

California faces a dual crisis: a massive housing shortage leading to displacement and spiraling economic inequality; and an increase in driving miles and related greenhouse gas emissions which threaten to undermine the state's progress achieving its climate goals. Both of these crises were solidly addressed in Sen. Scott Wiener's [SB 50](#), which seeks to ease local restrictions on housing development near transit and jobs, in part so more residents can access transit and shorter commutes.

The bill sailed through its first two policy committees, with bipartisan support and only one vote against it in each. Labor unions, business groups, and key environmental groups like NRDC supported it. Yet as Jonathan [posted](#) yesterday, Sen. Anthony Portantino, chair of the appropriations committee, unilaterally suspended the bill until January next year.

Sen. Portantino's political career started out in the affluent Los Angeles suburb of La Cañada Flintridge, a community of mostly upper income homeowners. Residents' general state of housing security contrasts sharply with the rest of the region, with the city's average household income in 2015 at \$214,496, compared to a median income in Los Angeles County that year of \$54,510. The city was also [ranked](#) the 71st wealthiest city in the U.S. by Bloomberg. In short, it is a community with residents who aren't likely to feel the brunt of the housing affordability crisis and in fact are likely benefiting from it through increased property values.

Sen. Portantino's arguments against the bill cited some familiar objections, such as the bill would increase gentrification (false: new construction under the bill would almost [exclusively occur](#) in high-income areas), it's one-size-fits-all (false: it is [tailored](#) to counties by population and areas by transit frequency, with the exception of a statewide provision permitting fourplex renovations), and that it will discourage transit expansion if a new rail line would come with strings attached on land use (to which the obvious response is: why would we want to spend taxpayer dollars on expensive transit lines to low-density communities?).

He also argued that incentives would work better to convince local governments to allow more housing. Yet what incentives does Sen. Portantino and others who espouse this view believe will work to induce city councils in upscale communities like Palo Alto, Beverly Hills and La Cañada Flintridge to allow multifamily housing, particularly for a variety for income levels? These are wealthy communities that will not be moved by the prospect of more state dollars. Indeed, in recent years, some of them (like Corte Madera in Marin County) even tried to [secede](#) from regional transportation agencies to avoid having to comply with state mandates to build low-income housing — that's right, they'd rather sacrifice state transportation dollars than live next to low-income people.

Sen. Portantino's unilateral action to hold the bill until next year now places the burden on Senate president Toni Atkins to override this decision and allow SB 50 a vote by the full senate. It also places a burden on Governor Newsom, who has pledged to build 3.5 million housing units in the state and expressed tentative support for the concept of SB 50. Yet as UCLA's Luskin Center [documented](#), the state's current zoning only allows for 2.8 million units, and most of those units are likely in places where we wouldn't want to see new growth, such as in far-flung, fire-prone regions. In short, the Governor cannot achieve his signature campaign goal without significant statewide upzoning, as SB 50 would produce.

Will state leaders step up to resuscitate to the bill? Is it too late at this point? Or will those currently suffering from housing insecurity and lack of affordable places to live have to wait until next year for a solution, when an upcoming election may darken its prospects for passage? Certainly other bills in Sacramento seek to address aspects of the housing shortage, but only SB 50 presented a comprehensive, meaningful solution to a crisis that is well past time to solve in this state.