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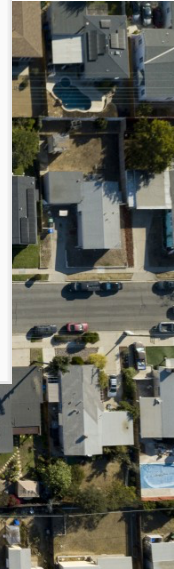
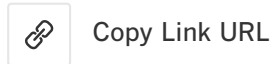


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Single-family homes line the streets of Clairemont in San Diego. (K.C. Alfred/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

The bill by Senate leader Toni Atkins of San Diego is one of two measures enacted to slice through local zoning ordinances

BY DON THOMPSON | ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEPT. 17, 2021 4:58 PM PT

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Thursday approved two measures to slice through local zoning ordinances as the most populous state struggles with soaring home prices, an affordable housing shortage and stubborn homelessness.

He signed the most prominent legislation despite nearly 250 cities objecting that it will, by design, undermine local planning and control.

The outcome marks the latest battle between what's come to be thought of as NIMBY vs. YIMBY. While most agree there is an affordable housing shortage, proposed construction often runs into “not in my backyard” opposition.

“The housing affordability crisis is undermining the California Dream for families across the state, and threatens our long-term growth and prosperity,” Newsom said in announcing his approval.

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He also announced the state will put \$1.75 billion into what his administration is calling a new California Housing Accelerator, which he said will speed building 6,500 affordable multi-family units that had been stalled for lack of tax-exempt bonds and low-income housing tax credits.

It's part of \$22 billion that the state plans to spend to spur new housing and ease homelessness along with the new laws.

[The bill by Senate leader Toni Atkins](#) of San Diego would require cities to approve up to four housing units on what was a single-family lot. They would also have to approve splitting single-family lots so they could be sold separately.

“For too many Californians, the idea of owning a home, renting a house big enough for their family, or even just being able to live in the community where they work is a far-off dream,” Atkins said. “This law will help close the gap and make those dreams a reality.”



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Amid cities' opposition, Atkins included ways local governments can block construction that might harm public safety or public health or benefit housing speculators. Property owners seeking to split a lot would have to swear that they plan to have one of the housing units as their principal residence for at least three years.

That's not enough to keep from

undercutting local control, 241 cities joined by the League of California Cities said [in a letter to Newsom](#), though they acknowledged that affordability and homelessness “are among the most critical issues facing California cities.”

The bill “would undermine the ability of local governments to responsibly plan for the type of housing that communities need, while usurping local democracy and the input of local residents,” said league executive director Carolyn Coleman.

Newsom has made fighting homelessness a centerpiece of his administration and said he was spurred to even more urgency by a recall election that threatened to unseat him in midterm. He survived when nearly two-thirds of voters decided to keep him in office this week.

Atkins, a fellow Democrat, earlier said the legislation was a longtime and elusive goal driven by her own experience growing up in a series of rentals when “the idea that the Atkins family could own a home of our own was ... a far off fantasy.”

California's median sales price for single-family homes is now \$811,170, up 21.7% since July of last year.

The advocacy group California Community Builders has said legislation approved by lawmakers this year would help narrow a racial wealth gap in California, where more than 60% of whites own their homes compared to 35% of Blacks and about 40% of Latinos.

Atkins' measure was among those [lauded this month](#) by President Joe Biden's administration.

Newsom also signed a bill by Democratic Sen. Scott Wiener easing the way for local governments to [rezone neighborhoods near mass transit](#) for up to 10 housing units.

Wiener made his bill optional in response to opposition, but the advocacy groups California YIMBY and California Community Builders still hailed its passage.

"It shouldn't take 5 or 10 years for cities to re-zone, and SB 10 gives cities a powerful new tool to get the job done quickly,"

Wiener said.

Newsom said [in a signing message](#) that “certain provisions may have unintended impacts,” so he ordered housing officials to monitor its progress.

Several Sacramento neighborhood groups argued that Wiener’s bill would keep more lower- and middle-class residents as perpetual renters because it encourages apartment building ownership by large financial organizations. They also objected that it undermines local control and environmental protections.

Sacramento officials aim to make California’s capital city one of the nation’s first to eliminate traditional single-family zoning. Portland, Oregon, and Minneapolis have passed similar ordinances in recent years. The state of Oregon passed a law eliminating traditional single-family zoning statewide.

Newsom also signed a bill extending a 2019 law designed to make it easier to build more housing throughout the state. That law had been set to expire until 2025, but now will

[remain in effect](#) until 2030.

Lawmakers this year did not advance two other high-profile housing bills that would have made it easier to turn [abandoned shopping malls](#) into apartment buildings.

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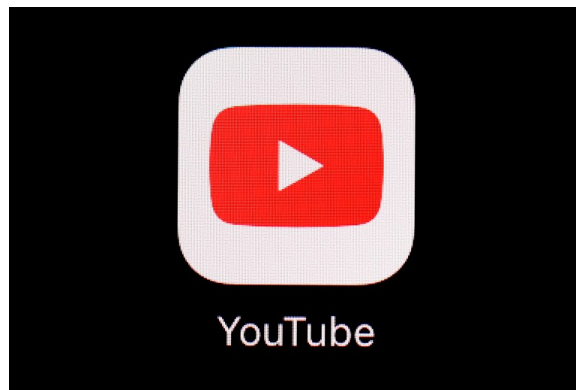
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