



Summer 2026

CEQA UNDER **ATTACK**

The central pillar of environmental protection in the state, the California Environmental Quality Act, is under attack. Prop 45 on the November 2026 ballot would limit environmental review of development impacts, limit mitigation, and tie the hands of judges so they can no longer step in to halt environmentally harmful construction activities.

CEQA distinguishes California as a state that recognizes and values nature and the need to curb pollution. Its requirement to study development impacts, including loss of prime farmland, often brings critical information to light. Its requirement to mitigate significant impacts has averted or lessened noxious outcomes. For example, CEQA studies have

discovered landslides and contaminated soils, and identified development impacts such as traffic, flooding, toxic air, and water pollution that could then be mitigated. If approved by voters, Prop 45 will eliminate environmental safeguards for large-scale projects resulting in more farmland and endangered species being lost to development. It will also disproportionately impact low-income communities. Howard Penn, Executive Director of the Planning and Conservation League said the measure “is not a reform that will help everyday Californians with affordability. It is funded by corporations that want to avoid paying for their impacts and pollution.” For more information on CalChamber’s CEQA-gutting Prop 45 measure go to noprop45ca.com. ☆

OUR CONSERVANCIES AND PARKS JUST GOT ANOTHER FRIEND! *Ventura County Open Space Collaborative is Born*

Introductions

Presenting today



Jim Friedl,
General Manager,
Conejo Recreation
and Park District



Melissa Baffa,
Executive Director,
Ventura Land
Trust

Other founding members



Linda Parks,
Executive Director,
Save Open Space
and Agricultural
Resources (SOAR)



**Candice
Meneghin, Board
Member, SOAR
and Friends of the
Santa Clara River**

From its beaches to its mountains, Ventura County is home to an abundance of wild, open space that gives our region its unique character. These landscapes support extraordinary biodiversity and essential ecological processes that sustain both our communities and our local economy.

To support the work of organizations dedicated to protecting and conserving these important places—and to connect those who benefit from

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MAKING A HEALTHY PLANET

Patagonia's Holdfast Collective Awards Grants for Regenerative Agriculture



We were delighted to learn that the Holdfast Collective, the nonprofit owner of Patagonia, Inc., is investing in healthy farms by awarding grants for regenerative agriculture. They began by asking, "Is there a way to help farms and ranches move away from harmful chemicals and destructive practices and onto a path toward regenerative

organic farming?" They launched the venture by donating \$1 million to a Rodale Institute initiative that has since connected 26% of Ventura County farmers, including the California Organic Center at McGrath Farms. The awards have gone for training, funding and equipment to help regenerate soil health and sequester carbon. Then earlier this spring, the Holdfast Collective announced an additional \$1.55 million donation to build even more momentum behind the work. In their announcement, Patagonia stated, "These efforts are crucial. They don't just restore land and provide food but improve the lives and health outcomes of families living near agricultural fields. If successful, the Rodale Institute will make Ventura County the first fully regenerative organic farming region in the United States." Thank you Holdfast Collective for leading the way to a healthier world! ☆

OUR CONSERVANCIES AND PARKS JUST GOT ANOTHER FRIEND!

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open space—we have formed the Ventura County Open Space Collaborative. The Collaborative, a group of two dozen organizations and agencies, was convened by Melissa Baffa with the Ventura Land Trust, James Friedl with the Conejo Recreation and Park District, Candice Meneghin with Friends of the Santa Clara River, and Linda Parks with SOAR. We are committed to safeguarding the natural landscapes that surround us and make Ventura County so special.

Inspired by an economic study of the financial benefits of open space that was produced in neighboring Santa Barbara County (bit.ly/43nvKp2), our Collaborative is looking to fund a similar study of Ventura County open spaces. We recently made a presentation about this effort for the Ventura County Community Foundation's "Virtual Lunch and Learn" which you can view in English at heyor.ca/Xd8srz or in Español at heyor.ca/kYhBF0

The Collaborative was created because we know we can accomplish more together than we can do on our own, in support of the natural open spaces that enrich us all! ☆

EXCITING RIBBON CUTTING COMING

DECEMBER 2, 2026!



It won't be your typical ribbon cutting of an infrastructure project. Waiting eagerly for the Governor and leaders to cut the ribbon are the wildlife that will live longer and thrive because they will be able to safely cross ten lanes of traffic on the 101 without being killed. The landscaped bridge over the freeway in Agoura Hills will be open for mountain lion, deer, bobcat, coyote and all other wildlife to traverse.

With tens of thousands of native plants, and almost as wide as it is long, the bridge will seem like a seamless stretch of the parkland on either side of the 101 freeway. The lands on both sides are owned by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority. The wildlife on both sides belong to the hills and valleys that were separated

when the freeway was built. Thanks to the unique partnership of MRCA, CalTrans, National Wildlife Federation and the National Park Service and donors, wildlife will have a better chance of survival for future generations to enjoy. ☆

SACRAMENTO'S HEAVY HAND ON HOUSING

by David Newman, Thousand Oaks City Councilmember

In response to a housing affordability crisis, the State of California has undertaken a 10-year sustained attack on local control over land use. Among the recent requirements: Mandatory approval of previously banned housing types and lot types; mandatory “ministerial” approvals that remove local discretion; state control over environmental review under CEQA; state-imposed density bonuses; and costly litigation for cities that fail to comply with state mandates.

The irony is that while housing supply has increased, much of California has less affordable housing today than in 2016, when many of the mandates began.

For example, starting in 2016 and continuing through today, state laws regarding accessory dwelling units (ADUs) have preempted local laws and restricted local design and parking rules. These measures have produced lots of ADUs, not necessarily more affordability. ADUs are almost always added to large lots, and typically aren't classified as affordable housing.

SB 9 (2021) was supposed to “end single-family zoning as we know it.” It mandates approval of “lot splits” – taking a single-family residence, splitting its lot in two, and allowing one house and one ADU or junior ADU on each lot, supposedly quadrupling housing capacity. However, the law is so complex and expensive to implement that there have been relatively few SB 9 projects. For example, Thousand Oaks has about 50,000 housing units and to date has processed only 18 eligible projects since SB 9's enactment in 2022.

SB 330 (2019), known as the Housing Crisis Act, prohibited local agencies and citizen initiatives from reducing housing capacity or enacting growth caps and moratoriums. Cities have long used the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to condition housing projects, but the state has largely removed local agencies' ability to evaluate environmental concerns. SB 35 (2017) exempts

streamlined projects from CEQA review in qualified cities. AB 2011 (2022) exempts affordable-housing and mixed-use projects on commercial land. AB 130 and SB 131 (2025) expand CEQA exemptions for housing near transit and infill development.

Density bonuses – which allow developers to add extra units in exchange for some affordable units – are not new, having started in 1979. However, recent changes have significantly altered the landscape. AB 2345 (2020) increases the maximum density bonus from 35% to 50%, provided 15% of all units are for very-low-income households. Current law allows up to an 80% bonus for 100% affordable housing projects.

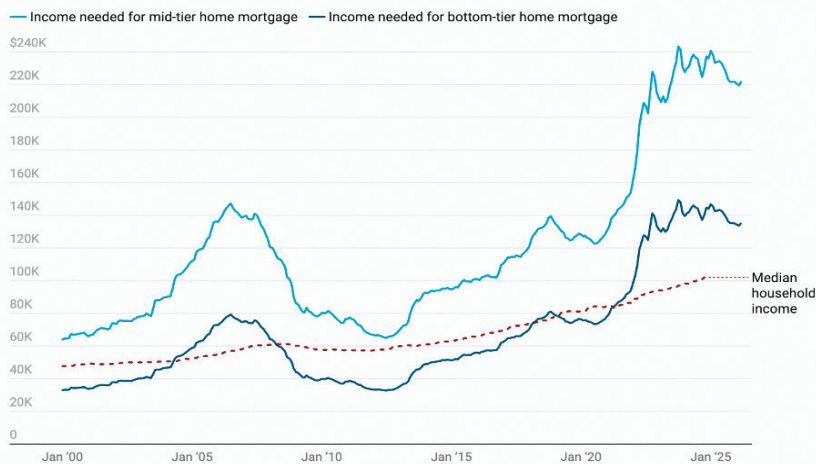
Starting in the mid-2010s, the state department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) began aggressively enforcing existing laws requiring cities to meet state-mandated housing quotas. Noncompliant cities have seen developers file “builder's remedy” lawsuits, along with applications for towers, dense apartment complexes, and mixed-

use buildings in the middle of residential neighborhoods — all projects these cities normally would have rejected. Taken together, these measures have weakened local control – but they haven't made housing more affordable as median housing prices continue to increase faster than household incomes.

Additionally, the state mandates have resulted mostly in high-density apartment buildings, doing nothing to provide access to for-sale units that would build equity and lessen wealth inequality.

The data is clear: It's an oversimplification to paint housing affordability only in supply-and-demand terms – or to believe yet more loss of local control will make housing more affordable. ☆

Median Household Income Lower Than Income Needed to Qualify for Mortgage on Bottom-Tier Home



<https://lao.ca.gov/LAOEconTax/Article/Detail/793>



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(A controlled committee by California State Assemblymember Steve Bennett,
and Oxnard City Councilmember Gabriel Teran)



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*Please contribute to
SOAR today to protect
nature and farmland for
this generation and as
many generations as
we can into the future!*

SOME OF THE MANY BENEFITS OF SOAR

SOAR's requirement of voter approval to rezone open space and agricultural lands discourages development outside of cities. In so doing, SOAR:

1. Supports a \$2.3 billion agricultural industry
2. Offers an additional layer of protection for parks and trails
3. Allows groundwater recharge that improves water quality
4. Protects lands that detain stormwater and prevent flooding
5. Saves open space for diverse wildlife and habitat
6. Avoids traffic-generating projects built far from city services
7. Protects air quality with large undeveloped airsheds and fewer cars to pollute
8. Focuses utilities within communities for greater efficiency and cost savings
9. Encourages redevelopment within cities
10. Incentivizes more affordable homes in cities near services and schools
11. Keeps agricultural lands that act as buffers from wildfire
12. Allows each city to be separate with its own unique identity
13. Enables the availability of fresh, local produce that promotes health
14. Furthers democracy by giving voters a say on urban sprawl