

Who should make land use decisions - local or state government?

Harlan Strickland

There is growing sentiment around the state, shared by city and county officials as well as average citizens, for a state initiative to take local land use decision making back from Sacramento. Passage of the initiative would be a major step with many consequences affecting cities and counties around the state far into the future, much like Prop 13 continues to affect us today. Thousand Friends has not taken a position on the idea, but Thousand Friends would very much like to hear your thoughts.

Over the past several years, there have been more than a hundred bills passed imposing the state's will on local communities to increase housing. At the most fundamental level, the current regime of state mandates has not produced the housing results promised, even though it has negatively affected the quality of life and overall character of many cities around the state. The reason is that developers build housing, not cities. Developers are businesspeople, and though cities have been forced to rezone their land for increased housing, only median- or higher-priced housing is profitable for developers, and so affordable housing gets only modest attention.

Another concern is economic – for cities. After Prop 13, the net annual general fund revenue for a residence with long-term ownership is only a fraction of what the city spends for all the services it must provide for its residents. For a new home, or one that changes hands and has its assessed value reflect the current market, a median-priced residential unit barely covers the city's expenditures – only a few hundred dollars - depending on the Tax Rate Area.

Martinez needs money, and Measure D (roads only – 0.5% sales tax, currently around \$4.5M) expires in 2031, and Measure X (general fund - 0.5% sales tax, currently around \$4.5M) is set to expire around 2033. In built-out Martinez, land that can be used for businesses to boost general fund revenue, such as are mentioned at the very end of General Plan 1035's Land Use Element, is fast disappearing. Your property tax bill may look large, but a city's general fund only

sees a fraction of the 1% ad valorem tax, while providing something like \$800 to \$1000 in services for every resident. Remote work will reduce commute traffic and sales tax leakage, but will give the substantial sales tax revenue generated by that remote work to the community where that business is actually located.

And traffic ... even though Hwy 4 turns into a parking lot in one direction twice a day (housing without corresponding jobs in east county), the combined RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Allocation) mandate for Pittsburg, Antioch, Oakley and Brentwood is still 7613 units, or potentially over 30,000 additional vehicle trips per workday.

Let us know what you think! thousandfriendsofmartinez@outlook.com

More information:

Recent draft of initiative #23-0011:

<https://ourneighborhoodvoices.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Our-Neighborhood-Voices-Initiative-July-2023.pdf>

Follow Endorse/Our List of Endorsers to see the many officials endorsing the initiative.

Another group focused on quality of life and affordable housing, also endorsing the initiative:

<https://www.livablecalifornia.org/>

Why is there a housing shortage here, but not in Detroit?:

Enrico Moretti, "The New Geography of Jobs"

General state of the nation and how we got to where we are today:

Scott Galloway, "Adrift: America in 100 Charts"