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SB 50 Clears First Committee Hurdle

William Fulton on Apr 9, 2019

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The Senate Housing Committee voted overwhelmingly, 9-1, to support Senate Bill 50 (https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=20190200SB50), the controversial measure to promote dense development around transit hubs and job centers statewide. It now advances to the Senate Governance and Finance Committee. In so doing, SB 50 has already gone further than its predecessor, last year's SB 827, which died amid controversy even before it came up for a vote in committee. (See prior CP&DR coverage (<http://www.cp-dr.com/articles/20180420>).)

Authored by Sen. Scott Wiener, SB 50 would require cities to approve moderate-density residential buildings, of four or five stories, around rail stations, high-frequency bus stops, and "jobs-rich areas." The latter term has yet to be defined in the bill. The bill requires that developments include affordable housing and reduces parking requirements. It would be the most significant state intervention in local land-use planning in recent memory.

The Governance and Finance vote is scheduled for April 24.

SB 50 has been polarizing. Sponsored by the pro-housing group California YIMBY, SB 50 is seen as a crucial part of the state's efforts to increase its housing supply. Opponents, who scuttled SB 827, contend that it is an affront to local control and threatens communities with gentrification. Others contend that SB 50 undermines the state's traditional celebration of single-family-home neighborhoods.

The bill has received support from organizations such as AARP, the California Federation of Labor, the Natural Resources Defense Council, among others. Mayors of San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Stockton, and Sacramento have also voiced support. Opponents include leaders of many smaller cities and some social justice organizations concerned about gentrification.

Meanwhile, in a display of SB 50's divisiveness, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors will vote this week on a resolution (<https://sf.curbed.com/2019/4/5/18297044/sb-50-gordon-mar-scott-wiener-transit-housing-gentrification>) opposing SB 50. Sup. Gordon Mar's resolution reads (<https://sf.curbed.com/2019/4/5/18297044/sb-50-gordon-mar-scott-wiener-transit-housing-gentrification>), in part, "[SB 50 will] undermine community participation in planning for the well-being of the environment and the public good, prevent the public from recapturing

an equitable portion of the economic benefits conferred to private interests, and significantly restrict San Francisco's ability to protect vulnerable communities from displacement and gentrification, unless further amended."

"Local control isn't biblical, it's a good thing when it delivers results, and it usually does deliver good results, and I say this as a former elected local official," said Weiner, as quoted (<https://sf.curbed.com/2019/4/3/18293731/senate-bill-50-scott-wiener-density-transit-hearing-housing>) in Curbed SF. "When it comes to housing, California's system of almost pure local control hasn't worked."

Meanwhile, the California chapter of the American Planning Association has formally opposed SB 50. The opposition seems in line with local governments' traditional preference for local control. However, many progressive planners see SB 50 as an important, progressive measure. Planner and blogger Nolan Gray is circulating a petition (<https://medium.com/@mnolangray/planners-for-sb-50-sign-our-open-letter-da48945fde0a?fbclid=IwAR1zgTGOWBfjYI9noNdD-ESusXcCQR7h7X--t5ANo9D210gugYVcgZIHjrg>) to encourage the APA to reverse course. His petition reads in part, "the incongruence between what we all agree SB 50 gets right and the California APA Chapter's stated concerns leaves many of us shocked by the chapter's decision to oppose this legislation. The California APA Chapter can and should pursue some of these requested reforms, either as amendments to the bill or in follow up legislation, but a position of 'Oppose Unless Amended' is irresponsible and unjustified."

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