

## **State Housing Mandates Worsen Fire Risk and Water Shortages**

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, August 22, 2022

Cities are stuck between a rock and a hard place. It's the result of well-heeled development interests in Sacramento having the muscle to push their housing agenda above all else. As a result, two key tenets of land use have been tossed out: ensuring there is sufficient water, and not building in dangerous locations.

Against the constant refrain of "Where are you going to get the water?" City Councils are holding their noses and voting for overdevelopment, hoping somehow, somewhere, water will come, because if they don't vote for more housing they face serious repercussions from the State. They can accrue daily fines, be sued or lose future funding opportunities, or potentially lose permitting authority for all development in their city. While it's true new developments utilize modern water conservation techniques, the fact is climate change and the resulting water shortages are not being fully addressed. At a time when six million Southern Californians are facing water restrictions, cities and counties are forced to vote against their communities' best interests and approve housing projects that will further drain limited water resources.

In addition, the State's bully-approach to land use fails to protect the public's safety. They make no allowances for cities in State-designated High and Very High Fire Severity Zones. If cities resist housing developments in these high-risk areas they can be sued, like Calabasas for denying a housing project in one of these fire zones.

Putting more people in fire prone areas not only risks their lives, but also those in adjacent communities, as well as our firefighters. Traffic from new development can further clog deficient evacuation routes, and forcing those approvals borders on negligence. There are also financial impacts associated with defending homes in these risk areas, insurance policies are being canceled, and it is the taxpayers who ultimately pick up the tab. As a past urban planner, it is particularly difficult to watch generations of thoughtful city planning being tossed aside to comply with these unreasonable housing mandates.

We can all agree that there is a housing shortage in California and that measures should be taken to encourage housing production. We can likely agree that the emphasis should be on housing for those who can least afford it. However, that is not what the State has done; the State mandate applies equally to producing homeless housing or tract mansions, reflecting the influential role the development industry plays in Sacramento. Unfortunately, this approach isn't solving California's housing crisis, but it is exacerbating wildfire risk and water shortages.