

The first (and probably only) debate in the California governor's race happened [earlier this week](#) between Democratic nominee Gavin Newsom and Republican nominee John Cox. Appropriately enough both candidates were asked how they were going to address the state's housing crisis. Newsom's response was an ambitious target of 500,000 new homes/year through 2025 (far higher than current levels) through subsidies, and changing the incentives for local governments to zone for more housing. (For more details, look [here](#).)

On the other hand, John Cox repeated his prior criticism of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as the main obstacle to housing production in the state, and [promised reform that would eliminate those obstacles](#). Interestingly, when asked about local land-use regulation and its role in constraining housing production, Cox called the power that local governments have "[appropriate](#)."

This is similar to statements Cox made this summer that I [blogged about](#), where he called for reducing regulation while also opposing SB 827, a legislative proposal that would have significantly reduced local land-use restrictions on dense residential development near transit lines.

As I've blogged about before, it's quite possible that Cox has this precisely backward - that the main obstacle to housing production in California is [not CEQA processes or litigation](#), but instead local land-use regulation. This is a question that a research team that I'm part of is focusing on as we examine the local land-use regulatory process for housing production in California. For instance, [as our first report indicated](#), the five Bay Area local governments we studied impose some sort of discretionary review on almost all residential development within their borders, rather than allowing that development "by right" - it is that decision to impose discretionary review that in turn triggers CEQA. In addition, local governments that want to facilitate land-use development have ways to do streamlined review for CEQA analyses and use it - those that don't want land-use development can use their zoning processes to kill development, regardless of CEQA.

Again, our results are still tentative, and we are still collecting data - I'm looking forward to the information we collect from our additional case studies in the Los Angeles area and elsewhere statewide, and I'll keep our readers posted on what those results show.