

Assigned for all purposes to: Stanley Mosk Courthouse, Judicial Officer: Mary Strobel

1 CALIFORNIANS FOR HOMEOWNERSHIP, INC.

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9 **SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

10 **FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES**

11
12 CALIFORNIANS FOR
HOMEOWNERSHIP, INC., a
13 California nonprofit public benefit
corporation,

14 Petitioner,

15 v.

16 CITY OF VERNON,

17 Respondent.
18

Case No. 22STCP01397

**VERIFIED PETITION FOR
WRIT OF MANDATE**

[C.C.P. § 1085; Gov. Code §§ 65587, 65751]

19 Petitioner Californians for Homeownership (“Californians”) alleges as follows:

20 1. California is in the midst of a “housing supply and affordability crisis of
21 historic proportions.” Gov. Code 65589.5(a)(2). That crisis is driven in major part by
22 “activities and policies of many local governments that limit the approval of
23 housing” Gov. Code § 65589.5(a)(1)(B).

24 2. As part of the Legislature’s effort to address this crisis, the law required
25 cities in Southern California to adopt updated housing elements by October 15, 2021.

26 3. Vernon did not meet this deadline.

27 4. On behalf of the important public interest in the availability of housing,
28 Californians seeks a writ compelling the City to adopt an updated housing element.

CALIFORNIANS FOR HOMEOWNERSHIP, INC.
LOS ANGELES, CA

PARTIES

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2 5. Petitioner Californians for Homeownership, Inc. (“Californians”) is a
3 California nonprofit public benefit corporation and 501(c)(3) public charity. Its
4 mission is to address California’s housing crisis through litigation in support of the
5 production and availability of housing affordable to families at all income levels.

6 6. Respondent City of Vernon is a city situated in Los Angeles County.

7 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

8 7. The Court has general subject matter jurisdiction over this action
9 pursuant to Government Code Sections 65587 and 65751 and Code of Civil Procedure
10 Section 1085.

11 8. The Court has personal jurisdiction over the City of Vernon pursuant to
12 Code of Civil Procedure Section 410.10.

13 9. Venue for this action properly lies with this Court pursuant to Code of
14 Civil Procedure Section 394.

15 **STATUTORY BACKGROUND**

16 10. In recent years, the California Legislature has sought to address what it
17 has described as a “housing supply and affordability crisis of historic proportions.”
18 Gov. Code 65589.5(a)(2). “The consequences of failing to effectively and
19 aggressively confront this crisis are hurting millions of Californians, robbing future
20 generations of the chance to call California home, stifling economic opportunities for
21 workers and businesses, worsening poverty and homelessness, and undermining the
22 state’s environmental and climate objectives. While the causes of this crisis are
23 multiple and complex, the absence of meaningful and effective policy reforms to
24 significantly enhance the approval and supply of housing affordable to Californians of
25 all income levels is a key factor.” *Id.* (subdivision numbers omitted).

26 11. As a result of the housing crisis, younger Californians are being denied
27 the opportunities for housing security and homeownership that were afforded to
28 previous generations. Families across economic strata are being forced to rent rather

1 than experience the wealth-building benefits of homeownership.¹ Many middle and
2 lower income families devote more than half of their take-home pay to rent, leaving
3 little money to pay for transportation, food, healthcare and other necessities.² Unable
4 to set aside money for savings, these families are also at risk of losing their housing in
5 the event of a personal financial setback. Indeed, housing insecurity in California has
6 led to a mounting homelessness crisis.³

7 12. Beyond the human toll, California’s housing crisis harms the
8 environment. “[W]hen Californians seeking affordable housing are forced to drive
9 longer distances to work, an increased amount of greenhouse gases and other
10 pollutants is released and puts in jeopardy the achievement of the state’s climate
11 goals.” Gov. Code § 65584.

12 13. At the core of California’s affordable housing crisis is a failure to build
13 enough housing to meet demand. California’s Legislative Analyst’s Office estimates
14 that the state should have been building approximately 210,000 units a year in major
15 metropolitan areas from 1980 to 2010 to meet housing demand. Instead, it built
16 approximately 120,000 units per year.⁴ Today, California ranks 49th out of the 50
17 states in existing housing units per capita.⁵

18 14. California’s housing crisis has been building for decades. The
19

20 ¹ California Department of Housing and Community Development, *California’s*
21 *Housing Future: Challenges and Opportunities: Final Statewide Housing Assessment*
22 *2025* (2018), available at http://www.hcd.ca.gov/policy-research/plans-reports/docs/SHA_Final_Combined.pdf, at 18-19.

23 ² *Id.* at 27.

24 ³ *Id.* at 3, 48-50.

25 ⁴ Legislative Analyst’s Office, *California’s High Housing Costs: Causes and*
26 *Consequences* (2015), available at <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2015/finance/housing-costs/housing-costs.pdf>, at 21.

27 ⁵ McKinsey & Company, *A Tool Kit to Close California’s Housing Gap: 3.5*
28 *Million Homes By 2025* (2016), available at https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured_insights/Urbanization/Closing_Californias_housing_gap/Closing-Californias-housing-gap-Full-report.ashx, at document page 6.

1 Legislature has recognized that the crisis is driven, in part, “by activities and policies
2 of many local governments that limit the approval of housing, increase the cost of
3 land for housing, and require that high fees and exactions be paid by producers of
4 housing.” Gov. Code § 65589.5(a)(1)(B).

5 15. Over the last five decades, the Legislature has increasingly sought to
6 address the power imbalance at play in local housing policy. The most important state
7 policy addressing the housing crisis is the Regional Housing Needs Allocation
8 (“RHNA”) and housing element system.

9 16. The RHNA system is a process for assessing and allocating housing
10 targets on a periodic basis, generally every eight years. Gov. Code § 65588. It starts
11 with an assessment of statewide housing needs by the California Department of
12 Housing and Community Development (“HCD”). The Department allocates the
13 state’s anticipated housing needs on a region-by-region basis, at different levels of
14 affordability, based on established criteria. Gov. Code §§ 65584.01, 65588. This need
15 is then usually meted out to individual localities by a regional council of governments,
16 as is the case in the Southern California region. Gov. Code § 65584.05.

17 17. Once the allocations are final, each locality is tasked with developing an
18 action plan (the housing element) to enact land use policies that will produce enough
19 housing to meet its RHNA goals. Gov. Code §§ 65583, 65583.2. The housing
20 element must provide an inventory of sites available for residential development and
21 assess constraints and market realities that affect the likely development activity at
22 those sites, including local land use regulations. Localities must make changes to
23 their land use rules, including by rezoning land, if needed to enable housing sufficient
24 to meet their RHNA goals. Gov. Code § 65583(c), 65583.2(h).

25 18. Each city submits a draft of its Housing Element to HCD for review and
26 receives written findings. Gov. Code § 65585(b)(3). In its written findings, HCD
27 makes a determination whether the draft housing element “substantially complies”
28 with the statutory requirements. Gov. Code § 65585(d). Prior to adoption of a

1 housing element, a city must consider HCD’s findings and either amend its housing
2 element accordingly or provide findings of its own as to why it believes the housing
3 element is compliant despite HCD’s determination. § 65585(e), (f).

4 19. California is currently in the midst of the sixth statewide housing element
5 update cycle. For cities in the Southern California region, including the City, the
6 sixth cycle covers an eight-year planning period starting October 15, 2021, and these
7 cities were required to update their housing elements by that date. Gov. Code
8 § 65588(e)(3).

9 20. A city without a compliant updated housing element is prohibited from
10 using its general plan and zoning standards to reject certain housing development
11 projects. *See* Gov. Code § 65589.5(d).

12 21. A city that does not adopt a compliant updated housing element within
13 120 days of the due date is subject to accelerated rezoning under the housing element,
14 once adopted. Gov. Code §§ 65583(c)(1)(A), 65583.2(c), 65588(e)(4)(C).

15 22. An interested party may bring an action under Code of Civil Procedure
16 Section 1085 to determine whether a housing element conforms to the statutory
17 requirements and to compel a city to adopt a compliant housing element. Gov. Code
18 §§ 65587, 65751.

19 23. If a city’s housing element does not substantially comply with state law,
20 a reviewing court must order the city to bring it into compliance within 120 days.
21 Gov. Code § 65754(a). After adopting a housing element subject to such an order, the
22 city must subsequently rezone to obtain consistency with the housing element within
23 120 days. Gov. Code § 65754(b).

24 24. Additionally, the court must subject the city to penalties, which can
25 include a suspension of all non-residential permitting and judicial approval of housing
26 development projects. Gov. Code § 65755(a)(1), (4). The court can also grant this
27 relief on an interim basis during the pendency of litigation. Gov. Code § 65757.
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FACTS

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2 25. The statutory deadline for the City to adopt a sixth cycle updated
3 Housing Element was October 15, 2021.

4 26. The City has not adopted a sixth cycle updated housing element.

5 27. Californians is a non-profit organization that aims to address California's
6 housing crisis, generally through impact litigation to support the development of and
7 access to housing for families at all income levels. From 2019 through 2021,
8 Californians participated in five lawsuits as petitioner or intervenor, and three more as
9 *amicus curiae*.

10 28. Californians is currently engaged in a statewide effort to enforce both the
11 substantive requirements and the deadlines in state housing element law, for the sixth
12 housing element update cycle. As part of this effort, it has contacted approximately
13 50 cities to address concerns about their compliance with state law.

14 29. For cities that have not yet adopted sixth cycle updated housing
15 elements, Californians' approach involves contacting each city with a threat of
16 litigation and an offer of compromise whereby Californians would agree to delay
17 litigation in exchange for an acknowledgment by the city of certain state law penalties
18 that apply due to its failure to timely adopt an updated housing element. In response,
19 some cities have agreed to make such an acknowledgment, while others have
20 declined.

21 30. On March 7, 2022, Californians contacted Daniel Wall, the Director of
22 Public Works of the City, to threaten litigation and offer this compromise.

23 31. On March 8, 2022, Mr. Wall responded. The response declined to make
24 all of the specific acknowledgments requested by Californians.

25 32. Later on March 8, 2022, Californians wrote to Mr. Wall to say that the
26 City's response was inadequate and to reiterate the specifics of the offer of
27 compromise.

28 33. On March 28, 2022, Californians contacted the City Council to again

1 threaten litigation and make the compromise offer. The letter demanded a response
2 by April 1, but no response was received.

3
4 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

5 **Writ of Mandate to Compel Compliance with Housing Element Law**
6 **(Gov. Code §§ 65587, 65751; C.C.P. § 1085)**

7 34. Californians incorporates and realleges all of the foregoing paragraphs.

8 35. Under Government Code Section 65587, any interested party may bring
9 an action to determine whether all or part of a Housing Element conforms to the
10 statutory requirements.

11 36. Pursuant to Government Code Sections 65587 and 65751, an action to
12 challenge the legal adequacy of a housing element or compliance with housing
13 element deadlines shall be brought under Code of Civil Procedure Section 1085.

14 37. Californians is an interested party for the purposes of these statutes.

15 38. The City's deadline to adopt a sixth cycle updated housing element was
16 October 15, 2021.

17 39. Because the City missed this deadline, its housing element does not
18 substantially comply with state law and it is subject to an action under Government
19 Code Sections 65587 and 65751.

20 40. Californians has no available administrative remedies.

21 41. Californians has no plain, speedy, or adequate remedy at law, other than
22 the relief sought herein.

23 42. Accordingly, Californians is entitled to a writ of mandate.

24 **PRAYER**

25 WHEREFORE, Petitioner prays for relief as follows:

26 1. A writ of mandate directing the City to adopt a sixth cycle updated
27 housing element pursuant to the schedule set forth in Government Code Section
28 65754.

2. An injunction or order providing relief under Government Code Section

1 65755.

2 3. A declaration that:

- 3 a. From October 16, 2021 until the City complies with the Court’s
4 writ of mandate through the adoption of a housing element that
5 substantially complies with state law, the City has not had a
6 housing element that was revised in accordance with Government
7 Code Section 65588 and the City’s housing element has not
8 substantially complied with state law;
- 9 b. The City is required to complete any rezoning required under
10 Government Code Sections 65583(c)(1)(A) or 65583.2(c) by
11 October 15, 2022.
- 12 c. The City is not permitted to use the provisions in subdivision (d)(1)
13 or (d)(5) of Government Code Section 65589.5 to disapprove a
14 housing development project that qualifies for approval under
15 subdivision (d) of that section—that is, a project in which either (A)
16 at least 20 percent of the total units shall be sold or rented to lower
17 income households, as defined in Health and Safety Code Section
18 50079.5, or (B) 100 percent of the units shall be sold or rented to
19 persons and families of moderate income as defined in Health and
20 Safety Code Section 50093, or persons and families of middle
21 income, as defined in Government Code Section 65008—or to
22 condition the approval of such a project in a manner that renders it
23 infeasible for development for the use of very low, low-, or
24 moderate-income households, or an emergency shelter, including
25 through the use of design review standards.

26 4. Costs of suit;

27 5. Attorneys’ fees under Code of Civil Procedure Section 1021.5 and as
28 otherwise allowed by law;

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6. Such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

Dated: April 18, 2022

Respectfully Submitted,
CALIFORNIANS FOR HOMEOWNERSHIP, INC.

By 
Matthew P. Gelfand

Attorneys for Petitioner,
Californians for Homeownership, Inc.

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VERIFICATION

I, Matthew P. Gelfand, declare:

1. I hold the position of Counsel at Petitioner Californians for Homeownership, Inc., and am familiar with the matters discussed in the foregoing Petition.

2. I have read the Petition and know the contents thereof. The statements of fact therein are true and correct of my own knowledge.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on April 18, 2022 at Los Angeles, California.



Matthew P. Gelfand