



HOUSING, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

Highlights

Friday, January 23, 2026

ATTENDANCE:

Members: Leslie Castelano (Chair); Jorgel Chavez (Vice Chair); Rob Baquera; Jose Luis Barajas; Kim Barber; Scott Behrendt; Evan Branning; Lee Butler; Larissa De La Cruz; Alexxiss Diaz; Tanya Doby; Marilyn Ezzy-Ashcraft; Jon Fugitt; Belle La; Alma Hernandez; Terry Hines; Cecilia Hupp; Andrew Jared; Lisa Kaplan; Tamala Kelly; Mark Lazzaretto; Tonia Lediju; Kari Leon; Irais Lopez-Ortega; Julie Lucido; Meredith Matthews; Patricia Matthews; Stacey Mattina; John Miki; Juan Munoz-Guevara; Alice Patino; Debra Porada; Kelly Purvis; Kelly Ramirez; Rocky Rhodes; Lisa Soghor; Thomas Soule; Niroop Srivatsa; Gret Terry; Julie Testa; Maureen Toms; Stephanie Vargas; Brad Walker; Mark Waronek; Scott Webb

League Partners: Clayton Miller

Staff: Brady Guertin, Legislative Advocate
Waleed Hojeij, Policy & Legislative Affairs Analyst

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting opened with welcoming remarks from Chair Leslie Castellano, who expressed her appreciation for the committee's continued engagement and commitment. She noted the strong turnout and emphasized the importance of the committee's policy work for the year ahead.

Vice-Chair Jorgel Chavez followed with additional introductory comments, highlighting the collective excitement surrounding this year's Policy Committee meeting.

Members of the policy committee then introduced themselves with their names, the city they represent, and how long they have been serving on the policy committee.

II. Public Comment

Chair Castellano opened the floor up for members of the public who wish to speak. No public comment was provided.

III. Committee Orientation

Cal Cities Legislative Advocate Brady Guertin provided the committee with an overview of the policy committee process. He outlined how issues are added to the agenda, the standards for determining statewide policy significance, the board of directors' role, and the various legislative positions the committee can take on pending legislation.

IV. Cal Cities 2026 Advocacy Priorities

Mr. Guertin reviewed the approved Cal Cities 2026 Advocacy Priorities adopted by the Board of Directors at our December League Leaders Meeting. He highlighted that the issues the HCED Committee works on will be included in this year's priorities.

V. **Existing Policy and Guiding Principles**

Staff delivered an update on the organization's existing policy and guiding principles. Brady provided an overview of the seven Cal Cities policy committees and described the biennial update process for the guiding principles, which serve as a reference point for Cal Cities' formal advocacy and official positions on housing bills. Cal Cities staff presented the recommended updates to the existing HCED guidelines and principles. Members of the policy committee provided feedback on ways to improve the document. There was an extensive discussion on the term "local control" and how we can advocate for cities through an equity lens. Members also raised concerns that our Rent Control Policy needed to be refined to be clearer. A member also requested that we consider adopting a policy regarding the Surplus Land Act.

Cal Cities staff took notes on all comments and will incorporate them into the existing draft of the guidelines and principles for the board's review in February. A motion was made to approve the update to existing policies and guiding principles as drafted, and to task staff with providing a summary of policy committee comments to the Cal Cities Board of Directors about potential changes or refinements to the existing policies and guiding principles for the HCED committee and the Board of Directors to consider and discuss this year. The motion was approved by a unanimous voice vote.

VI. **Adoption of 2026 Work Plan**

Cal Cities policy analyst, Waleed Hojeij presented the top three priorities identified by members in the work plan survey. The three priorities identified in the survey by the committee. Committee members identified the following top priorities for the policy committee to focus on this year:

1. **Housing Affordability, Supply, and Production:** Specifically, funding various types of housing development, addressing financing gaps and reducing construction costs, modernizing the housing permit and entitlement process, and addressing various state housing laws.
2. **Local Land Use Authority and State Mandates:** Specifically, continuing to advocate against unfunded mandates, protecting/enhancing local discretion and local land use authority, providing regulatory flexibility to local governments, and balancing state housing goals with local flexibility and discretion.
3. **Economic development and financing tools:** Specifically, restoring effective economic development tools to local jurisdictions, including infrastructure financing to support development, empowering cities to support local economies and promote economic development, and a general focus on economic development in local communities.

These priorities were reflected in the proposed 2026 Work Plan. After a brief discussion, the committee unanimously voted to submit the workplan to the board of directors.

VII. RHNA 7th Cycle Compliance: What to Expect and Best Practices

David Loya and Cristin Kenyon discussed the challenges smaller cities like Arcata and Eureka face in meeting Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) and Housing Element requirements in state law for the 7th RHNA cycle. In their presentation, they focused on how built-out communities with limited vacant land and parcels are often too small to meet the Department of Housing and Community Development's expectations.

Additionally, the panelists highlighted shared statewide issues, including strict site inventory requirements in state law, the increase in unfunded mandates, and competing statewide policy priorities. Both stressed the importance of understanding local housing market drivers and encouraged jurisdictions to adopt creative, realistic strategies, such as redeveloping city-owned sites, using form-based codes, pursuing infill development, and exploring zoning reforms. They also underscored the need for unified messaging, staff support, and coordinated advocacy for state-level reforms and funding.

VIII. Office of Land Use Planning and Climate Innovation

Lawrence Grodeska provided an update on the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation's multi-year effort to modernize the state's General Plan Guidelines, Specific Plan Guide, and Tribal Consultation Guidelines. The update will incorporate 250+ new state laws, improve clarity, and add practical tools such as checklists, case studies, and an interactive website to better support jurisdictions of all sizes in updating and completing their general plans. Lawrence emphasized a strengthened focus in this update on equity, climate, Tribal knowledge, and community engagement, as well as a reorganized structure designed to create an understanding of state requirements more accessible. The project is underway through 2027 and has ongoing opportunities for cities to participate in the process.

IX. Legislative and Budgetary Update

The meeting concluded with a legislative update from Mr. Guertin, who presented the various newly introduced HCED bills for the 2026 session. He also discussed broader housing issues he anticipates will be forthcoming this legislative session. Finally, he provided a more in-depth analysis of the release of the housing element [audit](#) by the California State Auditor's Office and informed the committee about Cal Cities' [response](#) and plans for the final year of this legislative session.

X. Adjourn

Next Meeting: Friday, March 27 (Hilton Orange County/ Costa Mesa), 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.