

ATTACHMENT A

**City of Agoura Hills**

**Sixth Cycle Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) Appeal Request Form**

***Brief Statement on why this revision is necessary to further the intent of the objectives listed in Government Code Section 65584:***

As described more fully under, “Brief Description of Appeal Request and Desired Outcome,” the City of Agoura Hills respectfully appeals the RHNA number of 318 housing units provided by SCAG for the Sixth Cycle, primarily due to: wildfire concerns; the acknowledgement at the State and Los Angeles County level that new development in fire prone areas should be reconsidered; and the fact that most of the City is within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ).

A reduction in units would continue to be consistent with the equity-related objectives in Government Code Section 65584(d), as described below, and would better support the objectives in subparagraph (2) of Section 65584(d), which prioritizes infill development, encourages the protection of environmental resources, and seeks to promote land use patterns that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- (1) The reduced RHNA number would allow the City to direct new housing units to the center, more urbanized part of the City where there are some vacant infill lots and lots feasible for redevelopment. This would better protect environmentally sensitive lands and reduce fire-related concerns since much of the City contains hillside properties that contain native habitat, and even significant ecological areas. However, even many of the vacant infill lots and the lots that are feasible for redevelopment in the center of the City are located in the VHFHSZ, and the entire City is located in an area prone to fire. Placing more residents in the urban portions of the community where there are bus lines and more compact development would assist in supporting socioeconomic equity and greenhouse gas reduction, but it still would place new development in fire-prone areas and create concerns regarding emergency evacuation. Decreasing the City’s RHNA obligation would allow the City to direct future housing development to the more urban areas of the City, without overloading evacuation routes in fire emergencies. In addition, a reduction in RHNA for the City of Agoura Hills would result in a more efficient development pattern and lower greenhouse gas emissions region-wide by placing more of the region’s housing in areas closer to job centers.
- (2) The City of Agoura Hills would continue to accommodate a mix of housing types and affordability, even with a slightly reduced RHNA number. The requested decrease in units would be across all income categories such that the City would still be responsible for providing a mix of units at all affordability levels.

***Brief Description of Appeal Request and Desired Outcome:***

The City of Agoura Hills respectfully appeals the RHNA number of 318 residential units provided by SCAG for the Sixth Cycle, and is requesting a reduction in the City's total RHNA allocation for the Sixth Cycle. The City acknowledges its responsibility to accommodate additional units to address the statewide housing shortage, and the City is planning for such units. At the same time, we believe the full 318 units is not practical or appropriate due to the fact that the majority of the City land area (approximately 2/3 of all of the City's land area) is within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ), per CAL FIRE mapping (see Supporting Document No. 1).

The City is requesting a reduction in RHNA from 318 to 212 housing units. The methodology used in determining this new number is based on the land area in the City that is considered VHFHSZ, an estimated two-thirds of the land, and a desire to minimize development in this zone. Therefore, we are requesting a proportional decrease in RHNA. We understand that the Final RHNA Methodology includes two components: "Total Projected Need" and "Total Existing Need." Using SCAG's RHNA data for Agoura Hills of "Existing Need Due to Job Accessibility" of 159 units, 2/3 of that amount (generally estimated to be in the VHFHSZ) is about 106. The difference between 159 and 106 is 53 units, which is the proposed revised number of "Existing Need Due to Job Accessibility" units. After combining the 53 units with the "Net Residual Factor for Existing Need," the "Total Existing Need" is 68 units. Combining the "Total Existing Need" of 68 with the "Total Projected Need" of 144 calculated by SCAG, the result is a total 212 RHNA. This is a decrease in 66 percent from the original 318 units to the City-proposed 212 units.

While the CAL FIRE map itself is not new since April 30, 2019, new information about the vulnerability of the area along the Ventura County/Los Angeles County border for future wildfires has become available since April 30, 2019. The entire City is within historic wildland fire pathways. As the fires in 2020 have demonstrated, the effect of climate change has increased fire risk in California statewide. Whereas the City used to be able to rely on mutual aid agreements with other jurisdictions, the State's experience in 2020 demonstrates how multiple fire incidents occurring simultaneously has become more frequent, stretching the State's fire response resources and exacerbating the effects of each fire incident. As governmental entities across the State have begun to emphasize in the last 18 months (as described below), reducing development in the State's most fire-prone areas is a priority for future land use development.

Recent analysis of the Woolsey Fire, which occurred in November 2018 and significantly affected the City of Agoura Hills, supports the City's request for a reduction in the City's RHNA allocation. The *County of Los Angeles After Action Review of the Woolsey Fire Incident*, which was issued on November 17, 2019, (see Supporting Document No. 2) indicates, "While the Woolsey Fire disaster presented unprecedented challenges, it was still a single, focused incident; it was not Countywide. Imagine the challenges after a great earthquake or similar wide ranging event" (p. 1). The report further indicates, "There must also be an ongoing public policy discussion regarding significant development in Very High or High Fire Hazard Severity areas" (p. 1). Lastly, page 2 of the document states (with our emphasis):

*As terrible as the Woolsey Fire was, it was not the largest megafire in California. We cannot expect that all population growth in Very High or High Fire Hazard Severity areas can be protected simply by increasing resilience<sup>1</sup> to wildfire and by adding more fire engines. Even if the current fire weather cycle stops, it will return. Governor Gavin Newsom's Strike Force Team, on April 12, 2019, observed that **it is critical** to 'Make*

*communities more resilient by considering updating codes that govern defensible space, encouraging cost-effective hardening of homes, strengthening evacuation, encourage other emergency planning, and **improving land use practice to reduce the damage to life and property from wildfires.***”

<sup>1</sup> *Hardening buildings, fuels treatment, and vegetation management*

Similarly, the Governor Newsom Strike Force Report, *Wildfires and Climate Change: California’s Energy Future* (April 12, 2019) (Supporting Document No. 3) states on page 14 (with our emphasis):

*The Governor has made housing production and affordability a key priority. California already has strong standards to reduce VMT. The strike force recommends that at the state and regional level, governments and planners incorporate CAL FIRE’s fire risk projections and the fire projection information in the Adaption Clearinghouse and Fourth Climate Assessment into short-term and long-term planning, **and begin to de-prioritize new development in areas of the most extreme fire risk.** In turn, more urban and lower-risk regions in the state must prioritize increasing infill development and overall housing production.*

We are seeking a reduction in the RHNA of 318 so that the necessary housing units can be accommodated in the more developed, urban portion of the City (see CAL FIRE map), and more importantly, that more of the region’s units be accommodated in the less fire-prone areas of the region as a whole.

The entire City for practical purposes is within a fire-prone area, and an estimated 2/3 of the City is formally designated as being located within the VHFHSZ. The non-VHFHSZ portion of the City likely is categorized as such because it is already developed with urban uses. However, as we have seen in the past two years, many suburban areas in fire-prone areas have experienced devastating losses, despite the “developed nature” of those areas. We believe that denser housing development should not be concentrated outside of the center urban area in the City, but the center urban area is almost fully developed, and redevelopment opportunities are minimal because the existing development is relatively new and not ripe for turnover. While there are a few sites where housing units could be focused, many of the vacant and theoretically developable sites are in the more natural areas, which are most vulnerable to wildfires. In light of the State’s interest in revising land use patterns to de-prioritize new development in fire-prone areas, we think a reduction in the City’s RHNA allocation is warranted.