



Housing, Land Use and Development Lectureship & White Paper

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WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THIS TOPIC

Housing in California is unaffordable to most households. Limited construction relative to robust job growth is one of the main causes.

WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS

This study describes how local opposition to new housing construction suppresses new housing supply, and does so in an unequal way across metropolitan areas. I show that the concerns associated with new construction are widespread, but that our planning system grants unequal opportunities to act on these motivations. I also highlight the fact that wealthy neighborhoods have prevented new development within their communities, while benefiting from metropolitan growth in general. The study outlines strong support and general guidance for increased state intervention in local planning decisions, along with suggestions for specific changes to California's planning system.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE & POLICY

This white paper should motivate and guide action on the part of the state government to address one cause of the housing crisis.

Understanding and Challenging Opposition to Housing Construction in California's Urban Areas

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Housing affordability is one of the most pressing issues facing California. In the intense public debate over how to make housing affordable, the role of new supply is a key point of contention despite evidence demonstrating that supply constraints—low-density zoning chief among them—are a core cause of increasing housing costs. Many California residents resist new housing development, especially in their own neighborhoods. This white paper provides background on this opposition and a set of policy recommendations for the state government to address it. I first describe how limiting new construction makes all housing less affordable, exacerbates spatial inequalities, and harms the state's economic productivity and environment. I then discuss the motivations for opposing more intensive land use, and clarify the way the role of new housing supply in shaping rents is misunderstood in public debates. I also list the various tactics used to block housing projects, demonstrating just how many veto points present in our current system. I conclude with several proposals for reform that have potential to reduce the power of local opposition to new housing construction. The state should take action by enforcing and enhancing existing laws, pushing local planning agencies to represent more people more equally, providing information for public discussion, and developing ways to make planning decisions at a metropolitan, not neighborhood scale.

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