

Opinion: California's housing crisis only getting worse

By Joe Mathews

California has begun a takeover of local housing policy.

That's the big picture behind the more than 100 housing bills that have been introduced in the Legislature. None of these proposals is up to the task of getting the state to build sufficient housing, especially the affordable kind. But taken together, the legislative proposals—covering production incentives for builders, rental assistance, greater enforcement of state housing laws, even taxation of second homes—clearly signal the state's intention to take a leading role in how California houses itself.



Joe Mathews

The prospect of a Sacramento intervention is usually worrisome. But this one should be welcomed. The threat of the state seizing power may be necessary to pressure the biggest obstacles to new housing—local governments—to get out of the way.

One can hardly blame state government for aggressive meddling. California has a nasty history of destabilizing housing calamities: from the 1970s run-up in housing prices that produced the Proposition 13 backlash; to the debt-fueled mid-2000s increases that led to the Great Recession.

Today, California's housing crisis results from a failure to create enough units to meet the population's needs. While the state needs an estimated 180,000 new units a year, it's been getting less than half of that. By one estimate, the resulting shortage is a \$140 billion annual drag on the state economy. Home ownership is at the lowest rate in California since the 1940s.

The crisis also represents a public health issue. Housing costs force Californians into long commutes that damage our health, our infrastructure and the environment. And housing prices are one big reason why California suffers from the greatest homelessness and the highest poverty rate of any state.

A response is difficult because of the bewildering mix of federal, state, and local policies that affect housing. Federal and state programs, which support those who seek housing and those who try to provide it, are tiny compared to the need for subsidies in expensive California.

Local governments add to the shortage by establishing limits on housing development, density, and sometimes rents themselves. This local hostility to housing is fueled by NIMBYism, environmentalism, and a state fiscal system that encourages local governments to pursue retail development (which produces sales tax for local coffers) instead of housing.

The state goal should be straightforward: more housing. That should mean more assistance to those seeking housing, more incentives to produce more housing, and fewer regulations that limit housing. But the politics are wickedly complicated, even by California standards. Housing divides key interests that come together to pass new laws. Among these are labor (split between building trades unions that oppose reforms to lower housing costs, and service-sector unions whose members need lower-cost housing), environmentalists (between those who

embrace denser development and hardliners who oppose all growth), and advocates for the poor (between those who want to revive poorer communities with new housing and those who fear new housing will displace poor people).

Some of the more than 100 housing bills in the legislature could make things worse, by adding to the costs of housing, or creating disincentives for local governments to approve housing. And it's difficult to make even small gains in housing. State Sen. Toni Atkins of San Diego, for example, has built a formidable coalition behind a bill to provide a dedicated funding stream to support below-market housing. Politically, achieving such funding would be a huge breakthrough. But the legislation would produce just \$250 million a year, a fraction of the tens of billions in affordable housing needs statewide.

And subsidized housing reflects only a fraction of our housing market. The state's nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office has called for a focus on encouraging additional private housing construction in high-demand coastal areas. Shortages there, the legislative analyst said, have rippled across the state, sending people further inland in search of cheaper housing, and driving up housing costs for everyone in the process.

The housing crisis is urgent and has been years in the making, and the state's legislative efforts to gain power over the problem could take many years, with hiccups and mistakes. Is there any way to go faster? Perhaps, but it would require the politically difficult step of empowering developers.

One model, with a record of success in Massachusetts, gives private developers, nonprofit organizations, and local authorities great powers to challenge land-use regulations that prevent housing development. The developers get an especially free hand in localities that fail to meet state requirements on housing. This puts local governments on the

defensive; they can't just say no to housing projects, but must make plans for housing.

Such pressure from the state may sound extreme. But so are the consequences of our housing shortage.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Million-dollar teachers: Cashing in by selling lessons

By Associated Press

Miss Kindergarten is in the million-dollar club. So are Lovin Lit, the Moffatt Girls and about a dozen other teacher-entrepreneurs who are spinning reading, math, science and social studies into gold by selling their lesson plans online to fellow teachers around the world.

Despite worries from some educators, such online marketplaces are booming, driven by rising standards and the willingness of teachers to pay out of their own pockets for classroom-tested materials.

"I am so thankful and blessed that it came into my life and that my passion and career can kind of mesh into one," says Miss Kindergarten, aka 32-year-old Hadar Hartstein, of Lake Forest, California, who says she has earned more than \$1 million in sales over the past six years, enough to take this year and maybe the next few off from her teaching job to be with her newborn daughter.

Her more than 300 offerings on the popular Teachers Pay

Teachers site range from free alphabet flash cards and a \$1.50 Popsicle party counting activity to a \$120 full-year unit on math and literacy, all of them widely promoted on her blog and social media accounts.

Read the whole story

Latest trend in cycling – gravel bikes

By Josh Petri, Bloomberg

If a mountain bike allows a rider to take the road not traveled, the gravel bike is designed to let riders take the road that's ... only sort of a road.

The bike industry has a long history of hyping new niche machines. Remember when fat tire bikes were all the rage? Gravel bikes are just the latest example. They're durable enough to handle modest terrain—gravel trails, fire roads, etc.—while remaining light and nimble enough to efficiently cruise on pavement as well.

At first glance, a gravel bike looks like, well, a bike. There are the classic drop bars, shifters, and the 700cc rims of a road or cyclocross bike. But there are small tweaks and upgrades sprinkled throughout that help the bike handle rougher conditions. It has a slightly lower bottom bracket, and a longer wheelbase, which makes it more stable over uneven terrain at higher speeds. The wheels are wrapped in bigger tires, usually 32mm or 35mm wide, that do not require tubes. This lets riders run lower tire pressures for a better grip in a variety of surface conditions. Flat-mounted disc

brakes offer greater modulation and stopping power than the rim brakes usually found on road bikes.

Read the whole story

Altering the energy market in the West

By David R. Baker, San Francisco Chronicle

For several years, officials in California and states throughout the West discussed merging control of their electricity grids to create one vast, integrated power market that would span the entire region.

A unified grid, they reasoned, would be more efficient, keeping costs down. It could also help states more easily tap renewable power generated outside their borders.

Then Donald Trump won the presidency.

Suddenly, California legislators started wondering whether combining grids could expose the state's climate and energy policies to a new line of attack from a hostile administration. Interstate commerce, after all, falls squarely under federal control.

Read the whole story

Women neck-and-neck as 4-day bike race ends



Ultimately it was Anna van der Breggen, right, who beat out Katie Hall to win the 2017 Amgen Tour of California. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Anna van der Breggen, a phenomenal sprinter, powered her way past the field of Amgen Tour of California cyclists on Sunday to win the four-day race.

Van der Breggen, who is from the Netherlands and rides for Boels-Dolmans, entered Sunday's contest one second behind Katie Hall.

Hall, who is known for her prowess on the hills – and showed her **strength in Tahoe**, finished second overall. The United Healthcare rider from the United States was one-hundredth of a second behind van der Breggen.

The final standings:

- Van der Breggen, 10:47.33
- Hall, + 0.01
- Arelenis Sierra, Astana Women's Team, + 0.31
- Kristabel Doebel-Hickok, Cylance Pro Cycling, + 0.34
- Ruth Winder, United Healthcare, +0.38.

Hall earned the final Queen of the Mountain jersey for her power up the hills. Sierra earned the sprint jersey and best young rider jersey.

The first two stages were based out of **South Lake Tahoe**. Saturday's third stage went from Elk Grove to Sacramento, with the final stage in Sac.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

No more Sierra snow? Think again

By Ryan Sabalow, Sacramento Bee

Winter isn't quite ready to release its snowy grip on the Sierra – even after record-breaking precipitation.

Tuesday, a cold storm is expected to blow in and drop snow levels to as low as 5,500 feet.

While only a few inches of snow may fall, the shift from pleasant spring weather “may catch travelers off guard,” said

Idamis Del Valle, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

Read the whole story

Illness briefly closes Pet Supermarket in SLT

Pet Supermarket in South Lake Tahoe has reopened after being closed for a few days last week.

The store on Emerald Bay Road closed because an illness among employees was thought to be the result of something they had contracted in the building. A store employee said the building was found to have nothing to do with the illnesses.

Lake Tahoe News was deferred to corporate offices in Florida, which are not open on Sunday, so what the illness was and why the building may have been a factor are not known.

Pet Supermarkets are mostly found in the southeast, with the only stores on this side of the country being in South Lake Tahoe and Sparks.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Ne. expands free parks

passes for elementary students

By Alison Noon, AP

Nevada students ages 9 to 11 can play at state parks for free beginning in July under a law Gov. Brian Sandoval signed Friday that will give fifth-graders free entry to all state parks and recreational areas for one year.

The measure builds on a federal program that allows fourth-graders to apply for free admission to all national parks as well as Nevada state parks.

Day passes at about 20 other state parks across Nevada cost between \$7 and \$12.

Read the whole story

Launch mode for world-class whitewater

By Tom Stienstra, San Francisco Chronicle

You can hit launch mode on a rafting trip this summer and feel like you're being shot out of a cannon.

Light the fuse and stand back.

As the rafting season gets under way, the outlook matches or exceeds the biggest water seasons in the past 30-plus years, including 1983, '86 and '98. Coming after years of drought, conditions are beyond euphoric for those who love rafting,

kayaking and river running.

Ratings for many rapids have been upgraded to the highest level and – in a new industry trend – several rafting companies have raised minimum age requirements from age 7 to 12 until flows recede to more traditional levels.

“With all the water, we’re treating Class III runs like Class IV,” said Nate Rangel of Adventure Connection out of Coloma.

Read the whole story

A to Z guide to off-roading in Nevada

By April Corbin, Las Vegas Sun

Off-road adventures abound in the Silver State, but the majority of residents are skirting the law when they jump into their dune buggies or climb aboard their all-terrain vehicles or dirt bikes.

In July 2012, Nevada began requiring registration for almost all off-highway and all-terrain vehicles, and just under five years later, compliance is still low. The Nevada Commission on Off-Highway Vehicles estimates there are 400,000 off-highway vehicles in the state, but as of the end of last month only 43,145 were registered with the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles.

That’s a registration rate of only about 10 percent.

Officials are hoping to boost that number with a new online resource that appeals to owners’ sense of adventure.

Read the whole story