



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
900 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 1700
Los Angeles, CA 90017
T: (213) 236-1800
www.scag.ca.gov

September 18, 2019

Mr. Doug McCauley
Acting Director
Housing & Community Development (HCD)
2020 W. El Camino Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95833

Subject: SCAG's Objection to HCD's Regional Housing Need
Determination

Dear Mr. McCauley,

This letter represents the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)'s formal objection to HCD's Regional Housing Need Determination as submitted to SCAG on August 22, 2019 and is made in accordance with Government Code Section 65584.01(c)(2)(A) and (B). At the outset, please know that SCAG is fully aware that the State of California is in the midst of a housing crisis and that resolving this crisis requires strong partnerships with state, regional and local entities in addition to private and non-profit sectors.

As such, SCAG desires to be an active and constructive partner with the State and HCD on solving our current housing crisis, and this objection should not suggest otherwise. We are in fact currently setting up a housing program that will assist our local jurisdictions on activities and policies that will lead to actual housing unit construction.

In the context of the 6th cycle Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) process, SCAG appreciates the collaboration with HCD as reflected in the numerous consultation sessions on the regional determination and other staff engagement on housing issues with the objective of making RHNA a meaningful step toward addressing our housing crisis.

As you are aware, HCD transmitted its Regional Housing Needs Determination of 1,344,740 units for the SCAG region last month. This number reflects the housing units that local jurisdictions in the region must plan for during the 8-year period from October 2021 to October 2029. At the September 5, 2019 meeting, SCAG Regional Council authorized staff to file an objection to HCD on regional housing need determination pursuant to Government Code Section 65584.01(c).

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I would like to note that SCAG's objection focuses on the process and adherence to state housing law requirements and not necessarily to the regional housing need determination number. The ultimate aim of this objection, as discussed at length by the Regional Council, is to ensure the most technically and legally credible basis for a regional determination so that the 197 local jurisdictions in the SCAG region can approach the difficult task of zoning to accommodate regional needs with the backing of the most robust and realistic target that is possible.

One of our major concerns is that HCD did not base its determination on SCAG's RTP/SCS Growth Forecast, which was inconsistent with Government Code 65584.01(c)(2)(A). Another major concern is that pursuant to Government Code 65584.01(c) (2) (B), HCD's determination of housing need in the SCAG region is not a reasonable application of the methodology and assumptions described in statute. Specifically, HCD compared household overcrowding and cost-burden rates in the SCAG region to national averages rather than to rates in comparable regions as statutorily required. These and two additional basis for objections are described in detail in the section below which also includes a deduction for household growth on tribal land and a concern that the vacancy rate standards used by HCD are not substantiated by data, analysis, or literature. In addition, the attached EXCEL worksheet and technical documentation contain SCAG's alternative proposed 6th cycle RHNA determination, which would consist of a range of total housing unit need between 823,808 and 920,772.

BASIS FOR SCAG OBJECTION

Use of SCAG's Population Forecast

HCD did not base its determination on SCAG's RTP/SCS Growth Forecast, which was provided in the original consultation package and via follow-up email to HCD. Government Code 65584.01(a) indicates [emphasis added]:

*“(a) The department’s determination shall be based upon population projections produced by the Department of Finance and regional population forecasts used in preparing regional transportation plans, in consultation with each council of governments. **If the total regional population forecast for the projection year, developed by the council of governments and used for the preparation of the regional transportation plan, is within a range of 1.5 percent of the total regional population forecast for the projection year by the Department of Finance, then the population forecast developed by the council of governments shall be the basis from which the department determines the existing and projected need for housing in the region.** If the difference between the total population projected by the council of governments and the total population projected for the region by the Department of Finance is greater than 1.5 percent, then the department and the council of governments shall meet to discuss variances in methodology used for population projections and seek agreement on a population projection for the region to be used as a basis for determining the existing and projected housing need for the region. If no agreement is reached, then the population projection for the region shall be the population projection for the region prepared by the Department of Finance as may be modified by the department as a result of discussions with the council of governments.”*

SCAG projects total regional population to grow to 20,725,878 by October, 2029. SCAG's projection differs from Department of Finance (DOF) projection of 20,689,591, which was issued by DOF in May, 2018, by 0.18%. The total population provided in HCD's determination is 20,455,355, reflecting an updated DOF projection, differs from SCAG's projection by 1.32%. As SCAG's total projection is within the statutory tolerance of 1.5%, accordingly HCD is to use SCAG's population forecast.

While HCD has emphasized that consistency in approach to the 6th cycle RHNA across regions is a priority, deference to the Council of Governments' forecast as specified in statute is an important aspect of regional planning. Federal requirements for SCAG's Regional Transportation Plan necessitate a forecast of population, households, and employment for evaluating future land use patterns and measuring future travel demand as well as air quality conformity under the federal Clean Air Act. In addition, under SB 375, the State requires SCAG to develop a Sustainable Communities Strategy which is a coordination of transportation and land use in the regional planning process to achieve State's climate goals. Both federal and State requirements are predicated on SCAG's forecast of population, households and employment.

As a result, SCAG has a long-established and well-respected process for producing a balanced forecast of population, households, and employment for the region, the details of which can be found in each Regional Transportation Plan (e.g. http://scagrtpscs.net/Documents/2016/final/f2016RTPSCS_DemographicsGrowthForecast.pdf). SCAG's quadrennial growth forecast begins with a consensus on appropriate assumptions of fertility, migration, immigration, household formation, and job growth by a panel of state and regional experts including members of DOF's Demographic Research Unit. In addition, SCAG co-hosts an annual demographic workshop with the University of Southern California to keep state and regional experts and stakeholders apprised of demographic and economic trends (<https://www.scag.ca.gov/calendar/Pages/DemographicWorkshop.aspx>).

SCAG places a high priority on generating its own forecasts of population, households, and employment and ensuring the highest possible degree of consistency and integrity of its projections for transportation, land use, and housing planning purposes.

Use of Comparable Regions

Pursuant to Government Code 65584.01(c)(2)(B), HCD's determination of housing need in the SCAG region is not a reasonable application of the methodology and assumptions described in statute. Specifically, HCD compared household overcrowding and cost-burden rates in the SCAG region to national averages rather than to rates in comparable regions as statutorily required.

SCAG's initial consultation package provided an approach using comparable regions to evaluate household overcrowding. SCAG staff met with HCD staff in-person in both Los Angeles and Sacramento to discuss adjustment criteria and how to define a comparable region to Southern California, as our region's size precludes a straightforward comparison. At the direction of HCD, SCAG staff refined its methodology for identifying comparable regions and provided a state-of-the-practice analysis supported by recent demographic and economic literature which determined

that the most appropriate comparison to the SCAG region would be an evaluation against the San Jose, New York, San Francisco, Miami, Seattle, Chicago, San Diego, Washington D.C., Houston, and Dallas metropolitan areas. Despite this collaboration on the subject between HCD and SCAG, HCD elected to reject this approach and instead used national average statistics, which include small metropolitan areas and rural areas having little in common with Southern California.

HCD's choice to use national averages:

- Is inconsistent with the statutory language of SB 828, which added the comparable region standard to RHNA law in order to improve the technical robustness of measures of housing need.
- Is inconsistent with empirical data as economic and demographic characteristics differ dramatically based on regional size and context. For comparison, the median-sized metropolitan region in the country is Fargo, North Dakota with a population of 207,500. That is not a meaningful basis of comparison for the nation's largest MPO.
- Is inconsistent with HCD's own internal practice for the 6th cycle of RHNA. The regional need determination for the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), issued on July 18, 2019, was the first 6th cycle RHNA determination following SB 828's inclusion of the comparable region standard. During their consultation process with HCD, SACOG also produced a robust technical analysis to identify comparable regions for the purposes of using overcrowding and cost-burden statistics to determine regional housing needs. However, HCD's final determination for SACOG used this analysis while the SCAG region was held to a different and less reasonable standard.

Improved Vacancy Rate Comparison

HCD seemingly uses unrealistic comparison points to evaluate healthy market vacancy, which is also an unreasonable application of the methodology and assumptions described in statute. While SB 828 specifies a vacancy rate for a healthy rental housing market as no less than 5 percent, healthy market vacancy rates for for-sale housing are not specified. HCD's practice is to compare actual, ACS vacancy rates for the region versus a 5 percent total vacancy rate (i.e. owner and renter markets combined).

During the consultation process, SCAG discussed this matter with HCD staff and provided several points of comparison including historical data, planning standards, and comparisons with other regions. In addition, SCAG staff illustrated that given tenure shares in the SCAG region, HCD's suggestion of a 5 percent total vacancy rate is mathematically equivalent to an 8 percent rental market vacancy rate plus a 2.25 percent for-sale housing vacancy rate. However, in major metropolitan regions, vacancy rates this high are rarely experienced outside of severe economic recessions such as the recent, housing market-driven Great Recession. Given the region's current housing shortage, the high volume of vacant units envisioned in HCD's planning target would be rapidly absorbed, making it an unrealistic standard.

SCAG staff's original suggestion of 5 percent rental vacancy and 1.5 percent for-sale vacancy (resulting in a 3.17 percent total vacancy rate based on current tenure shares) is in fact *higher* than the observed rate in the comparable regions defined above. It is also above Federal Housing Authority standards for regions experiencing slow or moderate population growth. It is also above the very liberal standard of 6 percent for for-rent housing and 2 percent for for-sale housing suggested by the California Office of Planning and Research (equivalent to 3.90 percent total vacancy based on SCAG tenure shares) which would also be a more reasonable application of the methodology.¹

Additional Considerations

In addition to the three key points above, SCAG's proposed alternative includes several other corrections to technical shortcomings in HCD's analysis of regional housing needs.

1. HCD's evaluation of replacement need is based on an arbitrary internal standard of 0.5 percent to 5.0 percent of total housing units. 2010-2019 demolition data provided by DOF suggest that over an 8.25-year period, it is reasonable to expect that 0.14 percent of the region's total housing units will be demolished, but not replaced. This would form the basis of a more reasonable housing needs determination, as DOF's survey represents the most comprehensive and robust data available.
2. Anticipated household growth on tribal land was not excluded from the regional determination as indicated in the consultation package and follow-up communications. Tribal entities within the SCAG region have repeatedly requested that this estimate be excluded from the RHNA process entirely since as sovereign nations, state law does not apply. SCAG's proposed approach is to subtract estimates of household growth on tribal land from the regional determination and ensure that these figures are also excluded from local jurisdictions' annual progress reports (APRs) of new unit construction to HCD during the 6th cycle.
3. A refinement to the adjustment for cost burden would yield a more reasonable determination of regional housing needs. SCAG has repeatedly emphasized the shortcomings of and overlap across various ACS-based measures of housing need. Furthermore, the relationship between new unit construction and cost burden is poorly understood (i.e., what will be the impact of new units on cost, and by extension, cost-burden). Nonetheless, SCAG recognizes that the region's cost burden exceeds that of comparable regions and proposes one modification to HCD's methodology, which currently considers cost burden separately by lower and higher income categories.

While housing security is dependent on income, it is also heavily dependent on tenure. While spending above 30 percent of gross income on housing for renters can reflect true housing insecurity, spending above this threshold for owners is substantially less problematic. This is particularly true for higher income homeowners, who generally benefit from housing shortages as it results in home value appreciation. Thus, a more reasonable application of cost burden

¹ See Nelson, AC. (2004), *Planner's Estimating Guide Projecting Land-Use and Facility Needs*. Planners Press, American Planning Association, Chicago. P. 25.

statistics would exclude cost-burden experienced by moderate and above-moderate owner households and instead make an adjustment based on three of the four income and tenure combinations: lower-income renters, higher-income renters, and lower-income owners.

4. From our review, HCD's data and use of data is not current. In large metropolitan regions, there is no reasonable basis for using 5-year ACS data, which reflects average conditions from 2013 to 2017. For cost-burden adjustments, HCD relies on 2011-2015 CHAS data. By the beginning of the 6th cycle of RHNA, some of the social conditions upon which the determination is based will be eight years old.

During the consultation process, SCAG staff provided HCD with Excel-version data of all inputs needed to replicate their methodology using ACS 2017 1-year data (the most recent available); however, this was not used. The Census bureau is scheduled to release ACS 2018 1-year data on September 26, 2019. SCAG staff would support replicating the same analysis, but substituting 2018 data when it becomes available in order to ensure the most accurate estimates in planning for the region's future.

Finally, given that the manner and order in which modifications are made affects the total housing need, the attachments demonstrate two alternatives with varying interpretations of three of the above points (see boldface, red text in attachments):

- Vacancy rate comparison – SCAG's originally proposed values versus an alternative which emerged from the consultation process
- Replacement need – DOF survey value versus HCD's current practice
- Cost burden measure – whether or not to include higher-income homeowners in this adjustment

We appreciate your careful consideration of this objection. RHNA is a complex process and we recognize the difficult positions that both SCAG and HCD are in but are hopeful that our agencies can reach a reasonable conclusion with respect to the regional need determination. Please contact me if you have questions. I look forward to continuing our close partnership to address the housing crisis in our state.

Sincerely,



Kome Ajise
Executive Director

Attachments

1. SCAG Alternative Determination
2. Excel version: SCAG Alternative Determination and supporting data
3. HCD Letter on Regional Need Determination, August 22, 2019

Attachment 1
SCAG Alternative Determination

1	OPTION A: SCAG region housing needs, June 30 2021-October 1 2029 (8.25 Years)			
2	Population: Oct 1, 2029 (SCAG 2020 RTP/SCS Forecast)			20,725,878
3	- Less Group Quarters Population (SCAG 2020 RTP/SCS Forecast)			-327,879
4	Household (HH) Population, Oct 1, 2029			20,397,998
		SCAG Projected HH Population	Headship rate - see Table 2	Projected Households
	Household Formation Groups			
		20,397,998		6,668,498
	under 15 years	3,812,391		n/a
	15 - 24 years	2,642,548		147,005
	25 - 34 years	2,847,526		864,349
	35 - 44 years	2,821,442		1,304,658
	45 - 54 years	2,450,776		1,243,288
	55 - 64 years	2,182,421		1,116,479
	65 -74 years	1,883,181		1,015,576
	75 - 84 years	1,167,232		637,415
	85+	590,480		339,727
5	Projected Households (Occupied Unit Stock)			6,668,498
6	+ Vacancy	Owner	Renter	
	Tenure Share (ACS 2017 1-year)	52.43%	47.57%	
	Households by Tenure	3,496,058	3,172,440	
	Healthy Market Vacancy Standard	1.50%	5.00%	
	SCAG Vacancy (ACS 2017 1-year)	1.13%	3.30%	
	Difference	0.37%	1.70%	
	Vacancy Adjustment	12,953	53,815	66,768
7	+ Overcrowding (Comparison Point vs. Region ACS %)	5.20%	9.82%	4.62%
8	+ Replacement Adj (Actual DOF Demolitions)		0.14%	
	- Household Growth on Tribal Land (SCAG Estimate)			-2,766
9	- Occupied Units (HHs) estimated June 30, 2021 (from DOF data)			-6,250,261
10	+ Cost-burden Adjustment (Comparison Point vs. Region)			23,969
	6th Cycle Regional Housing Need Assessment (RHNA)			823,808

1	OPTION B: SCAG region housing needs, June 30 2021–October 1 2029 (8.25 Years)			
2	Population: Oct 1, 2029 (SCAG 2020 RTP/SCS Forecast)			20,725,878
3	- Less Group Quarters Population (SCAG 2020 RTP/SCS Forecast)			-327,879
4	Household (HH) Population, Oct 1, 2029			20,397,998
		SCAG Projected HH Population	Headship rate - see Table 2	Projected Households
	Household Formation Groups	20,397,998		6,668,498
	under 15 years	3,812,391		n/a
	15 - 24 years	2,642,548		147,005
	25 - 34 years	2,847,526		864,349
	35 - 44 years	2,821,442		1,304,658
	45 - 54 years	2,450,776		1,243,288
	55 - 64 years	2,182,421		1,116,479
	65 -74 years	1,883,181		1,015,576
	75 - 84 years	1,167,232		637,415
	85+	590,480		339,727
5	Projected Households (Occupied Unit Stock)			6,668,498
6	+ Vacancy	Owner	Renter	
	Tenure Share (ACS 2017 1-year)	52.43%	47.57%	
	Households by Tenure	3,496,058	3,172,440	
	Healthy Market Vacancy Standard	2.00%	6.00%	
	SCAG Vacancy (ACS 2017 1-year)	1.13%	3.30%	
	Difference	0.87%	2.70%	
	Vacancy Adjustment	30,433	85,540	115,973
7	+ Overcrowding (Comparison Point vs. Region ACS %)	5.20%	9.82%	4.62%
8	+ Replacement Adj (HCD minimum standard)		0.50%	
	- Household Growth on Tribal Land (SCAG Estimate)			-2,766
9	- Occupied Units (HHs) estimated June 30, 2021 (from DOF data)			-6,250,261
10	+ Cost-burden Adjustment (Comparison Point vs. Region)			47,724
	6th Cycle Regional Housing Need Assessment (RHNA)			920,772

1	Projection period: Gov. Code 65588(f) specifies RHNA projection period start is December 31 or June 30, whichever date most closely precedes end of previous RHNA projection period end date. RHNA projection period end date is set to align with planning period end date. The planning period end date is eight years following the Housing Element due date, which is 18 months following the Regional Transportation Plan adoption rounded to the 15th or end of the month.
2-5	Population, Group Quarters, Household Population, & Projected Households: Pursuant to Government Code Section 65584.01, projections were extrapolated from SCAG's Regional Transportation Plan projections. <u>Population</u> reflects total persons. <u>Group Quarter Population</u> reflects persons in a dormitory, group home, institution, military, etc. that do not require residential housing. <u>Household Population</u> reflects persons requiring residential housing. <u>Projected Households</u> reflect the propensity of persons, by age-groups, to form households at different rates based on Census trends.
6	Vacancy Adjustment: Pursuant to Government Code 65584.01, a 5% minimum is considered to be healthy market vacancy in the for-rent housing market. Vacancy rates in the for-sale market are unspecified in statute. SCAG's analysis of vacancy rates suggests a healthy market standard of 5% for fore-rent housing and 1.5% for for-sale housing. After extensive consultation with HCD, a review of historical trends, regional and national comparison, and various planning standards, a more liberal vacancy standard of 6% for for-rent housing and 2% for for-sale housing may also be supported by this analysis. These standards are compared against ACS 2017 1-year data based on the renter/owner share in the SCAG region.
7	Overcrowding Adjustment: In regions where overcrowding is greater than the Comparable Region Rate, an adjustment is applied based on the amount the region's overcrowding rate (9.82%) exceeds the Comparable Region Rate (5.20%). Data is from 2017 1-year ACS.
8	Replacement Adjustment: A replacement adjustment is applied based on the current 10-year average % of demolitions according to local government annual reports to Department of Finance. While these data suggest an adjustment of 0.14% is most appropriate, SCAG recognizes that HCD's internal practice is to use an adjustment factor of 0.5%.
9	Occupied Units: Reflects DOF's estimate of occupied units at the start of the projection period (June 30, 2021).
10	Cost Burden Adjustment: A cost-burden adjustment is applied to the projected need by comparing the difference in cost-burden by income and tenure group for the region to the cost-burden by income and tenure group for comparable regions. Data are from 2017 1-year ACS and the ACS \$50,000/year household income threshold is used to distinguish between lower and higher income groups. The lower income RHNA is increased by the percent difference between the region and the comparison region cost burden rate for households earning approximately 80% of area median income and below (88.89%-84.39%=4.51% for renters and 27.33%-20.97%=6.36% for owners), then this difference is applied to very low- and low-income RHNA proportionate to the share of the population these groups currently represent (Very Low=63% of lower, Low=37% of lower). The higher income RHNA is increased by the percent difference between the region and the comparison region cost burden rate (67.15%-65.53%=1.62% for renters and 23.78%-17.06%=6.72% for owners) for households earning above 80% Area Median Income, then this difference is applied to moderate and above moderate income RHNA proportionate to the share of the population these groups currently represent (Moderate=29% of higher, Above Moderate=71% of higher). SCAG's analysis of the cost-burden measure suggests that it may be less appropriate to apply for higher-income owners and it may be excluded from the adjustment.

Option A: Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) Determination**SCAG Region****June 30, 2021 through October 1, 2029**

<u>Income Category</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Housing Unit Need</u>
Very-Low *	25.8%	212,284
Low	15.1%	124,375
Moderate	17.1%	140,601
Above-Moderate	42.1%	346,547
Total	100.0%	823,808
* Extremely-Low	14.6%	included in Very-Low Category

Option B: Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) Determination**SCAG Region****June 30, 2021 through October 1, 2029**

<u>Income Category</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Housing Unit Need</u>
Very-Low *	25.8%	231,084
Low	15.1%	135,390
Moderate	17.1%	159,982
Above-Moderate	42.1%	394,316
Total	100.0%	920,772
* Extremely-Low	14.6%	included in Very-Low Category

Income Distribution: Income categories are prescribed by California Health and Safety Code (Section 50093, et.seq.). Percents are derived based on ACS reported household income brackets and county median income, then adjusted based on the percent of cost-burdened households in the region compared with the percent of cost burdened households nationally.