

What is a Housing Element?

The Housing Element is a plan to ensure that decent, safe, and affordable housing is provided for all Fairfield residents over the next eight years. Every city and county in California is required to update their Housing Element every eight years.

What does it contain?

State law defines the specific topics that must be covered, including:

- A summary of the population and housing characteristics that contribute to the present and future housing need in Fairfield.
- An analysis of any obstacles to affordable housing production in the community.
- An evaluation of the existing Housing Element.
- An inventory of sites to accommodate Fairfield’s identified housing need.
- Programs to promote housing opportunities for all Fairfield residents.
- Goals, objectives, and policies, defining the community’s position on various housing issues and setting measurable targets for meeting housing needs.
- An action plan, identifying the specific steps the community will take to implement its housing policies.

Once complete, the Housing Element must be submitted to the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) for certification.

How does the Housing Element fit with the General Plan update (Fairfield Forward 2050)?

The Housing Element is one of seven required elements of the General Plan. Fairfield’s General Plan effort, called Fairfield Forward 2050, covers a longer period than the Housing Element and will likely identify additional opportunities to create more mixed-use neighborhoods and develop new housing beyond the Housing Element’s eight-year timeframe. The General Plan Update is happening simultaneously as the Housing Element and will be consistent with its policies and actions.

What is a RHNA? How much housing does Fairfield have to plan for?

California state law recognizes that local governments play a vital role in developing affordable housing. In 1969, the state required that all California cities, towns and counties must plan for the housing needs of our residents—regardless of income.

This state requirement is called the Regional Housing Needs Allocation, or RHNA. The RHNA process determines how many new homes, and the affordability of those homes, each local government must plan for in its Housing Element every eight years. This current Housing Element update covers the 6th cycle RHNA and plans for housing needs from 2023 to 2031.

For the 6th Cycle RHNA, all seven incorporated cities and unincorporated Solano County chose to form a subregional entity. They designated the City County Coordinating Council (4Cs) to serve as the representative body and allocate the number of housing units by income category for each jurisdiction. The number of units at the affordability levels are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Final Solano County Jurisdictional Allocation By Income Tier

Jurisdiction	Affordability Tier				Total
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	Above Moderate	
City of Benicia	212	127	123	288	750
City of Dixon	113	62	62	179	416
City of Fairfield	792	464	539	1,274	3,069
City of Rio Vista	79	41	50	157	327
City of Suisun	160	95	98	267	620
City of Vacaville	677	404	409	1,105	2,595
City of Vallejo	690	369	495	1,346	2,900
Unincorporated Solano County	80	50	56	129	315
Total	2,803	1,612	1,832	4,745	10,992



Are cities and counties required to build new housing?

The State does not require cities and counties to actually build the housing necessary to meet the community's needs. However, it does require that each community adopt policies and programs to support housing development, as well as designate adequate land at appropriate densities to meet the housing needs.



What is “affordable” housing?

Generally, affordable housing is housing that a household can pay for, while still having money left over for other necessities like food, transportation, and health care. That means that what's considered “affordable” depends on a household's income. The government typically defines housing as affordable when it consumes no more than 30 percent of a household's income.

Income categories are based on area median income (AMI), which is the median family income for a geographical area. Income limits are used to determine eligibility for many state and federal housing assistance programs.



Solano County's AMI for a family of four is \$99,300. Affordability is shown below:

RHNA Category	Extremely Low (<30% AMI)	Very Low (30-50% AMI)	Low (50-80% AMI)	Moderate (80-120% AMI)	Above Moderate (<120% AMI)
Income	Less than \$29,150	\$29,150 to \$48,550	\$48,551 to \$77,600	\$77,601 to \$119,150	Over \$119,150

How were housing sites chosen?

The housing sites inventory includes projects that are already approved for development/under construction (called “pipeline” sites), and sites that are vacant and underutilized (where the land value is worth more than the building, or where the building only occupies a small part of the land) that are zoned to allow housing. Many of these opportunity sites are in the Heart of Fairfield and Train Station specific plan areas in Central Fairfield, areas where significant City investment and new development at various income levels is planned to occur.

Housing elements are also required to plan for inclusion by affirmatively further fair housing. Under state law, cities can't perpetuate historic patterns of racial segregation when planning for future housing. Instead, housing elements must actively encourage more integrated, inclusive communities, and plan for affordable housing growth in neighborhoods with more resources.

The State has certain requirements for lower income housing sites, including parcel size, allowable density (sites must allow 30 dwelling units per acre generally, known as the “default density”), and location away from environmental hazard areas, among other criteria. As a result, the sites inventory identifies sites to rezone to geographically distribute affordable housing and affirmatively further fair housing.

What actions will the City take to address affordability, homelessness, and increase different types of housing?

The City's Housing Action Plan outlines goals, policies, programs, and actions the City will take to meet its housing needs. Programs include:

- Affordable Housing Strategy, including actions to increase funding for affordable housing and homeownership
- Development Incentives, Assistance, and Streamlining, including actions to promote infill and small lot consolidation, design standards and support for more diverse housing types, and streamlining of permits for affordable housing
- Long-term housing affordability and preservation strategies for units that receive certain funding sources
- Rehabilitation loans
- Incentives for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)
- Changes to the Zoning code to facilitate housing development, particularly in moderately resourced areas, and to promote smaller unit types that are more affordable by design
- Housing for special needs, including for people with disabilities, older adults, farmworkers, and military personnel
- Continuum of Care support and zoning changes to promote development of housing types supportive for individuals experiencing homelessness
- Energy conservation and efficiency opportunities
- Affirmatively furthering fair housing actions, including through programs described above, and in partnership with Fair Housing Advocates of Northern California.



What is the timeline?

Bay Area jurisdictions must certify their Housing Elements by January 31, 2023, with a 120-day grace period for approval.

The draft Housing Element was published on August 22, 2022. After the 30-day public review period (which ends on September 22, 2022), the City will address comments and send the Housing Element to California Housing and Community Development (HCD). HCD will then have 90 days to provide feedback. Additional public review will occur after the City addresses HCD's comments, as well as during decisionmaker meetings to adopt the Element in Winter of 2022 and Spring of 2023.

The state-mandated deadline for Housing Element is critical, otherwise the City can lose funding and land use control. While the Housing Element will be completed in Winter 2022 or Spring 2023, community input related to housing after this period will be incorporated into the General Plan update.



How can I give input?

To read the draft Element and submit comments, please visit www.fairfieldforward.com/housing-element. Please submit comments and questions by email to Associate Planner Jessie Hernandez at jhernandez@fairfield.ca.gov by September 22, 2022.