

Residential Development and Growth Control Policies: Survey Results from Cities in Three California Regions

Paul G. Lewis
Max Neiman

July 2000

Co-published with the
Center for Social and Behavioral Sciences Research
University of California, Riverside

Public
Policy
Institute of
California

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS	3
3. POLICIES AIMED AT RESTRICTING RESIDENTIAL GROWTH	5
4. POLICIES LINKING RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT TO INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY	7
5. OTHER POLICIES TO SHAPE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT	9
6. ASSESSING FACTORS THAT MAY SLOW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT	11
Discussion of Specific Items	12
7. CITIES AND THE POLITICS OF GROWTH	19
8. PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF LOCAL ACTIONS	23
9. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS	27
APPENDIX: ABOUT THE SURVEY AND THE RESPONDENTS	29

1. Introduction

Although California residents and policymakers increasingly discuss housing affordability and production, growth management, and development patterns, little is known about the range of local residential development policies currently employed around the state. In this paper, we provide new evidence on these issues, summarizing the findings of a recent mail survey of local planning officials in the three main regions of the state regarding cities' residential development policies and growth controls.

City governments in California's three major economic regions differ substantially in the ways they approach residential development. According to local planning officials, San Francisco Bay Area municipalities have had policies affected far more by citizen activism and have taken more steps to shape or limit new housing development. Central Valley cities, by contrast, have experienced much less controversy over local residential policies, but see housing construction there as more limited by infrastructure constraints. Southern California localities tend to occupy an intermediate position on these dimensions of residential growth policy. Although most city governments in these regions are trying to ease the procedural burdens on housing development, 30 percent have at some point experienced a moratorium in housing development or water or sewer connections, and 13 percent have established a population ceiling for their community.

These are among the major findings of the survey, conducted in 1998 and 1999 as a joint undertaking of the Center for Social and Behavioral Science Research at the University of California, Riverside and the Public Policy Institute of California. We chose to survey planners as the persons presumably most knowledgeable about residential policies at the local level. Usable surveys were received from respondents in 297 municipalities in the three regions, for a 76 percent response rate. (Please see the Appendix for more information about the survey and the respondents.)

In this paper, we summarize questionnaire responses for cities in each of the regions surveyed—metropolitan Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, and the Central Valley. This tabulation allows for comparisons of residential growth policies across these areas, which have experienced growth pressures at different rates and have different traditions of local governance. We use fairly broad definitions of each region. Table 1 lists the counties included in each region, as defined in this paper.

Table 1. Definition of the Three Regions

Region:	Includes cities in these counties:
Southern California metropolitan region	Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Ventura
San Francisco Bay Area	Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma
Central Valley	Butte, Colusa, Fresno, Glenn, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Tulare, Yolo, Yuba

2. The Development Review Process

We begin by examining city planners' impressions of the review process for residential development in their cities. With Californians' increasing sensitivity to housing costs and availability, cities appear to be streamlining their review process, as the following two survey items show. The respondents indicate that many local governments appear to be making some effort to ease the review process for residential development; relatively few have seen the process grow longer (Tables 2 and 3). This movement toward expedited review, however, seems considerably less pronounced in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹

Table 2. "In your opinion, has your city made it easier (quicker) for residential development projects to be reviewed in your city?"

	Southern California (N = 143)	SF Bay Area (N = 75)	Central Valley (N = 72)	Total (N = 290)
Yes	59 %	47 %	65 %	58 %
No	29	41	26	32
N/A	12	12	8	11

Table 3. "In thinking about the last five years, would you say that the TIME required to complete the review of residential projects in your city has been shortened, stayed the same, gotten somewhat longer, or has become much longer?"

	Southern California (N = 148)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 298)
Gotten shorter	26 %	26 %	23 %	25 %
Stayed the same	57	48	61	56
Gotten somewhat longer	13	18	11	14
Become much longer	2	6	0	3
Don't know	3	1	4	3

In terms of the formal process for approving development proposals, few municipalities indicate that they require supermajority votes of the

¹ In all tables in this paper, percentages may not sum to 100 percent due to independent rounding. Also, please note that some respondents skipped some questions, so the number of respondents differs slightly across tables.

council or planning commission for zoning changes. Even fewer require a popular vote, as Tables 4 and 5 show.

Table 4. “Does your city require MORE than a simple majority on the city council or planning commission to approve some zone changes?”

Requirement for Approving Zoning	Southern California (N = 144)	SF Bay Area (N = 76)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 293)
No, only simple majorities	87 %	87 %	89 %	87 %
Yes, on the planning commission only	1	1	1	1
Yes, on the city council only	4	3	3	3
Yes, on BOTH the council and planning commission	7	8	7	7
Don't know	1	1	0	1

Table 5. “Does your city require a vote of the people for some or all zoning changes?”

	Southern California (N = 145)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 295)
Yes	8 %	6 %	0 %	5 %
No	90	92	100	93
N/A	3	1	0	2

Although supermajority and popular vote requirements are relatively rare, a quarter of all respondents say that local school districts play an important role in reviewing residential projects (Table 6).

Table 6. “Are reviews of residential developments by your local SCHOOL DISTRICT an important factor in whether an individual project is likely to be approved by your city?”

	Southern California (N = 145)	SF Bay Area (N = 76)	Central Valley (N = 72)	Total (N = 293)
Yes	28 %	25 %	19 %	25 %
No	68	68	76	70
N/A	5	7	4	5

3. Policies Aimed at Restricting Residential Growth

The survey also asked planners about specific city policies that are relatively overt in limiting residential growth rates, such as growth caps or zoning changes that remove land from the residential zoning categories. In general, the percentage of cities employing these techniques is quite low, often in the single digits. Cities in the Southern California region generally are the least likely to impose such limitations.

Table 7. “In recent years, would you say that your city has substantially reduced the amount of land zoned for residential use?”

	Southern California (N = 146)	SF Bay Area (N = 76)	Central Valley (N = 72)	Total (N = 294)
Yes	1 %	5 %	0 %	2 %
No	97	95	100	97
Don't know	2	0	0	1

Table 8. “Does your city have a policy that limits the total number of BUILDING PERMITS issued in a given year?”

	Southern California (N = 146)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 296)
Yes	3 %	10%	5 %	6 %
No	89	87	95	90
N/A	8	3	0	4

Table 9. “Do your city’s policies include a limit on the total number of HOUSING/ RESIDENTIAL units authorized for construction in a given year?”

	Southern California (N = 146)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 296)
Yes	6 %	18 %	7 %	9 %
No	88	77	92	86
N/A	5	5	1	4

Table 10. “Does your city limit the total number of MULTIFAMILY dwellings built in a given year?”

	Southern California (N = 144)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 294)
Yes	3 %	5 %	7 %	4 %
No	90	84	93	89
N/A	7	10	0	6

Table 11. “Does your city have a policy that links local residential growth rates to some formula or external growth rate (for example, the growth rates of the county, region, or state)?”

	Southern California (N = 145)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 295)
Yes	3 %	8 %	4 %	5 %
No	92	87	95	92
N/A	4	5	1	4

Although specific limits are somewhat rare, about one city in eight has formally established a population ceiling (see Table 12). More dramatically, 30 percent of the respondents report that their cities have at some point implemented a moratorium on building permits or sewer or water connections (Table 13). These results are relatively consistent across regions.

Table 12. “Is there a population ceiling for your city prescribed by a FORMAL policy?”

	Southern California (N = 145)	SF Bay Area (N = 76)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 294)
Yes	13 %	12 %	12 %	13 %
No	83	87	85	85
N/A	3	1	3	3

Table 13. “To the best of your knowledge, have there been any MORATORIA on building permits, water connections, or sewer hook-ups in your city?”

	Southern California (N = 144)	SF Bay Area (N = 76)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 293)
Yes	33 %	32 %	25 %	30 %
No	65	68	75	69
N/A	2	0	0	1

4. Policies Linking Residential Development to Infrastructure Capacity

Other policies are less overtly restrictive of residential development than moratoriums or population caps. These techniques aim at setting limits on housing growth based upon the infrastructure capacity of the community, or that use infrastructure investments in an effort to control the rate or location of residential growth. Some of these techniques are in wider use than the more direct growth controls like downzoning or annual growth limits. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of cities in the three regions do not employ such policies. For example, Tables 14 and 15 show that very few respondents say their cities try to limit the capacity of water and sewer infrastructure.

Table 14. “Does your city limit the number of annual water connections in your city?”

	Southern California (N = 138)	SF Bay Area (N = 75)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 286)
Yes	2 %	5 %	5 %	4 %
No	89	91	93	91
N/A	9	4	1	6

Table 15. “Does your city require votes of the people to increase sewer capacity?”

	Southern California (N = 143)	SF Bay Area (N = 73)	Central Valley (N = 72)	Total (N = 287)
Yes	1 %	3 %	6 %	3 %
No	80	81	90	83
N/A	18	16	4	14

A much larger proportion of cities attempt to avoid traffic problems by linking residential growth decisions to local transportation conditions, as Table 16 shows.

Table 16. “Is there a formal policy in your city to affect residential growth rates by requiring that traffic standards be satisfied before new development occurs?”

	Southern California (N = 144)	SF Bay Area (N = 76)	Central Valley (N = 72)	Total (N = 292)
Yes	26 %	34 %	21 %	27 %
No	65	57	76	65
N/A	10	9	3	8

On a related topic, Table 17 indicates that 14 percent of respondents say that infrastructure investments are used to help direct the rate or location of residential development. (Regarding this item, several respondents wrote on the questionnaire that such policies were used to influence the location, but not the rate, of new growth.)

Table 17. “Are capital improvements and public works projects (e.g., street widening or sewer capacity) used to control the rate or location of residential development in your city?”

	Southern California (N = 145)	SF Bay Area (N = 76)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 294)
Yes	11 %	13 %	21 %	14 %
No	85	83	74	82
N/A	4	4	5	4

5. Other Policies to Shape Residential Development

The survey also asked planners about other policies that shape the form, style, or location of residential development. Observers would not necessarily label these policies as constraints on development but rather as requirements or recommendations that attempt to achieve broader development goals. Design review standards were by far the most common policies of this type, and the vast majority of municipalities in these regions used them (Table 18).

Table 18. “Do your city’s policies include design review standards?”

	Southern California (N = 145)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 295)
Yes	81 %	97 %	73 %	83 %
No	17	3	26	16
N/A	1	0	1	1

Although design review standards are fairly ubiquitous, only one city in twenty actually ranks new residential proposals (Table 19).

Table 19. “Does your city rank PROPOSED residential projects through a point system?”

	Southern California (N = 146)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 296)
Yes	4 %	6 %	4 %	5 %
No	88	87	92	89
N/A	8	6	4	6

Table 20 shows that cities in the Bay Area, the region with the most expensive housing, are most likely to require that new developments include some affordable housing. Cities in the Central Valley, where housing is least expensive of the three areas, are least likely to have an affordable housing set-aside requirement.

Table 20. “Does your city currently have a policy to REQUIRE residential development to include affordable housing, however that is defined in your community?”

	Southern California (N = 145)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 72)	Total (N = 294)
Yes	26 %	49 %	21 %	31 %
No	70	48	79	67
N/A	3	3	0	2

Tables 21 and 22 reveal that Bay Area communities are also most likely to steer new growth toward already-developed areas, thus perhaps encouraging infill.

Table 21. “Does your city have a FORMAL policy to restrict residential development to areas that are already developed?”

	Southern California (N = 145)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 73)	Total (N = 295)
Yes	3 %	14 %	4 %	6 %
No	88	79	92	87
N/A	8	6	4	7

Table 22. “Does your city have a FORMAL policy to encourage residential development to occur in already developed areas?”

	Southern California (N = 146)	SF Bay Area (N = 77)	Central Valley (N = 72)	Total (N = 295)
Yes	19 %	39 %	36 %	28 %
No	71	56	60	64
N/A	10	5	4	7

6. Assessing Factors That May Slow Residential Development

Planners were asked a series of questions about various factors that might constrain or slow residential development in their communities. Specifically, they were asked to rate these factors on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not at all important” and 5 considered “very important” for constraining or slowing residential growth.

Table 23 reports the differences in the mean score for respondents in the three regions for each of the factors that they were asked to rate. Additionally, the overall mean score for each factor is reported in the last column. The items are listed in order of overall importance.

Table 23. Mean Importance Ratings for Factors Assessed as Constraining or Slowing Residential Growth

Constraining/Slowing Factor	Southern California	S.F. Bay Area	Central Valley	Total Item Mean
Supply of land for residential use	3.65	3.87	2.76	3.49*
Cost of new infrastructure	2.81	2.41	3.45	2.86*
Density restrictions on residential use	3.06	2.87	2.20	2.79*
Citizen opposition to growth	2.69	3.14	2.40	2.74*
School crowding	2.54	2.37	2.53	2.49
Overall rate of residential development	2.28	2.36	2.68	2.40*
Process for review of individual projects	2.47	2.36	2.23	2.38
City council opposition to growth	2.36	2.51	2.15	2.35
Fees for review/construction	2.32	1.88	2.62	2.28*
Sewer capacity limits	2.09	2.13	2.75	2.27*
Lack of personnel to review projects	2.09	2.25	2.32	2.19
City budget constraints	2.09	1.99	2.35	2.13
Insufficient water supply	2.05	1.86	2.28	2.06

Most of the mean scores, it should be noted, fall in the lower half of the 5-point “difficulty scale.” Overall, the data indicate that the five most important factors in constraining and slowing residential growth are (1) the supply of land zoned for residential use; (2) the cost of new infrastructure; (3) density restrictions on residential use; (4) citizen opposition to growth; and (5) school crowding. Additionally, the last column has been marked with an asterisk where there are statistically significant differences among the regions regarding these factors.

Considered broadly, the results indicate that Central Valley respondents are more likely to find that infrastructure costs are important in

slowing and constraining growth. Sewer capacity limits—perhaps indicating problems in managing water quality—and policies that impose fees on development seem more important to Central Valley respondents. Additionally, these respondents appear to be reflecting a concern with the sheer pace of recent growth in their region. In contrast, political factors (density restrictions and citizen opposition to growth) and development review processes are more important to San Francisco Bay Area respondents. In most cases, the Southern California respondents appear to be in the intermediate levels.

Discussion of Specific Items

San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California respondents tend to consider the review process for individual residential development projects to be more important than do Central Valley respondents, as Table 24 indicates. Among San Francisco Bay Area respondents, 23.3 percent are in the 4-5 categories, while 17.0 percent of the Southern California and 12.7 percent of the Central Valley respondents are in the 4-5 categories. On the other hand, majorities in all regions place review of individual projects in the categories indicating less importance (1-2).

Table 24. How important is the “process of review for individual projects?”

	Southern California (N=141)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=71)	Total (N=288)
1. Not at all important	25 %	28 %	27 %	26 %
2.	30	40	39	35
3.	28	9	21	22
4.	8	17	10	11
5. Very important	9	6	3	7

As the region experiencing the more dramatic conversion of land use from agricultural to urban uses, the Central Valley respondents seem to be somewhat more likely to assess the overall rate of residential development as an important factor influencing policies (see Table 25). Among Central Valley respondents, 26.5 percent are in the categories signifying importance (4-5), in comparison to the Southern California (17.9 percent) and San Francisco Bay Area (19.0 percent) respondents.

Table 25. How important is the “overall rate of residential development?”

	Southern California (N=134)	SF Bay Area (N=74)	Central Valley (N=68)	Total (N=276)
1. Not at all important	34%	34%	28%	32%
2.	25	22	15	22
3.	23	26	31	26
4.	15	12	15	14
5. Very important	3	7	12	6

Compared to other respondents, Central Valley planners are much less likely to regard the supply of land for residential use as an important constraint on growth (see Table 26). Over 68 percent of the San Francisco Bay Area and 65 percent of the Southern California respondents place the supply of land in the 4 or 5 categories, with only 39.6 percent of the Central Valley respondents doing so. Perhaps reflecting the more recent nature of growth pressures in the Central Valley, respondents there perceive that more land is still available. Much of the Central Valley region remains in agriculture, and though the overall population of the region is growing rapidly, it is still much smaller than the urban giants of Southern California and the Bay Area.

Table 26. How important is the “supply of land for residential use?”

	Southern California (N=141)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=71)	Total (N=288)
1. Not at all important	12 %	12 %	20 %	14 %
2.	12	7	23	13
3.	11	13	28	16
4.	29	20	21	25
5. Very important	36	49	9	33

Central Valley respondents are more likely than others to claim that fees for review and construction are important factors constraining or slowing residential growth (Table 27). Of the Central Valley respondents, 23.3 percent consider total fees for review and construction to be in the 4 or 5 level of importance. The corresponding responses are only 6.6 percent among Bay Area and 14.8 percent among Southern California respondents. Compared to respondents in the other regions, Bay Area respondents are much less likely to consider review and construction fees to be important.

Table 27. How important are “total fees for review/construction?”

	Southern California (N=142)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=71)	Total (N=289)
1. Not at all important	28 %	47 %	16 %	30 %
2.	33	25	37	32
3.	25	21	25	24
4.	9	5	16	10
5. Very important	6	1	7	5

As Table 28 shows, most Central Valley respondents do not consider a policy designed to reduce residential development pressures to be important. Specifically, 60.6 percent of the Central Valley respondents indicated that density restrictions on residential land were in the less important categories (1-2), whereas the corresponding proportions were approximately 34.0 percent for Southern California and 38.6 percent for San Francisco Bay Area respondents. None of the Central Valley respondents indicated that such policies were very important in constraining or slowing residential development. This pattern may reflect a relative lack of interest on the part of builders for constructing high-density housing in the Valley, especially given the availability of land there.

Table 28. How important are “density restrictions on residential land?”

	Southern California (N=141)	SF Bay Area (N=75)	Central Valley (N=71)	Total (N=287)
1. Not at all important	18 %	17 %	32 %	21 %
2.	16	21	28	21
3.	26	28	27	27
4.	23	24	13	21
5. Very important	17	9	0	11

San Francisco Bay Area respondents confirm their region’s reputation as being the hotbed of grassroots controls on growth (see Table 29). Perhaps reflecting the role of profit-seeking holders of agricultural land and concern in the region for its above-average unemployment, Central Valley respondents are far less likely to rate citizen opposition as an important factor in constraining or slowing development. Southern California respondents again are situated in an intermediate position.

Table 29. How important is “citizen opposition to growth?”

	Southern California (N=143)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=291)
1. Not at all important	24 %	7 %	31 %	21 %
2.	22	29	25	25
3.	22	21	25	23
4.	25	30	13	23
5. Very important	7	13	7	9

Relatively small minorities of the respondents in all areas regard city council opposition to growth as an important constraint on residential development, as Table 30 shows.

Table 30. How important is “city council opposition to growth?”

	Southern California (N=142)	SF Bay Area (N=75)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=289)
1. Not at all important	32 %	24 %	44 %	33 %
2.	26	28	19	25
3.	21	24	18	21
4.	14	21	13	16
5. Very important	6	3	6	5

Although there is often discussion about the budget stress created by residential development, the respondents do not rate very highly the importance of city budget constraints in slowing growth (Table 31). The findings do not vary significantly by region.

Table 31. How important are “city budget constraints?”

	Southern California (N=141)	SF Bay Area (N=75)	Central Valley (N=71)	Total (N=287)
1. Not at all important	45 %	51 %	31 %	43 %
2.	26	20	28	25
3.	14	15	20	16
4.	8	9	17	11
5. Very important	8	5	4	6

Similarly, even in the least affluent region—the fiscally strapped, rapidly growing Central Valley—few respondents consider the lack of city staff to review projects as a constraint on residential development (Table 32). There are no major regional differences on this question.

Table 32. How important is “lack of personnel to review projects?”

	Southern California (N=141)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=289)
1. Not at all important	37 %	33 %	29 %	34 %
2.	31	25	31	29
3.	22	30	22	24
4.	8	8	15	10
5. Very important	3	4	3	3

Infrastructure costs can be expected to be more stressful in a newly emerging, rapidly urbanizing area, and the results in Table 33 support this expectation. Nearly 60 percent of the Central Valley respondents judge the cost of infrastructure to be a constraining and slowing factor in residential development, compared to 23 percent of Bay Area officials. Southern California remains in an intermediate position on infrastructure costs.

Table 33. How important is the “cost of new infrastructure?”

	Southern California (N=141)	SF Bay Area (N=75)	Central Valley (N=71)	Total (N=287)
1. Not at all important	23 %	31 %	10 %	22 %
2.	16	31	13	19
3.	31	16	18	24
4.	16	12	41	21
5. Very important	14	11	18	14

Perhaps reflecting the still-rural levels of infrastructure capacity in parts of the Central Valley, a much higher proportion of respondents there (33.3 percent) than elsewhere indicates that sewer capacity limits constrain or slow residential development (Table 34). Bay Area and Southern California respondents tend to indicate that such limits are unimportant.

Table 34. How important are “sewer capacity limits?”

	Southern California (N=138)	SF Bay Area (N=75)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=285)
1. Not at all important	44 %	48 %	26 %	41 %
2.	24	16	19	21
3.	19	17	21	19
4.	5	12	19	11
5. Very important	8	7	14	9

Table 35 indicates that over a quarter of the Central Valley respondents feel that insufficient water supply is an important problem for their communities. Nevertheless, very substantial majorities across all three regions do not see water supply limits as a constraint on growth.

Table 35. How important is “insufficient water supply?”

	Southern California (N=140)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=288)
1. Not at all important	48 %	55 %	43 %	49 %
2.	21	20	21	21
3.	17	16	11	15
4.	5	3	15	7
5. Very important	9	7	10	8

Finally, despite conventional wisdom, respondents in all three regions generally give school crowding a score indicating low to moderate importance (Table 36). Approximately 20 percent of respondents in all three regions think of school crowding as a constraint on local growth.

Table 36. How important is “school crowding?”

	Southern California (N=141)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=289)
1. Not at all important	26 %	29 %	22 %	26 %
2.	21	32	28	25
3.	33	20	29	28
4.	17	13	17	16
5. Very important	4	7	4	5

7. Cities and the Politics of Growth

Much concern over the years has been expressed regarding the role of citizen initiatives in local planning. Tables 37 and 38 address this issue. The reputation of San Francisco Bay Area localities for higher levels of local opposition to residential growth is supported by these results. Substantially higher proportions of Bay Area respondents report that initiatives have been or are likely to be a source of slower residential development within their localities. Still, it appears that land-use initiatives are not a major growth-limiting factor in the vast majority of cities.

Table 37. “Have initiatives been a major source of policies to slow residential development?”

	Southern California (N=139)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=287)
Yes	13 %	33 %	4 %	16 %
No	87	67	96	84

Table 38. “Is there a good chance an initiative measure to slow growth will occur in your city?”

	Southern California (N=129)	SF Bay Area (N=75)	Central Valley (N=67)	Total (N=271)
Yes	8 %	24 %	8 %	12 %
No	92	76	93	88

Other results tend to support regional distinctions in citizen-based, elections-driven land-use policy. For example, respondents were asked whether neighborhood pressure, council actions, or initiatives were sources of local policy. Table 39 provides evidence that the San Francisco Bay Area respondents, much more so than their Central Valley and Southern California counterparts, perceive local policy to derive from the initiative process and from the neighborhoods. According to the respondents here, the role of neighborhoods and initiatives are negligible within the Central Valley.

Table 39. Perceptions Regarding Origins of Local Residential Development Policy, by Region

	Southern California (N=119)	SF Bay Area (N=65)	Central Valley (N=56)	Total (N=240)
Enacted by council, without much neighborhood pressure	57 %	39 %	84 %	58 %
Enacted by council, but mainly as a result of neighborhood pressure	26	39	9	25
Enacted through council AND through the initiative process	15	22	7	15
Enacted pretty much EXCLUSIVELY as a result of the initiative process	2	2	0	1

These broad regional patterns also hold when local planners are asked about the level of political controversy over new housing in their communities. Table 40 shows that half of Bay Area respondents say that residential growth issues are often or always controversial in their cities, compared to one quarter of Southern California respondents and one eighth of Central Valley respondents.

Table 40. “In considering the past and more recent periods, how controversial would you say residential growth issues are in your city?”

	Southern California (N=146)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=294)
NOT AT ALL controversial	22 %	4 %	28 %	19 %
SOMETIMES controversial	52	43	60	52
OFTEN controversial	20	25	8	18
Almost ALWAYS controversial	5	25	4	10
Don't know	1	3	0	1

Not surprisingly, given this level of controversy, Bay Area respondents are much more likely to say that such land-use issues have been significant in affecting the outcomes of local elections for mayor or council (Table 41).

Table 41. “Which of the following do you believe best describes the influence of residential development issues on your city’s elections?”

	Southern California (N=148)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=296)
Growth issues HARDLY EVER affect council or mayoral elections	42 %	21 %	51 %	39 %
There have been A FEW TIMES when growth issues have affected the outcomes of local council or mayoral elections	31	34	28	31
Local growth issues have OFTEN been influential in affecting the outcomes of local council or mayoral elections	16	41	14	22
Don’t know	11	4	7	8

Interestingly, however, the controversy and electoral importance of growth issues in the Bay Area do not mean that city councils in that region strongly embrace slowdowns in residential development, as Table 42 shows. According to our respondents, 67 percent of Bay Area city councils either encourage residential growth or are neutral toward it—compared to 80 percent in Southern California and 84 percent in the Central Valley. Perhaps the soaring cost of housing in the Bay Area has encouraged local politicians to favor additional supply, despite substantial antigrowth pressure from residents in many of that region’s cities. Southern California councils are actually seen as least likely to encourage new housing.

Table 42. “As to the general attitude of the majority of your city council toward residential growth, which of the following best describes the situation in your community?”

	Southern California (N=145)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=294)
Generally, the city council ENCOURAGES residential growth	35 %	42 %	58 %	43 %
The city council is MOSTLY NEUTRAL, neither encouraging nor opposing residential growth	45	25	26	35
The city council OCCASIONALLY SLOWS the rate of residential growth when growth issues become controversial	12	17	8	13
The city council generally tries to slow growth and OFTEN PROPOSES LIMITATIONS on residential development	6	9	4	6
Don’t know	2	7	4	4

Respondents were also asked to assess how easy it is to approve different sorts of residential development projects on a scale from 1 (very easy

to approve) to 5 (very difficult to approve). The higher the score, the more difficult the respondent perceives a development to be in their respective community. Table 43 reports the mean “difficulty scores” for various types of housing developments by region.

Table 43. Mean Difficulty-of-Approval Scores for Different Kinds of Residential Developments, by Region

Type of Residential Development	Southern California	SF Bay Area	Central Valley	Total
Detached/high density	3.56	3.41	3.40	3.48
Multifamily/apartment	3.57	3.47	3.25	3.47
Affordable housing	3.40	3.60	3.22	3.41
Townhouses	3.11	2.99	2.84	3.01
Detached/medium density	2.97	2.93	2.61	2.87
Planned residential development	2.90	2.89	2.63	2.83
Senior citizen housing	2.45	2.42	2.10	2.35
Detached/low density	1.92	2.12	1.76	1.93

Central Valley respondents generally report less difficulty in approving residential developments in their cities than respondents from the other regions. However, types of housing that are more difficult to approve in other regions are also more difficult in the Central Valley. Overall, detached/high density, multifamily/apartment, affordable, and townhouse projects are seen as the four most difficult project types to approve. For San Francisco Bay Area respondents, the most difficult projects appear to be affordable housing, while for Central Valley respondents the most difficult appear to be detached, high-density projects. For Southern California respondents, the most problematic projects appear to be multifamily/apartment developments.

8. Perceived Effects of Local Actions

What are the ultimate results of these local politics and policies? We asked respondents about their perceptions of the magnitude and effects of development fees, the influence of policies on the social status of local residents, the relative strictness of local policies, and the relative emphasis on residential and commercial growth.

With respect to development fees, respondents in Southern California overwhelmingly believe that their cities' fees are about the same (81 percent of the 132 responding to the item) as those of other nearby cities. (As a result of an error in the questionnaire, the Southern California respondents were not provided the option of indicating that their communities' fees were *lower* than those in nearby cities.) Of the 75 San Francisco Bay Area respondents who answered the corresponding item, 32 percent indicate that their cities' fees are less than other area cities, while 47 percent report that their city's fees are higher. The comparable figures for the 71 Central Valley respondents are 39 percent and 38 percent respectively. In all three regions, majorities believe their city fees to be equal to or less than the fees in nearby cities.

In all three regions, moreover, majorities estimate that the total effect of all fees is to add less than 10 percent to the price of homes in their jurisdictions (Table 44). A greater proportion of San Francisco Bay Area respondents feel that fees have a bigger price impact, but still a slight majority estimates the price effect to be less than 10 percent. Fairly small proportions of respondents—10 percent or less—believe that the fees add 15 percent or more to housing prices. (Note that a fairly substantial share of respondents chose not to hazard a guess on this question.)²

Table 44. "Although it is only an informed guess, how much would you say your city's TOTAL development fees, including school district fees, add to the price of a typical single-family, detached home built in your community today?"

	Southern California (N=145)	SF Bay Area (N=75)	Central Valley (N=73)	Total (N=293)
Less than 5 %	25 %	21 %	18 %	22 %
5 % to 9 %	34	29	44	35
10 % to 14 %	15	23	18	18
More than 15 %	7	9	10	8
Don't know	19	17	11	16

² For an empirical investigation of the impact of development fees on home prices in Contra Costa County, see Marla Dresch and Steven M. Sheffrin, *Who Pays for Development Fees and Exactions?* Public Policy Institute of California, 1997 (full text available at www.ppic.org).

Respondents were also asked to rate how strict they thought their city’s policies were compared to other cities in the area. A large majority (68 percent) of all the respondents (N=286) believe that their city is equally or less strict than others in their area. Central Valley respondents are somewhat more likely than other respondents to think this; indeed, 78 percent of them believed their city policies were equally or less strict than areas in their area. The comparable figures were 67 percent for the San Francisco Bay Area and 66 percent of the Southern California respondents.

There is reason to believe, however, that respondents feel that local policies can have important effects on local populations, even if they think that their community’s fees and regulations are in line with neighboring jurisdictions. For example, respondents were asked to judge the overall impact of their respective city policies on the social status makeup of the local population (Table 45). San Francisco Bay Area respondents, somewhat more than Southern California respondents, believe that their city’s social status is higher as a consequence of local policy. On the other hand, a much smaller share of Central Valley respondents see their policies as increasing their community’s social status.

Table 45. “In considering the overall impact of your city’s residential development policies on who lives there, which of the following would you say best describes your view?”

	Southern California (N=147)	SF Bay Area (N=76)	Central Valley (N=73)	Total (N=296)
City population is somewhat LOWER in social status because of city policies	7 %	3 %	1 %	4 %
City population is SAME in social status, even with city policies	29	29	49	34
City population is SOMEWHAT HIGHER in social status because of city policies	30	34	16	28
City population is MUCH MORE affluent because of city policies	6	11	3	6
Don’t know	29	24	30	28

The higher “exclusivity” or “strictness” of the San Francisco Bay Area localities is also reflected in answers to a question about which sorts of development these cities encouraged (see Table 46). Only 40 percent of the 68 respondents with an opinion characterized their city’s policies as encouraging “all sorts of residential and commercial growth.” The comparable proportion for the 70 Central Valley respondents was 59 percent, and 49 percent for the 132 Southern California respondents. Moreover, 19 percent of Bay Area respondents believe their cities “make it more difficult for both commercial and residential development,” compared to 1 percent for the Central Valley, and 7 percent for the Southern California respondents.

Table 46. “Which of the following comes closest to YOUR view of the policies of your city regarding development?”

	Southern California (N=132)	SF Bay Area (N=68)	Central Valley (N=70)	Total (N=270)
My city encourages ALL SORTS of residential and commercial growth	48 %	40 %	59 %	49 %
My city ENCOURAGES MOST COMMERCIAL GROWTH, but is less receptive to multifamily or affordable housing projects	44	34	37	40
My city ENCOURAGES MOST COMMERCIAL GROWTH, but it makes all residential more difficult	2	7	3	3
My city makes it more difficult for BOTH COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT	7	19	1	9

However, when asked to judge how appropriate their cities’ housing policies are, an overwhelming majority of respondents in all regions indicate that they basically concur with the amount of residential growth that their cities allow. As Table 47 indicates, most respondents believe their local policies are “fine” or “optimal,” while the small minority who disagree tend to think that their communities are too permissive with respect to housing. Interestingly, Central Valley planners are the least likely to view their city’s policies as “optimal” and most likely to see them instead as “too permissive.” Some respondents may find that their idealistic views of planning do not match the political realities in that rapidly growing region.

Table 47. “In your opinion, which of the following tends to reflect your general view of your city’s residential development controls?”

	Southern California (N=143)	SF Bay Area (N=74)	Central Valley (N=72)	Total (N=289)
Local policies are too restrictive; we should permit more growth.	6 %	4 %	1 %	4 %
Local policies are fine, but implementation can be made more efficient.	20	31	44	29
Local policies and implementation are pretty much optimal for the city.	58	54	38	52
Local policies are too permissive	10	7	14	10
Don’t know	6	4	3	5

9. Summary and Next Steps

The major regional differences in many survey responses are prominent, though perhaps not surprising findings, given the different growth trends, political cultures, and economic patterns of these three areas. Perhaps just as notable are the tensions between local officials and citizens that emerge from the overall survey results.

On the one hand, most city governments are making efforts to streamline their review process for housing proposals. In addition, few cities appear to set extremely high procedural hurdles or strict constraints on residential development, such as supermajority council or commission votes, popular voter approval, or annual caps on building permits. This finding accords with previous studies of local growth control policies in California.³ Few city councils appear to support efforts to slow growth, and the planning officials responding to this survey tend to think that their own cities' residential policies are appropriate.

On the other hand, approving residential developments can be politically risky for city officials. Respondents note that residential growth issues occasionally affect the outcomes of local elections. Moreover, most respondents view such issues as at least somewhat controversial, with more than a quarter reporting frequent controversy over housing issues. Neighborhood pressure and citizen initiatives are seen to affect residential policymaking in a sizeable minority of communities, although the actual number of cities experiencing "ballot-box planning" is relatively low. Ultimately, the respondents find that higher-density, apartment, and affordable housing proposals have the most difficult time gaining approval, and many claim that their cities are more affluent than they would be in the absence of city residential policies.

Thus, it is fair to say that there is a strong reservoir of support for residential growth in California's *city governments*, but also that planners perceive a powerful undercurrent of resistance to new housing on the part of many *residents*. These tensions are likely to be particularly strong during the current period, when growth is rapid but the demand for housing at affordable levels far outstrips the supply in many areas of the state.

In our future research, we will provide more in-depth analysis of which types of cities undertake which sorts of residential development policies. We also will examine changes in city behavior over time, making use of surveys from prior years in the Southern California region. By combining our survey data with statistics on the demographic, economic, and other characteristics of each city, we will examine the factors that underlie local growth policies.

³ See, for example, Madelyn Glickfeld and Ned Levine, *Regional Growth, Local Reaction: The Enactment and Effects of Local Growth Control and Management Measures in California*, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992.

Appendix: About the Survey and the Respondents

The survey was conducted in two waves, with Southern California cities targeted in late 1998, and Bay Area and Central Valley cities in 1999. The 1998 survey was administered by the Center for Social and Behavioral Science Research at the University of California, Riverside. The 1999 wave was carried out by the Public Policy Institute of California, with the assistance of UCR. Because conditions in late 1998 were broadly similar to those in late 1999, we are reasonably confident that the overall results can be treated as one unified survey. It is conceivable, however, that one year's time may have changed some responses by Southern California cities on some items.

In both waves, we mailed a questionnaire to the planning director, or other official identified as being in charge of the planning function, in each municipality in these regions. We used a mailing list of the League of California Cities to identify these respondents, but we also allowed recipients of our initial contact letter to identify a different respondent if they felt the other person would be more knowledgeable about residential policies in their city. Respondents were assured that the anonymity of responses would be respected; thus, this paper reports only summary totals.

In addition to an initial postcard reminder mailed to all persons who received the survey, we contacted nonrespondents up to three more times by mail and telephone to encourage their participation. This process resulted in strong rates of response from all three regions, as shown in Table A-1.⁴ The 297 cities that responded have a total population of nearly 19 million residents.

Table A-1. Survey Response Rates, by Region

	Southern California	SF Bay Area	Central Valley	Total
Useable survey responses	147	77	73	297
Nonrespondents	55	23	17	95
Response rate	73 %	77 %	81 %	76 %

The survey respondents were well qualified to respond to the questionnaire. According to answers to the survey's general background questions, the typical respondent was 45 years old, held a graduate degree, had 18 years of planning experience, and worked in a five-person planning department. Of the respondents, 72 percent were male and 28 percent female. The job titles of the respondents varied, but generally indicate that

⁴ The responses were also quite representative of city population size categories, although very small towns responded at a lower rate. Note that new municipalities that incorporated in 1998 and 1999 are not included in the totals.

this group was highly knowledgeable about local residential policies, as the Table A-2 shows.

Table A-2. Self-Reported Job Titles of Survey Respondents

Job Title	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Planning director or planning manager	82	28 %
Other planner (principal, senior, associate, etc.)	85	29
Planning aide, technician, etc.	9	3
Director of community/economic development	56	19
Other development department personnel	16	5
Planning commission chair	7	2
Other planning commissioner	3	1
City manager	8	3
Assistant/deputy city manager	3	1
Other city department	5	2
No response or unclear response	23	8