



ASSOCIATION
OF BAY AREA
GOVERNMENTS

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January 19, 2021

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Supervisor Katie Rice, President
Marin County Board of Supervisors
Marin County Civic Center
3501 Civic Center Drive, Suite 329
San Rafael, CA 94903-4112

RE: Comments on Proposed Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) Methodology

Dear Supervisor Rice:

Thank you for your comment letter on the Proposed RHNA Methodology as well as Marin County's ongoing engagement in the RHNA process to-date. After reviewing feedback from the public comment period, ABAG released the Draft RHNA Methodology on December 18, 2020. The Draft Methodology uses the same baseline allocation, factors, and weights as the Proposed Methodology. However, the 2050 Households baseline in the Draft Methodology has been updated to include data from the Plan Bay Area 2050 Final Blueprint, while the Proposed Methodology used data from the Draft Blueprint.

Whereas the Plan Bay Area 2050 Draft Blueprint featured 25 strategies that influenced the location of future growth, the Final Blueprint features 35 revised strategies adopted by the ABAG Executive Board and Metropolitan Transportation Commission in fall 2020. These strategies shift the regional growth pattern, with generally small to moderate impacts on RHNA allocations. Integration of the Plan Bay Area 2050 Final Blueprint baseline data addresses many of the issues raised in the public comment period, such as reducing allocations to most unincorporated areas, including Marin County. More information on the Draft RHNA Methodology is available in this document on ABAG's website: https://abag.ca.gov/sites/default/files/abag_draft_rhna_methodology_release_december2020.pdf

Staff acknowledges the City's concerns about natural hazards and possible infrastructure limitations for new housing development, but the Draft RHNA Methodology effectively incorporates both hazard risk and potential development constraints. ABAG-MTC staff worked with local governments to gather information about local plans, zoning, physical characteristics and potential development opportunities and constraints. This information was used as an input into the Plan Bay Area 2050 Blueprint, which is used as the baseline allocation in the Draft RHNA Methodology. The Blueprint allows additional feasible growth within the urban footprint by increasing allowable residential densities and expanding housing into select areas currently zoned for commercial and industrial uses. Ultimately, by law, ABAG cannot limit RHNA based on existing zoning or land use restrictions. The statute also requires ABAG to consider the potential for increased residential development under alternative zoning ordinances and land use restrictions.

Including the Blueprint in the RHNA Methodology addresses concerns about natural hazards, as Plan Bay Area 2050 restricts growth outside Urban Growth Boundaries and does not allow for Growth Geographies to overlap with the worst fire hazard severity zones. The Blueprint Growth Geographies not only exclude CAL FIRE designated “Very High” fire severity areas, but they also exclude “High” fire severity areas in unincorporated communities as well as county-designated wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas where applicable. The Blueprint strategies focus future growth away from the highest fire risk zones, support increased wildland management programs, and support residential building upgrades that reduce the likelihood for damage when fires occur in the wildland urban interface. Additionally, the Blueprint incorporates strategies to mitigate the impacts of sea level rise, protecting nearly all communities at risk from two feet of permanent inundation. Communities can also choose to take these risks into consideration with where and how they site future development, either limiting growth in areas of higher hazard or by increasing building standards to address the hazard.

Census data indicates that nearly three-quarters of residents in unincorporated Marin County live in Census Designated Places, or more densely populated areas similar to incorporated cities and towns. In identifying future locations for housing, ABAG supports Marin County encouraging housing in these existing communities where most of the unincorporated county population already lives, such as parts of the unincorporated county that are near job centers and transit centers such as ferry terminals and SMART train stations. Additionally, at the request of local jurisdiction staff in some counties, ABAG-MTC staff has facilitated discussions with local jurisdictions about opportunities to direct additional RHNA units to incorporated areas. This includes the use of provisions in Housing Element Law that allow an unincorporated county to develop an agreement to transfer a portion of its RHNA allocation to a city or town after it receives its RHNA allocation from ABAG. ABAG-MTC staff is available to help with this process and provide any assistance needed by Marin County jurisdictions.

Notably, the performance evaluation metrics indicate that the Draft RHNA Methodology performs well in meeting all five of the RHNA statutory objectives. This analysis shows that the Draft Methodology results in jurisdictions with the most access to jobs and transit as well as jurisdictions with the lowest vehicle miles traveled per resident experiencing higher growth rates from their RHNA allocations than other jurisdictions in the region. In contrast, the performance evaluation metrics also show that using Plan Bay Area 2050 *household growth* as the RHNA Methodology baseline, as suggested in your letter, may fall short in achieving statutory requirements related to affirmatively furthering fair housing.

In the Draft Methodology, staff has not recommended integrating any changes to the methodology’s baseline beyond updating its underlying data to reflect the Final Blueprint. The 2050 Households baseline represents the outcome of the nearly year-long Housing Methodology Committee (HMC) process, and the HMC voted overwhelmingly to approve their recommended Methodology. ABAG’s Regional Planning Committee and Executive Board have also voted to approve the HMC’s recommendation.

We encourage you to remain engaged both in the RHNA process and in the Plan Bay Area 2050 process, which will continue through late 2021. The ABAG Executive Board is slated to take action on the Draft RHNA Methodology at the January 21, 2021 meeting. After a Draft RHNA

Methodology is adopted by the Executive Board, ABAG will submit the methodology to the Department of Housing and Community Development for review and then use the state agency's feedback to develop a final methodology and draft RHNA allocation in spring 2021. Release of the draft allocation will be followed by an appeals period starting in the summer of 2021, with the final RHNA allocation assigned to each of the Bay Area's local governments in late 2021.

Thank you again for your feedback and participation in this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Therese W. McMillan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Therese W. McMillan
Executive Director

TM: EK

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