

NIMBY Proposal To Address Housing Crisis

The NIMBYs have won a battle:

> A high-profile bill that would have increased home building near mass transit and in single-family home neighborhoods across California has been killed for the year, ending a major battle over how to address the state's housing affordability crisis that has attracted attention nationwide.
>
> Senate Bill 50 by Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) would have required cities to allow four- to five-story apartment complexes near rail stations and four or more homes on land zoned only for single-family homes across Los Angeles, San Francisco, Silicon Valley and much of the rest of California.
>
> The measure would have radically altered the state's growth patterns to direct significant new development toward urban areas, something the bill's backers said was necessary to make housing more affordable and to

meet the state's goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

But opponents of the legislation argued that changes under SB 50 would have unalterably diminished the quality of life in many California neighborhoods dominated by single-family home development. Others against the bill worried that its efforts to spur building would displace low-income residents already threatened by the state's high housing costs.

The question now is how the negotiations proceed for the next several months.



SB 50 Author Scott Wiener: Bash Your Head Against The Legislature

State Senator Anthony Portantino (D-La Canada) whom I know and have a lot of respect for, suspended the bill because it will allow the construction of multifamily units in single-family areas. That's the whole point: preserving single-family neighborhoods as wholly single-family neighborhoods means either that 1) we don't solve the housing crisis; or 2) we do so by sprawling out further and worsening climate change. If the opposition simply says, "no changes to single-family neighborhoods," as Los Angeles NIMBY-In-Chief Councilmember Paul Koretz insists, then they are effectively saying, "I've got mine, and who cares about the rest of

you.”

That said, the issues are complex. Many on the left worry that upzoned areas could lead to more gentrification. I have yet to find a single reputable study linking upzoning to displacement: indeed, the best research sees no link between *gentrification* and displacement at all; because low-income people move so much anyway, gentrification does nothing to their already high rates of displacement. But there might be ways of protecting communities that, to use the technical term, have gotten screwed for decades and aren’t willing to take some academic’s word for it. Wiener has tried this by giving “sensitive communities” a five-year exemption to the requirements, and time to come up with a better idea, but advocates are skeptical that are adequately inclusive of some neighborhoods.



Los Angeles NIMBY-In-Chief Paul Koretz: I’ve Got Mine, Jack

One provision of the amended bill that I particularly liked allowed building quadruplexes in single-family zones (although not tearing down single-family homes to build them: you have to either add on or do it in an empty lot). This might be a way to square the circle of people fearing “Manhattanization,” which had nothing to do with this bill, but was an easy argument for NIMBYs and demagogues like the AIDS Healthcare Foundation.

At this point, the big negotiating point in my view will concern inclusionary requirements. They are weak to the point of nonexistent in the current draft, and that must change. It will be a face-off: developers will insist that one more drop of an inclusionary requirement will bankrupt them, which should not be taken seriously, and advocates for low-income people will insist on tougher requirements. One fix that could also be useful is including a California version of Massachusetts' famous Anti-Snob Zoning law, which allows for state overrides of local denials of affordable housing projects, and broader CEQA exemptions for infill affordable projects.

When Wiener proposed his initial version of this bill at the beginning of 2018, I predicted that there was no way it would pass in its then-current form — an easy prediction that was quickly confirmed. But this fight isn't over yet, either: at this stage, it is beyond obvious that left to themselves, California's cities simply will not fix this problem on their own. And that will also mean that we will also be unable to meet the state's climate goals. This problem is not going away, no matter what the Housing Denialists say.