

RHNA FAQ

1. What is RHNA?

At the start of the Housing Element update process, the state assigns each region a target number of housing to plan for called the Regional Housing Needs Allocation or RHNA (*pronounced 'ree-nah'*). They look at several factors to determine the RHNA, like how many nearby jobs and quality schools there are, how close people live to their jobs, and population. Cities and towns are then required by state law to update their Housing Element (a chapter in every General Plan) that plans for this target number, meaning it must be possible for new housing to be built across income levels through a combination of rules and programs.

2. How was the RHNA assigned to my city or town?

The target number or RHNA determined by the state for the nine-county Bay Area this cycle is 441,176. After it was calculated by the state, the Association of Bay Area Governments or ABAG decided on the share for each city and town after a lengthy process based on factors like access to jobs and transportation and long-term growth projections. To learn more about how shares were determined, view this [Summary Report](#) from ABAG or visit [here](#).

3. Why are the numbers so high?

The RHNA for almost every city and town in the state is higher than in past cycles. For the past 30 years, while a lot of jobs have been added, not enough housing has been created to keep things in balance. Since 2010, San Mateo County saw the addition of 100,000 new jobs but only 10,000 new homes. There is also a lot of opportunity for housing identified by [Plan Bay Area 2050](#) – areas close to jobs and good schools with lower populations. San Mateo County accounts for 11 percent of the region's RHNA, 10 percent of its households and 10 percent of its jobs.

It's important to note that while state law requires cities and towns to plan for a target number of homes, doing so does not mean all those homes will be built. Local governments do not build housing, private and nonprofit developers do. Cities and towns can only make sure rules are in place so homes can be built. Some sites will have issues that prevent development, some landowners will decide not to sell to developers and not all possible sites will be developed.

4. When will the numbers be finalized?

The final methodology was just adopted by ABAG. The appeals process begins this summer and numbers will be finalized by the end of 2021. RHNA is not expected to change significantly.

5. What counts toward the RHNA?

There are three main categories of housing that cities and towns can count towards their RHNA:

- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) based on building permit trends
- Proposed or known projects, called pipeline projects, that are still under construction on June 30th, 2022
- Sites zoned for housing that can be built on by developers

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6. How does more housing get planned for if a city or town is built out?

Even if your city or town has little to no vacant land, there is often room to rethink what is there now. Re-envisioning existing sites that are underutilized or could include housing is an important part of meeting the RHNA. Start by looking at where you want housing to go, such as near transit, commercial centers and downtown. Then look to sites that might be nearby but aren't used like they once were, such as strip malls and vacant office parks, and reimagine housing in their place.

7. Were issues like climate change and wildfire risk considered?

Several environmental issues were factored in to the RHNA numbers. Wildfire risks, seismic activity, sea level rise and infrastructure were included through the work of Plan Bay Area 2050. Greenhouse gases and limited transit were included through both the RHNA Methodology process and Plan Bay Area 2050. Since it is very common for land in the Bay Area to have some seismic and/or wildfire risk, redeveloping with modern construction and building codes in some cases will improve public safety.

8. Does RHNA roll over from one cycle to a next?

No, RHNA generally does not roll over from previous cycles. If your city or town exceeded (or had a shortfall in) its RHNA, that is great, but it will not impact the current numbers.

9. What happens if a city or town doesn't meet their RHNA?

Cities and towns do not need to build housing, they just need to make sure there is a plan that *allows for housing to be built*. If they have zoned for the target number of units required but developers do not build, there are no consequences.

However, if a jurisdiction fails to submit a Housing Element update or plan for their target number, there are a lot of consequences to cities and towns, including:

- fines and fees
- inability to apply for state and regional grants
- court-issued takeover over of their land use authority

For more information view the [Housing Element Compliance Memo](#) from the California Department of Housing and Community Development.

10. Can the numbers be contested and has this been successful before?

There will be limited criteria to appeal on when the process opens this summer. The process is governed by state law limiting the options for appeals. Historically, appeals have not been likely to success. For instance, out of the 52 appeals in Southern California, only two were partially upheld – one was due to a mapping error and the other was due to a technical issue.