

What must cities do to comply with the RHNA?

- As part of the Housing Element update, State law requires cities to identify a sufficient amount of land that can accommodate both the overall RHNA allocation, and the lower-income allocation. “Land suitable for residential development” can be vacant sites, or sites that have potential for additional residential development or redevelopment. “Adequate sites” means sufficient land, with appropriate zoning, to accommodate the City’s share of regional need. “Appropriate zoning” means development standards and regulations that facilitate housing development for all income categories. If a city cannot demonstrate that it has adequate sites with appropriate zoning for new housing commensurate with its RHNA allocation, then the city must rezone the identified sites to accommodate for the RHNA allocation. In order to satisfy the lower-income allocation, cities may need to increase the density for the identified sites to match the “default density” that is deemed by State to be suitable for lower income housing.

How do cities identify adequate sites for the lower-income allocation?

- As part of each city's RHNA allocation, certain amount of the identified units must be capable of being developed with lower-income units (i.e., the extremely low, very-low- and low-income categories). Density is one of the most important factors that affect the feasibility of affordable housing. Higher density reduces the land cost for each housing unit, thereby reducing total development cost. In 2004 state law was amended to establish “default” densities that are presumed to be suitable for lower-income housing.

How is site density determined?

- According to the State law and the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) [Housing Element Site Inventory](#) Guidebook, parcels in the Housing Element inventory must be zoned to allow sufficient density to accommodate the economies of scale needed to produce affordable housing. To make this determination, the statute allows the jurisdiction to either demonstrate that the zoning allows a specific density set forth in the statute (known as “default density”) or to provide an analysis demonstrating the appropriateness of the zoned densities of the site identified to accommodate the lower-income RHNA.

Housing Element Sites Inventory FAQ

How is “default density” determined?

- Default density is a term used in Housing Element Law which specifies the assumed density at which affordable housing can be produced. State law defines four types of jurisdictions: (1) Incorporated cities within nonmetropolitan/rural counties and nonmetropolitan counties with micropolitan areas; (2) Unincorporated areas in all nonmetropolitan counties not included in 1 above; (3) Suburban Jurisdictions; and (4) Metropolitan Jurisdictions. The type of jurisdiction is determined by the U.S. Census Bureau (HCD, Default Density Standard Option – 2010 Census Update, June 20, 2012). Each of the four types of jurisdictions is assigned a default density in accordance with State law.

Housing Element Sites Inventory FAQ

What is the “default density” for Rancho Santa Margarita?

- Under Housing Element Law, Rancho Santa Margarita is a jurisdiction in a **metropolitan county**. A metropolitan county is defined as follows: jurisdictions (cities/counties) located within a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) with a population of more than 2 million unless a city has a population of less than 25,000 in which case it would be considered suburban. Rancho Santa Margarita is within Orange County, which has a population of approximately 3 million. The population of Rancho Santa Margarita is approximately 49,000. The default density for jurisdictions in a metropolitan county is **30 units per acre**.

For a jurisdiction in a metropolitan county sites allowing at least 30 units per acre are considered suitable to meet the lower-income portions of the RHNA. For example, if a jurisdiction has a default density of 30 units per acre and the zone allows for a range of 24 – 35 units per acre, the zoning is considered appropriate to accommodate the RHNA for lower-income households. (Housing Element Site Inventory Guidebook, Government Code Section 65583.2, June 10, 2020)

For additional information visit
<http://www.cityofrsm.org/622/Housing-Element-Update-2021> or contact Wendy Starks at wstarks@cityofrsm.org.

