



2023-2031 City of Cotati Housing Element Update Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q1: What is a Housing Element?

A: Under State law, all local governments in California, including cities, are required to adequately plan to meet the housing needs of everyone in the community by adopting a Housing Element as part of their General Plan. The Housing Element identifies housing conditions and needs and establishes the goals, objectives, and policies that are the foundation of the City's housing strategy to meet these needs.

Q2: Does the City of Cotati currently have a Housing Element? Why does it need to be updated?

A: Yes. The City of Cotati currently has an adopted Housing Element which was intended to address the community's housing needs from 2015-2023. State law requires local governments to update their Housing Element every eight years to periodically address the changing housing needs of their communities, to establish action plans to meet those goals, and to report on progress toward meeting those goals.

Cotati's 2015-2023 Housing Element includes the following six goals:

- Goal 1: Conserve and improve the existing housing stock to provide adequate, safe, and decent housing for all Cotati residents.
- Goal 2: Provide adequate sites to accommodate the housing needs of all economic segments of the community
- Goal 3: Expand affordable housing opportunities for lower income households and persons with special housing needs, including seniors, disabled persons, large households, and homeless persons and families
- Goal 4: Promote housing opportunities for all persons regardless of race, gender, age, marital status, ancestry, national origin, color, or sexual orientation
- Goal 5: Promote energy efficiency and conservation in residential development
- Goal 6: Ensure public participation in the development of the City's housing policies

The preparation of an updated Housing Element provides an opportunity to revisit these goals, policies, and programs to determine how they might be improved to better fit the needs of the community.

Q3: What is included in a Housing Element?

A: The components of a Housing Element are largely dictated by the State and typically must:

- Provide goals, policies, quantified objectives and scheduled programs to preserve, improve and develop housing;
- Identify and analyze existing and projected housing needs for all economic segments of the community;
- Identify adequate sites that are zoned and available within the 8-year housing cycle to meet the city's fair share of regional housing needs at all income levels;
- Be certified (approved) by the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) as complying with state law; and
- Be internally consistent with other parts of the General Plan (meeting this requirement is critical to having a legally adequate General Plan).

Q4: Why is it important to have a Housing Element?

A: The State has declared that “the availability of housing is a matter of vital statewide importance and the attainment of decent housing and a suitable living environment for all Californians is a priority of the highest order” (Gov. § Code 65580). At the local level, the Housing Element allows cities to prepare a community-specific approach to “how” and “where” housing will be addressed to meet the needs of the community.

Q5: What is the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA)?

A: Since 1969, California has required that all local governments adequately plan to meet the housing needs of everyone in their communities. To meet this requirement, each city or county must develop a Housing Element as part of its General Plan (the local government’s long-range blueprint for growth) that shows how it will meet its community’s housing needs. There are many laws that govern this process, and collectively they are known as Housing Element Law. The Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) process is the part of Housing Element Law used to determine how many new homes, and the affordability levels of those homes, each local government must plan for in its Housing Element. This process is repeated every eight years, and for this 6th Cycle, the Bay Area is planning for the period from 2023 to 2031.

Q6: Who is responsible for RHNA?

A: Responsibility for completing RHNA is shared among state, regional, and local governments. The role of the State is to identify the total number of homes which each region in California must plan for, in order to meet the housing needs of people across the full spectrum of income levels, from very low-income households all the way to market rate housing. This is developed by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and is known as the Regional Housing Needs Determination (RHND). The role of the regional government is to allocate a share of the RHND to each local jurisdiction in the region. As the Council of Governments (COG) for the nine-county Bay Area, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) is responsible for developing the methodology for sharing the RHND among all cities, towns, and counties in the region. ABAG does this in conjunction with a committee of elected officials, city and county staff, and stakeholders called the Housing Methodology Committee (HMC). The role of local governments is to participate in the development of the allocation methodology and to update their Housing Elements and local zoning to show how they will accommodate their share of the RHND, following the adoption of the RHNA methodology.

Q8: How was ABAG’s RHNA methodology developed?

A: At its core, RHNA is about connecting regional housing needs with the local planning process and ensuring local Housing Elements work together to address regional housing challenges. Working with the Housing Methodology Committee, ABAG developed a methodology, or formula, that shares responsibility for accommodating the Bay Area’s Regional Housing Needs Determination (RHND) by quantifying the number of housing units, separated into four income categories, that will be assigned to each city, town, and county to incorporate into their Housing Element.

Q9: Based on ABAG’s draft RHNA methodology, what will be Cotati’s fair share of RHNA?

ABAG’s proposed RHNA methodology is not yet final. The ABAG Executive Board is anticipated to adopt a final RHNA methodology in December 2021, following California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) review and an appeal period.

Jurisdiction	VERY LOW INCOME (<50% of Area Median Income)	LOW INCOME (50-80% of Area Median Income)	MODERATE INCOME (80-120% of Area Median Income)	ABOVE MODERATE INCOME (>120% of Area Median Income)	TOTAL
SOLANO COUNTY					
Benicia	203	117	135	351	806
Dixon	91	53	57	146	347
Fairfield	778	447	508	1,314	3,047
Rio Vista	127	73	76	197	473
Suisun City	156	90	101	264	611
Unincorporated Solano	237	137	149	385	908
Vacaville	487	279	305	791	1,862
Vallejo	724	416	501	1,297	2,938
SONOMA COUNTY					
Cloverdale	74	43	45	116	278
Cotati	60	34	39	101	234
Healdsburg	190	109	49	128	476
Petaluma	499	288	313	810	1,910
Rohnert Park	399	230	265	686	1,580
Santa Rosa	1,218	701	771	1,995	4,685
Sebastopol	55	31	35	92	213
Sonoma	83	48	50	130	311
Unincorporated Sonoma	1,036	596	627	1,622	3,881
Windsor	385	222	108	279	994
TOTAL	114,442	65,892	72,712	188,130	441,176

Some totals may differ +/- 2 units compared to information presented to the ABAG Executive Board in January 2021 as a result of corrections to fix rounding errors in the January materials.

Q10: How does a City demonstrate it has sufficiently zoned sites to accommodate RHNA?

A: A local jurisdiction must demonstrate it has adequate capacity to accommodate its fair share of the region’s RHND in its Housing Element through the preparation of a “site inventory.” The purpose of a site inventory is to identify and analyze specific land that is available and suitable for new or intensified residential development in order to determine the jurisdiction’s capacity to accommodate residential development and reconcile that capacity with the jurisdiction’s RHNA. The available and suitable sites are referred to as “adequate sites” or sometimes, “Housing Opportunity Sites.” Sites are suitable for residential development if zoned appropriately and available for residential use during the planning

period. If the inventory demonstrates that there are insufficient sites to accommodate the RHNA for each income category within a jurisdiction, the inventory must identify sites for rezoning to be included in a housing element program to identify and make available additional an adequate number of additional sites to accommodate those housing needs early within the planning period.

