

June 4, 2021

Re: OPPOSE SB 9 (Atkins)

Dear Honorable Assemblymembers:

Westwood Hills Property Owners Association represents a single-family neighborhood of more than 600 families in Los Angeles. We are writing to urge you to **OPPOSE SB 9** for the following reasons, among others:

1. Outlaws single-family neighborhoods. This bill is deceptively mislabeled—it is NOT a “duplex” bill. Instead, *SB 9 would permit the construction of up to 8 residential units on every single-family lot in the state*, without any regulatory, environmental, or discretionary review by local jurisdictions. **SB 9 effectively outlaws single-family neighborhoods in the state of California.**

This has dire consequences for the many millions of California families who bought homes, making long-term financial commitments in reliance on long-established zoning; for communities that will be torn asunder by indiscriminate building; and for millions of Californians who can no longer aspire to the American dream of owning their own home.

2. No affordability. *SB 9 does not require that the additional units be affordable*, nor does it provide funding to subsidize affordable housing. Increasing density does not lead to affordability, a fact proved by many cities that have tried this approach.

3. Multiple units already permitted. State law *already* allows additional homes on each single-family lot, via prior legislation authorizing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and Junior ADUs and limiting control by local jurisdictions. As a result, single-family neighborhoods are *already* adding thousands of units of housing—such as converted garages as well as new structures.

4. Inadequate infrastructure. SB 9 does not require any infrastructure improvements to accommodate the anticipated growth, nor does it provide funding for such infrastructure improvements. Existing power, water, sewer, gas and transportation infrastructures cannot handle the new demands that will result if SB 9 is enacted. Electrical failures, water shortages and out-of-control wildfires already plague California, and will only be exacerbated by this legislation.

5. Life and safety issues. With minimal side and rear setbacks, SB 9’s densification will have significant negative impacts on light, air, and privacy for residents. Fires sweeping down canyons or through a neighborhood will endanger densely packed households, limiting routes of escape and impairing firefighters’ efforts.

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6. Environmental impacts. By increasing the amount of building on every lot, SB 9 drastically reduces the number of gardens and yards which, with their mature trees and other plantings, now function as open spaces and permeable surfaces—this will negatively impact our aquifers, air quality and urban canopy.

7. Tone-deaf to pandemic impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic has upended work and living assumptions in ways that will have lasting impact. Millions of people are fleeing out of dense multifamily housing and into healthier, more spacious single-family homes. Millions more are working remotely—untethered from physical workplaces, they are moving out of urban centers into suburbs and small towns where they can buy single-family homes. *It is no longer necessary for people to live near jobs or public transit.* Indeed, in recent years California has suffered significant out-migration of both residents and employers, a trend which has only accelerated during the pandemic—resulting in the loss of one U.S. Congressman for the first time in the state’s history.

One obvious solution is to repurpose underutilized urban commercial space for future residential uses, without the need to destroy single-family communities.

8. Zoning is a local issue. There is no “one size fits all” solution to housing, especially not in a state as large and diverse as California. Each region, town and neighborhood has its own issues and challenges, which are best addressed at the local level—in addition to which, the state already exercises significant oversight of local planning via existing requirements imposed by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

In sum, there is neither justification nor any need for this bill. It will only harm Californians, while enriching developers.

We urge you most strongly to vote “NO” on SB 9.

Respectfully,
Stephen Rohde
President, Westwood Hills Property Owners Association