

# Walters: California failing to address housing shortage

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California has an immense shortage of housing, and every day it gets worse, because we're not building enough to keep up with even a modest level of population growth.

The shortage has driven housing costs through the roof, especially for working-class and poor families, and is atop the list of California's truly important issues, along with water and transportation.

However, as with those other deficiencies, another legislative session will end soon without decisive housing action.

Gov. Jerry Brown proposed a baby step toward alleviating the housing shortage -- exempting certain projects from some of the red tape that plagues the housing development industry.

He tied adoption to spending \$400 million on low-income housing, in hopes of overcoming opposition from local government officials, environmental groups and labor unions. However, it didn't appear that Brown was putting his full weight behind his proposal, and the fierce opposition cowed legislators. Last week, Democratic Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon pronounced Brown's proposal "dead."

"I don't think there's any support in our caucus for the ... proposal as the architecture was rendered by the governor," Rendon said.

As discussions collapsed, a coalition of liberal groups, including some that had opposed Brown's plan, publicly urged Brown to spend the \$400 million anyway. He didn't respond, at least publicly, but releasing the money would be an unmistakable signal that he wasn't serious about housing reform.

So if Brown's proposal is dead, at least for this year, what else is on the horizon?

The Senate has voted to place a \$3 billion housing bond issue before voters, but when it reached the Assembly, the Appropriations Committee delayed a vote until 2018 -- and it's uncertain whether it can muster the required two-thirds Assembly vote even with the delay.

Meanwhile, legislators have pursued several bills that nibble at the edges of the housing crisis, such as legislation allowing second units to be built on residential lots. But not all housing measures are positive.

One example is Assembly Bill 2282, carried by Assemblyman Ian Calderon, D-Whittier, which implies that "large-scale buy-to-rent investors" gobbling up houses by outbidding individual buyers is a big housing factor. It would create a state task force to investigate such purchases as a precursor to "meaningful legislative action that will help alleviate the pressing concern of rising home prices."

There are many factors in the state's failure to supply enough housing, but corporate home purchase isn't one of them. Relative to the state's immense housing market, such purchases are minuscule. If anything, they increase supply by repairing otherwise uninhabitable units and making them available to home-seeking families.

As Legislative Analyst Mac Taylor has told legislators, California's housing problem is that too little is being built.

The squeeze is especially acute in coastal metropolitan areas, where local not-in-my-backyard opponents and misguided environmental groups take advantage of complex planning, zoning and environmental laws. That's what Brown's proposal sought to mitigate.

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