmental justice, and is intended to create healthy, walkable neighborhoods, a vibrant economy, enhanced transportation options and a better quality of life while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting the environment and fostering justice and equity.

The 6th Cycle Housing Element addresses the ongoing housing crisis through policies and programs to meet existing and projected local housing needs through 2031. New housing is also expected to bring new revenues for needed infrastructure improvements and resiliency.