

Sustainable Housing for a Greener California: Unlocking Infill Housing Through CEQA Reform

Assemblymember Buffy Wicks and State Senator Scott Wiener are each authoring proposed state legislation that would amend the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to make it easier to build homes in existing urban areas. These types of homes are commonly referred to as “infill housing.”

Assembly Bill 609	Author	Senate Bill 607
Assemblymember Wicks	Senator Wiener	
Co-Sponsor	California YIMBY's Position	Support
Exempts environmentally-friendly housing from CEQA based on clear, objective standards, without making changes to existing exemptions.	The High Level	Focuses environmental impact reports (EIRs) on possible environmental harms, and makes the existing CEQA infill exemption clearer and more effective.
<p>Creates a new CEQA exemption for housing that is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 On a previously developed parcel, or surrounded on almost all sides by existing urban uses; 2 Consistent with local zoning; 3 On par with minimum density thresholds (typically 15 units per acre in urban areas, 10 units per acre in suburban areas, and 5 units per acre in rural areas); 4 Less than 20 acres in size; 5 <i>Not</i> located on environmentally sensitive or hazardous sites. 	The Nerd Speak	<p>Makes the following changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directs the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation to map areas that qualify for the existing infill exemption (Class 32) and clarifies the exemption to enable use. 1 Aligns the standard of review for a lead agency's determination to adopt a Negative Declaration or a Mitigated Negative Declaration with the existing standard of review for Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs). 2 Limits the scope of EIRs for projects that narrowly miss qualifying for statutory or categorical exemptions from CEQA due to a single condition, so that the EIR focuses only on that one condition. 3 Exempts rezonings that are consistent with an already approved housing element. 4 Limits the review of communications for a project under CEQA to decision-makers. 5

Why are both of these bills so important?

According to the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, building infill housing in developed urban areas is the most effective strategy for addressing climate pollution in most California cities. Infill housing also reduces impacts on important agricultural and open lands by focusing new housing construction in already-developed areas.

Multiple areas of existing state law recognize the environmental benefits of infill housing, and encourage its development as a part of California's efforts to enhance environmental quality and address climate change.

But inappropriate use of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) continues to cause significant delays in the development of more housing.

While some infill housing projects are currently exempt from CEQA, these exemptions are insufficiently clear and are therefore prone to abuse; some exemptions can also inadvertently drive up housing costs by including various conditions.

These bills take two different approaches to addressing those flaws, and both are important to ensuring that environmentally-friendly infill housing projects can be built faster and easier.

What can you do to help get them passed?

Your voice matters to your State Senator and Assemblymember. There are several ways to ensure your state representative knows that you support CEQA reform to make environmentally-friendly housing more abundant.

AB 609 (Wicks)

Click the link to access the latest information, a template support letter, and an easy to use tool to send your legislator an email asking them to vote YES on AB 609: [Take Action to Support AB 609](#)

SB 607 (Wiener)

Click the link to learn more about SB 607 and register your support for this critical legislation: [Take Action to Support SB 607](#)