
SECTION III: HOUSING DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

This section examines the land use strategies available within the City for development of new housing. The specific ideas are designed to balance the City's obligation to address regional housing needs with its desire to preserve its low-density, semi-rural character.

AVAILABILITY OF SITES FOR HOUSING

The City is an older and largely built-out community, with no significant amount of undeveloped land available for residential development. For the fifteen years since the City's incorporation, new development in the City has consisted of in-fill subdivisions of twelve or fewer single family lots, replacement construction within existing single family neighborhoods and two smaller multi-family condominium projects (twenty-one and twenty-four units). Many of the larger residentially zoned lots have been identified as very steeply sloping (229 acres), often exceeding 60% slope, with severely limited development potential due to infrastructure and emergency access limitations.

Potential New Units: Residential build-out at the densities projected in the General Plan Land Use Element total 7,120 dwelling units. As a projection of potential development, this total represents approximately 200 units more than the 6,918 existing units indicated in the 1990 Census. However, the actual number of new units which may be constructed within each land use category varies by more than the total potential increase indicated above. This variation is primarily related to three circumstances:

- 1) Certain single family areas are designated at a lower density than they are currently developed, and thus the actual number of units already exceeds the projection of potential development in these areas;
- 2) The Hillside Development Ordinance restricts permitted densities based on the slopes properties, thereby reducing

the number of units per acre which can be developed by an undetermined amount; and

3) the Land Use Element utilizes two new categories for higher density housing which did not exist prior to 1993, creating opportunities for new housing units for which the City has no previous development experience, thus densities may vary from projections.

The designation of single family areas at lower densities than actual development is largely the result of numerous illegal subdivisions which were initiated in the decades prior to standardization of land division practices (prior to 1972). Many such areas are too small to warrant a separate density designation from surrounding properties. However, the number of such substandard land divisions within the City boundaries is sufficient to warrant acknowledgement with respect to its effect on the comparison of actual density and the calculations for projected density of the Land Use Element.

The Hillside Ordinance requires that new land divisions be reduced in their permitted densities by a slope density factor which links the steepness of the slope to the minimum size of the lot. This factor, which can reduce the overall number of new lots be created in the City, is used as a guideline in Planning Commission considerations, and therefore flexibility is provided. The City has not performed a lot-by-lot slope analysis of vacant properties, so it is not possible to determine the effect of this adjustment on future densities. However, the Land Use Element projections take into account the steeply sloping areas and assume minimal development for these properties, thus reducing the uncertainty in housing unit projections for hillside areas.

The Land Use Element also identifies two new categories for multi-family residential uses: Medium High Density (up to 15 dwelling units per acre) and Development Opportunity Overlays which permit mixed use commercial/residential development (up to 15 dwelling units per acre, or a maximum overall Floor Area Ratio of 0.675:1). These are discussed more specifically below.

The Medium High Density Residential category is a multi-family designation which was originally created to encourage the development of high quality garden townhomes within the City,

thus offering a greater variety of housing types within the community. This designation is now applied to 6.2 acres located on the City's western boundary. Based on the site's slope and access limitations, approximately 18 units could be accommodated here.

In order to provide expanded opportunities for residential development, the City's General Plan Land Use Element has established the following housing opportunity strategies: Accessory Living Quarters (second units) and commercial/residential mixed use.

Accessory Living Quarters: In 1982, the State of California adopted legislation which identified "second units" as a viable source of lower income and senior housing. Further, the State restricted local zoning codes from prohibiting the development of such units in all single family neighborhoods and further directed cities to refrain from including these units in their land use density calculations. In 1991, the City adopted a set of standards for the development of second units, which are locally described as Accessory Living Quarters (ALQ's). (See Housing Appendix E).

The City's standards allow Accessory Living Quarters on larger lots, subject to approval of a Conditional Use Permit. Based on this requirement, approximately half the single family residential lots in the City (3,457 lots) would qualify for consideration of an Accessory Living Quarters. (Accessory Living Quarters are not permitted in commercial, multi-family or smaller lot residential zones.)

Based on its experience with guest houses, the City has concluded that Accessory Living Quarters are a viable and appropriate affordable housing option. Since adoption of the new standards in 1991, the City has approved 14 of the 15 units considered to date, with four additional requests pending at the time of this element's adoption. Twelve of the 14 Accessory Living Quarters approved to date were approved in the 12 months preceding adoption of this element. As interest and awareness of this alternative housing option grows, the City anticipates that at least fifteen such units per year will be proposed and developed.

Commercial/Residential Mixed Use: The General Plan Land Use Element incorporates a number of recommendations of the Foothill Boulevard Master Plan, including support for medium-high density residential and mixed use developments within the Development Opportunity Overlays located in the Foothill Boulevard corridor. In addition to providing expanded housing opportunities, and a greater variety of housing types and affordability, residential uses on Foothill Boulevard will allow less reliance on the automobile for shopping and employment, and will provide a customer base for the City's retail stores and services.

Nine of the fourteen Development Opportunity Overlay areas which are designated on Foothill Boulevard allow residential or mixed uses (commercial and residential) at densities of up to 15 dwelling units per acre. The General Plan Land Use Element anticipates that 25% of these overlay areas will develop into residential projects. Assuming an average density of 12 units per acre and a total of 10.6 acres utilized for residential development, 128 multi-family/mixed use housing units would be constructed.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL COMPARED WITH REGIONAL HOUSING NEEDS

The Regional Housing Needs Assessment prepared by SCAG has identified a housing need for the City of 266 dwelling units for the years January, 1988 through July, 1994. Of this total, 181 units were projected for high income households. The remaining units were projected for households of very low income (22 units), low income (29 units) and moderate income (34 units). These numbers are the current 'fair share' allocation for which the City must make provisions in its General Plan, and assess its progress to date.

Assessment of 1986 Housing Element and 1988-94 RHNA

The 1986 Housing Element identified four projected accomplishments by which to evaluate the effectiveness of the element:

- Loss of less than 1% of the affordable housing stock through condominium conversion or demolitions.

- Rent Assistance (Section 8 or other) to 2 - 5 households over the next five years [1986 - 1991].
- Rehabilitation or repair of 2 to 3 units per year as a result of code enforcement and rehabilitation (10 - 15 total).
- Development of approximately 100 - 200 new residential units over the next five years. All of the new housing will be affordable to moderate and upper income households. Very few are expected to be affordable to low and very low income households.

Each of these goals will be assessed for the total implementation period of January, 1986 - July, 1993, and for the RHNA period January 1988 - July 1993. (See also Appendix E - Building Permits 1986 through 1993)

Loss of affordable housing stock: In the period 1986 through 1993, the City issued fifty-two demolition permits, and approved no condominium conversion. Of the 52 demolitions, 43 were issued in the 1988 - 1993 RHNA period. [TBD] were for areas believed to provide lower or moderate income housing, based on Census Information. The City has no affordability information on individual units, and thus uses Census information and a recent rental survey to make this determination.

Rental Assistance: The City receives only \$86,000 per year in CDBG funds, has no active Redevelopment Agency and no city property tax, and has no active housing agency. It therefore trades the funds to the County of Los Angeles and relies on the L.A. County Housing Authority to process any requests for Section 8 Housing Assistance for the City. No inquiries have been received by the City regarding Section 8 Housing Assistance in either the 1988 - 1993 RHNA period or the 1986 - 1993 Element assessment period. The L.A. County Housing Authority confirmed in April, 1993, that there are presently no assisted units in the City.

Rehabilitation through Code Enforcement: The City's Property Maintenance Ordinance has been stringently enforced since its adoption in June, 1985. However, prior to 1992, no log of enforcement activities was maintained by which to evaluate this projection. A review of a representative sample of the

property maintenance enforcement files maintained since 1988 indicates that at least 3 units per year have been rehabilitated through the repair of roofs, refinishing of cracked and peeling surfaces, replacement of broken doors and removal of other attractive nuisances, during both the RHNA and the Element assessment periods. Furthermore, it is noted that in the 1988 - 1993 RHNA period, the City issued 2,715 permits for remodel of primary residential structures; a total of 3,523 such permits were issued in the 1986 - 1993 Element assessment period.

Development of 100 - 200 moderate to upper income residential units: Analysis of building permit activity in the RHNA assessment period shows that 114 net new dwelling units were constructed, including 12 Accessory Living Quarters. By comparison, the total number of new housing units allocated to the City for RHNA Period 1988 - 1994 is 266 units.

Permit valuation information provided to the City under its contract with the County of Los Angeles Building and Safety Division is aggregated in reports to the City, thereby allowing only average valuation analysis. Based on this information, the average new home valuation of construction, excluding land and financing costs, was \$196,141. It is assumed that most if not all of the 102 primary residences constructed were affordable to upper income households only. The City maintains, however, that the 12 Accessory Living Quarters units are affordable to lower and moderate income households, and is preparing a rental survey to be mailed concurrent with its annual certification of these units to verify this assertion.

For the Element analysis period of 1986 through 1993, a net new 176 units have been constructed within the City, with 62 of these units constructed in the first two years of this period. The City notes that the recession which began in the early 1990's continues to impact the number of new homes statewide, as well as in the City.

Revision to residential capacity assumption of 1986 Housing Element: Under the 1986 Housing Element adopted by the City, it was estimated that there was a remaining capacity for 652 residential units, assuming all land was buildable. As noted in this 1993 Housing Element, 229 acres of land has been determined to be largely unbuildable, based on infrastructure,

environmental and topographic constraints. The City continues to support the introduction of Accessory Living Quarters into single family residential neighborhoods, subject to a Conditional Use Permit, to address shifting housing needs and regional demands on local housing resources.

Summary of Assessment: As noted above, the City of La Cañada Flintridge has not experienced the 266 units projected for the RHNA 1988 - 1994 numbers. However, as detailed in Appendix F, the City has pursued several actions since 1986 which have had the potential to create opportunities for new housing development. The introduction of Accessory Living Quarters within single family residential neighborhoods allows further opportunities for housing development prior to the July, 1994 end of the RHNA period. The longer term policy of implementation of sewers on Foothill Boulevard removes some of the lot-by-lot difficulties to development of housing in this corridor, and supports the potential effectiveness of the policies of this element through the year 2000.

Policy Direction for future development projections: Assuming a similar regional demand for housing in the future, the City has used the 1988 - 1994 RHNA numbers by which to assess the potential effectiveness of its housing policies to meet future demand for the period 1995 - 2000. Combining the residential development that could occur through Accessory Living Quarters (fifteen units per year for five years), and Foothill Boulevard mixed use projects (128 new units), an estimated 203 dwelling units could be developed. An additional 104 single family units are expected to be constructed in the next five years on in-fill lots or as a result of smaller in-fill land divisions in the City's single family neighborhoods. It is expected that an 18-unit medium high density project could also be completed. Taken together, the City's projected residential development activity would then adequately address its fair share of the regional housing needs (See Table H-5 in Section V).

During this five year period the City will also be addressing the long-term needs of seniors with respect to housing to determine whether additional land use or housing policies are appropriate.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Energy conservation opportunities are possible both in new construction and in the remodeling of existing structures. The City's adopted Building Code has been amended over the past several years to reflect changes in the State Model for Uniform Building Code to allow, and in most cases require, improved energy conserving provisions. Efficient water heaters, solar heaters, low-flow toilets and enhanced wall/ceiling insulation have all been addressed by these recent amendments. Residents may take further actions to conserve energy to the extent allowed by the health and safety considerations of the Building Code.