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How to ease California housing crisis in four easy steps, and four more that are a little harder

BY GUEST COMMENTARY



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 New home construction needs a boost from the Legislature. (File photo.)



By Dan Dunmoyer, Special to CalMatters

The [Construction Industry Research Board Report](#) should be a wakeup call to California lawmakers.

The report shows that 110,218 housing unit permits were issued in 2019, a 7% decrease from the prior year.

This decrease marks the first statistical drop in permit activity for new residential construction in California in 10 years," the report says.

Long standing state regulations continue to make it difficult to build. Local governments add fees unrelated to housing, and unnecessary litigation delays. It all adds up to immense costs and complexities faced by homebuilders when they try to build housing for all in California.

In an effort to jump start legislative action and help address Gov. Gavin Newsom's housing construction goals, the California Building Industry Association has released legislative proposals that, if passed by the legislature in 2020, will increase housing production in the short and long term.

The "[Housing for All](#)," agenda is comprised of eight legislative solutions, the first four which are relatively easy technical fixes, and will have a positive impact on the housing crisis.

- California Environmental Quality Act. The Legislature should require disclosure of individuals who file lawsuits seeking to block new construction.
- Certificates of occupancy. Local governments should be required to allow occupancy of already constructed housing.
- Subdivision bonds. Local governments should be required to follow the law and reduce housing costs by efficiently reducing bond funds.
- Enforcement. The legislature should give California's Department of Housing and Community Development more authority and staffing resources to hold local governments accountable to existing law.

Those steps are easy, or ought to be. Others will be harder.



- Local impact fees. The responsibility for funding infrastructure should be a combination of holistic oversight of fees with new approaches to funding.
- Regional Housing Needs Assessment reform: The Legislature should provide incentive for local governments to meet their Regional Housing Needs Assessment obligation.
- California Environmental Quality Act, 2.0. The process for complying with the environmental quality act must be reformed to streamline appeals and speed up housing production so that multiple lawsuits over the same project are not allowed, One is enough.
- City and county requirements. Local governments should be incentivized to rethink outdated zoning restrictions, project approval processes and lot-use restrictions.

Gov. Newsom laid out ambitious housing goals when he took office in January 2019. Homebuilders appreciate the challenges legislators face as they seek short- and long-term solutions to the state's diverse housing needs. Some of these solutions might be tough for some legislators to support. But they offer California a clear way forward. Let's get to work building [Housing for All California](#).

Dan Dunmoyer is president and chief executive officer of the California Building Industry Association, ddunmoyer@cbia.org. He wrote this commentary for CalMatters.



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