

**Understanding and Challenging the  
Opposition to Housing Construction  
in California's Urban Areas**

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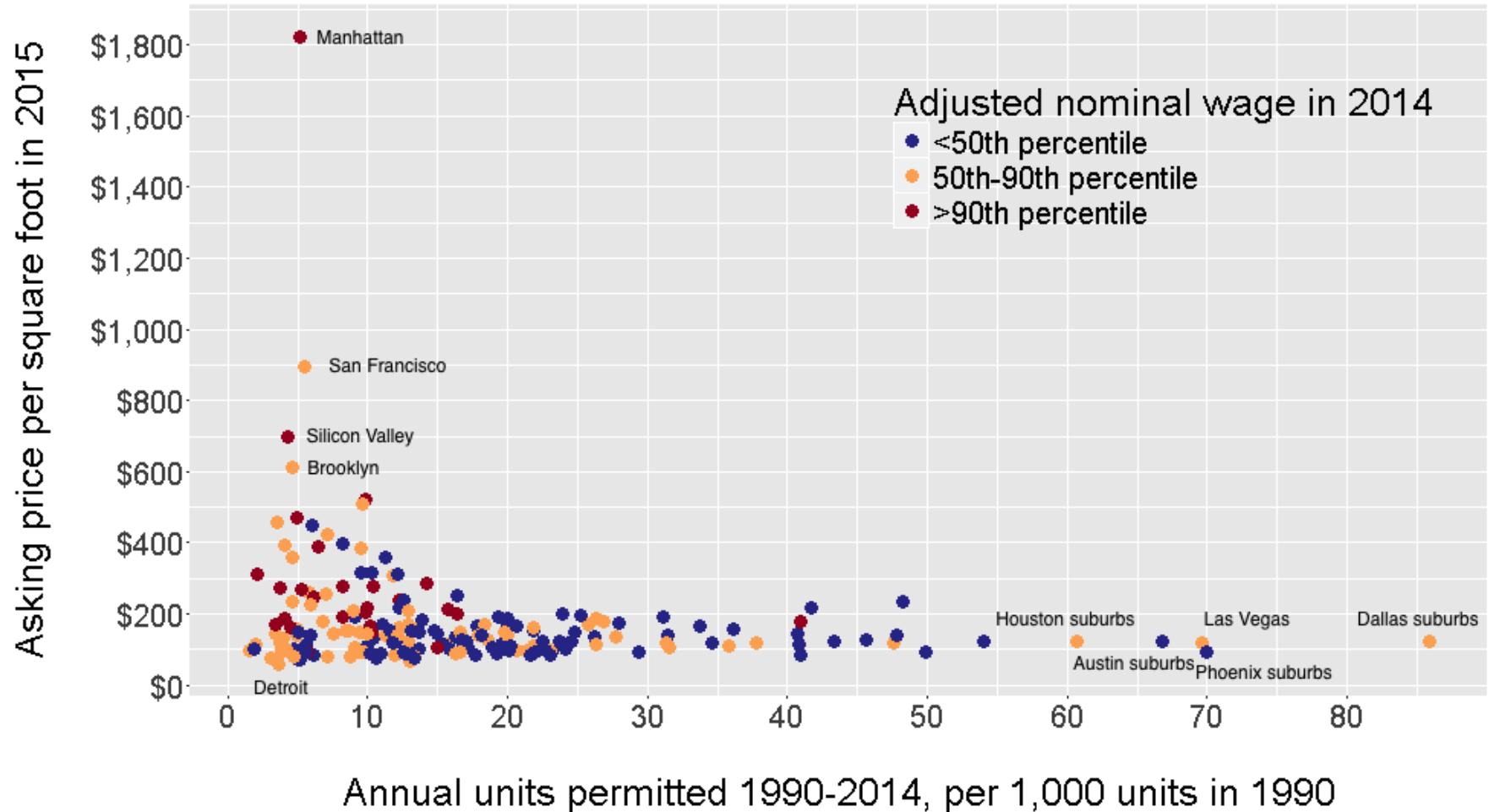
**Testimony to the California Senate  
Committee on Transportation and Housing**

# One cause of the affordability crisis

1. Downzoning & resistance to new housing is one of the major reasons for current affordability crisis
2. Our planning system enables local opposition to housing, magnifying a collective action problem (nobody wants new housing in their backyard)
3. The state government must use many levers to push cities to allow more new housing

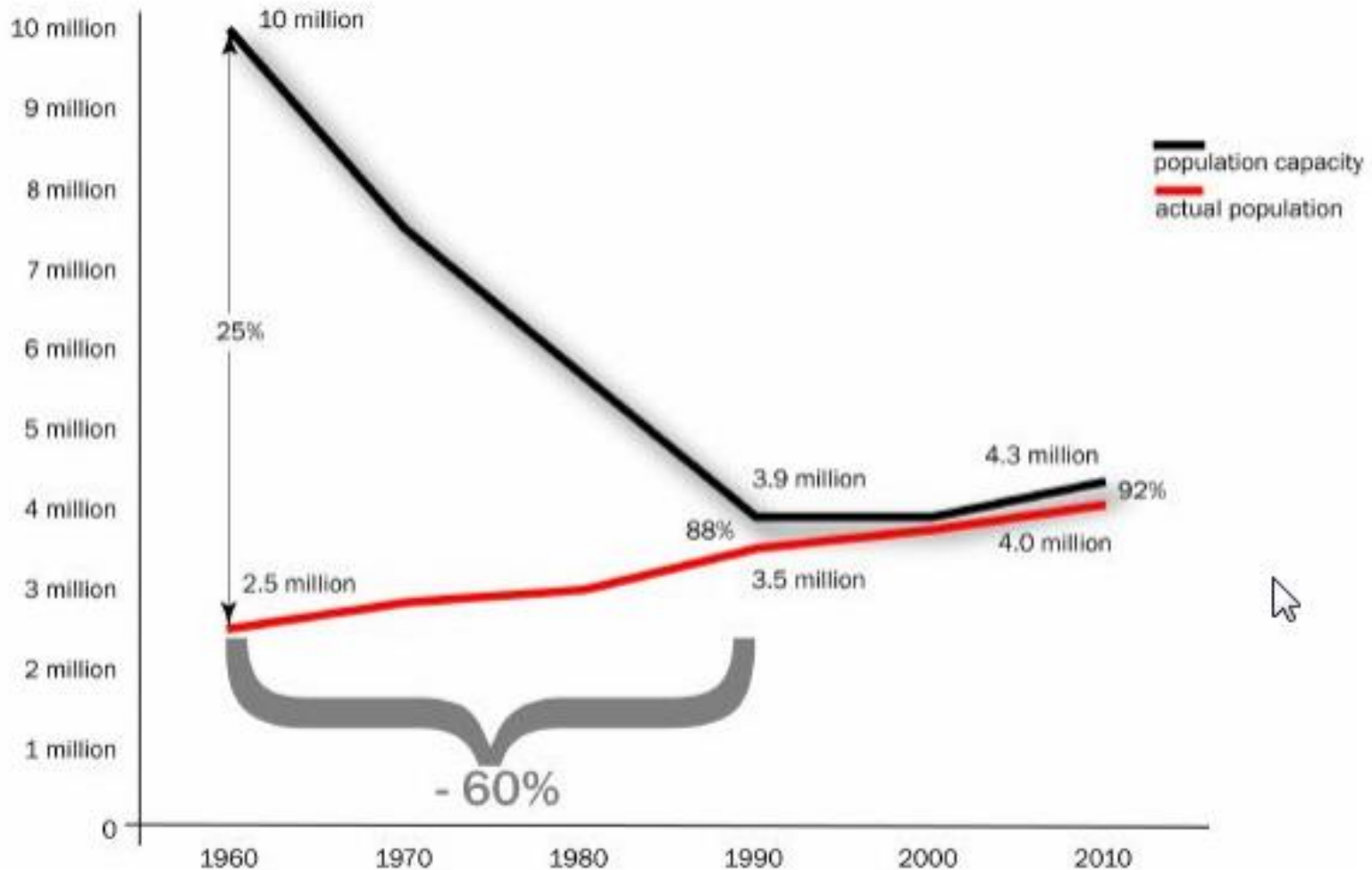
Source: Monkkonen, P. 2016. Understanding and Challenging Opposition to Housing Construction in California's Urban Areas, UC Center Sacramento White Paper (Available at: <http://uccs.ucdavis.edu/uccs-crre-housing-policy-brief-white-paper> )

# In cities that don't build housing, prices (and rents) are high



Source: Buntin, D. 2016. Is the Rent Too High? Aggregate Implications of Local Land-Use Regulation. UCLA Economics.

# Capacity zoned and actual population of Los Angeles, 1960-2010



Source: Morrow, Greg, "Homeowner Revolution: Democracy, Land Use, and the Los Angeles Slow Growth Movement 1965-1992." UCLA Electronic Thesis.<sup>4</sup>

# **Impacts of low-density zoning & resistance to new housing near employment and urban amenities**

- Leads to higher rents everywhere
- Pushes people farther from jobs & amenities
- Exacerbates spatial inequality
- Hurts regional economy
- Damages environment due to more driving

# **There are many reasons to oppose new housing near your own**

1. People are averse to changes in their neighborhood's built environment, the people that live there, and distrust the development process
2. Many misunderstand the role of supply in housing affordability
3. Even for those who support more housing in the abstract, the impacts of building are spatially concentrated but the benefits are disperse

# Currently, there are many ways to block residential development

## Planning system:

- Commenting through public fora, letters, petitions
- Appealing specific projects
- Participating in design review
- Filing historic designation petitions
- Advocating for requirements in new specific plans
- Making methodology for housing needs inadequate
- Influencing community planning process

## Legal system:

- Suing projects under CEQA
- Suing plans under CEQA
- Threatening to sue developers under CEQA
- Suing for developers not meeting a discretionary condition
- Suing to invalidate permits or policies

## Political system:

- Running ballot initiatives
- Lobbying (or recalling) City Council members individually
- Lobbying for state laws that affect specific cities' rules
- Lobbying against state laws that make it easier to build

# **The state government must do more to implement existing framework**

- Find more funding for subsidized housing
- Further streamline Accessory Dwelling Units
- Strengthen Housing Accountability Act
- SB 375 & Sustainable Communities Strategy
- Enhance and strengthen Housing Element Law
- Reorient the distribution of property & sales tax
- Democratize input to planning process
- Increase HCD funding & AG for housing laws



# **Enhance and enforce the Housing Element Law**

Cities are nowhere near complying with housing production targets derived from regional housing needs assessment (RHNA) (see recent Statewide Housing Assessment). Need more and bigger carrots and sticks.

RHNA allocations in many regions do not reflect environmental or affordability goals. Calculations should be simplified and standardized. Population projections bias downward housing needs.

# Democratize the planning process

Zoning decisions at a small geographic scale is a collective action problem.

The current system is inequitable - favoring homeowners, affluent, and those with time and resources (reinforces status quo bias in the political system)

The Housing Accountability Act can become important, as is funding for HCD and for Attorney General to enforce existing laws.

# Reorient local fiscal incentives

Give cities a greater share of property taxes (state backfill for school funding) on the condition of compliance with RHNA

Share sales tax revenue regionally per capita, to incentivize population rather than retail.

**Thank you!**

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