

Letters to the Editor

How does the City of Merced still find itself non-compliant?

Dear Editor,

Despite hiring two consultants to prepare the Draft Housing Element (which was due Jan. 31, 2024), on Nov. 7, 2024 the City of Merced received a highly detailed 10-page notice of non-compliance from the State of California Department of Housing and Community Development.

The city was reminded, its 6th cycle housing element was due January 31, 2024 and that the 5th cycle housing element no longer satisfies statutory requirements. The state also warned, if the City does not adopt a compliant housing element within one year from the statutory deadline, the element cannot be found in substantial compliance until all necessary rezones are completed.

The state findings concluded the draft Housing Element lacked meaningful data, lacked meaningful analysis, no measures of progress towards meeting affordable housing requirements and no comprehensive action plan to meet the community housing need.

What justification can there be for putting the community at risk like this? Why should the community be concerned about this non-compliance?

Several federal, state, and regional funding programs consider housing element compliance as an eligibility or ranking criteria.

The community consistently calls for more affordable housing. The solution lies in upzoning around the downtown High Speed Rail Station Area to allow for Housing as a planned Transit Oriented

Development strategy. Upzoning replaces restrictive land use policy with zoning codes that allows taller and denser housing; i.e., building over parking lots and in-fill development on vacant commercial lots. This is the level of vision and action planning the state is looking for in the Housing Element Plan.

The community will benefit from the Planning Commission and City Council conducting critical thinking on value per acre analysis to increase housing supply and in turn secure financial solvency for infrastructure maintenance. There are proven housing solutions available; now just might be the time to start local conversations on how to integrate them into the General Plan to make the community grant eligible.

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