



# ADVOCATE'S GUIDE TO HOUSING ELEMENTS MESSAGING

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# OVERVIEW



HOUSING ELEMENTS MESSAGING BASICS

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# **Housing Elements**

## **Messaging Basics**

# The three questions that drive messaging

1. What do you want people to **do**?
2. What do you want people to **feel**?
3. What do you want people to **know**?

# What do you want people to feel?

Before getting involved,  
community members need to feel  
and believe that participation is  
**accessible** and **meaningful**.

And then:

- **Concerned** — for their community, their family, their future.
- **Outraged** — about housing inequity and the burdens of our current reality.
- **Hopeful** — about the possibility of change.
- **Empowered** — by joining a movement and community bigger than themselves.

# What do you want people to know?

## The bad news:

Housing policy (and Housing Elements) can be:

- Complicated
- Wonky
- Confusing
- Intimidating

## The good news:

Community members don't need to know all the details to make an impact.

Our job is to communicate the **essential facts that motivate people** to get involved.

Everything else we can leave behind.

## What do you want people to know?

- **Housing Elements is required by law.** That means that **every city and county** must participate, and the planning process **must include community input.**
- **Housing Elements is for everyone.** The Housing Elements plan must determine how much housing is needed to **make sure every resident has a place to live**, and to plan for future growth. An important part of the federal law requires Housing Elements planning to **advance equity and prioritize the needs of communities of color** and other groups that have been the targets of discriminatory policy.

## What do you want people to know?

- **Housing Elements is happening now.** This process happens once every eight years, and this is our moment. That means we can't wait to get involved — and that **we will be living with this Housing Elements plan until 2030.** That's a big deal!
- **Housing Elements belongs to the community.** Nobody knows more about the challenges a community faces than the people who live there. That's why Housing Elements relies on community input to shape the plan. By getting involved, **you can help create a plan** that makes smart investments, supports your priorities, and helps build the future your community deserves.



## **RESIDENTS ARE EXPERTS IN THEIR OWN LIVES**

Our job is to make it as easy as possible to connect that perspective with the Housing Elements process.

# **POLICY PRIORITIES**

# The Ps

Most housing advocates have embraced a policy approach that includes the 3 Ps:

- **Production** of more housing, with an emphasis on more affordable housing.
- **Preservation** of existing housing options.
- **Protection** for renters and residents facing rising costs, eviction, and other hardships.

In addition, many advocates include an explicit emphasis on:

- **Prevention** of homelessness by fulfilling housing needs.

This is a useful shorthand for insiders, but can feel abstract to community members.

# Connect policy with people

## **More housing...**

- So that people have options that work for them
- So that communities and our economy can grow
- So that our children have a future here

# Connect policy with people

## **More equitable housing...**

- So that we can actively undo the harm done by past policies and invest in marginalized communities
- So that people from all walks of life can build a life here
- So that seniors, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes have stability and safety
- So that we promote the diversity that keeps our community vibrant and thriving

# Connect policy with people

## Smarter housing...

- So that we can protect and make most of our precious resources
- So that our communities are resilient and sustainable
- So that housing policy supports smart transit and economic planning

# CORE MESSAGES

## Core message

Right now, we have a once-in-a-decade chance to address current housing problems, invest in our communities, and create better housing options for all.

Speaking out now is the only way to make sure that your [city/town/county] will include your priorities in the [Housing Elements/housing] plan that will guide our community's future.



## Core message

**Right now**, we have a **once-in-a-decade chance** to address current housing problems, invest in our communities, and create better housing options for all.

**Speaking out now is the only way** to make sure that your city/town/county will include your priorities in the housing plan that will guide our community's future.

*This is where the urgency lives —  
the “why now.”*

## Core message

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*This is what's at stake. Customize to your community or policy priorities — problems to solve or opportunities to embrace.*

## Core message

Right now, we have a once-in-a-decade chance to address current housing problems, invest in our communities, and create better housing options for all.

Speaking out now is the only way to make sure that **your city/town/county** will include **your priorities** in the housing plan that will guide **our community's future**.

*Center the audience.*

*This is about them, the community, their future.*

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**Speaking out now** is the only way to make sure that your city/town/county will include your priorities in the housing plan that will guide our community's future.

*Always include a direct call to action.*

*The more specific, the better.*

# **SUPPORTING MESSAGES**

## Supporting messages

Within that core message, we have identified four supporting messaging frames that can be used to engage particular audiences, or that may be more effective for some messengers. These are mutually reinforcing, interconnected concepts, and in many cases you will want to refer to more than one while developing messaging content.

The most important question to ask is:

**Which of these supporting messages will be most meaningful and motivating for the community members I am likely to reach?**

## Supporting message: *Thriving communities*

*Basic message:*

Many people in our community are struggling right now to find housing that works for them — housing that is safe and stable, housing that they can afford. And that reality makes life harder for all of us. A thoughtful, inclusive plan will increase options and make our community livable now and for years to come. We need to act now to ensure that the next generation has a chance to thrive here in the place we love.

## **Supporting message: *Thriving communities***

*Advanced message:*

Investing in affordable housing options can help cut commute times, strengthen schools, and move our whole community forward.



## Supporting message: *Justice and equity*

### *Basic message:*

A history of policies designed to segregate and exclude people of color has created inequity and put safe, stable housing out of reach for far too many people. New housing policies can help undo that harm and move *all* our communities forward. Let's invest in housing that supports a diverse, vibrant, equitable future for the Bay Area.

## Supporting message: *Justice and equity*

*Advanced message:*

Federal law requires the housing plan to include details on how it is “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH).” That means that we need to understand how communities of color are affected by current housing options, and develop a plan that directly addresses inequities in our community. A good plan will make new choices about the priorities and investments that matter to our community.

## Supporting message: *Better economy*

### *Basic message:*

Housing costs don't just affect where you're able to live — they impact the economy for our whole region. The places that succeed over the next decade will be those that invest in housing so that essential workers can make ends meet, people can live near where they work, and local businesses can connect with the loyal customer base they need.

Creating a range of affordable housing options will help residents *and* businesses thrive.

## Supporting message: *Better economy*

*Advanced message:*

We've all seen how a growing economy can affect housing costs and make it harder for many people to stay in the communities they love. If we don't act now to create more options and a better balance, it's going to be harder and harder for businesses to attract and hire workers for all sorts of jobs.

## Supporting message: *Sustainability and resilience*

### *Basic message:*

Climate change is already hitting the Bay Area hard — bringing drought, wildfires, dangerous storms, extreme temperatures, and rising sea levels. This crisis affects all of us, and smart, sustainable housing policy has to be part of the solution. Modern housing options — including multifamily homes and concentrating near public transit — reduce our region’s carbon footprint and help drive sustainable growth that will be climate resilient.

## Supporting message: *Sustainability and resilience*

*Advanced message:*

The Bay Area has been a leader in so many of the most important movements of the last fifty years. Now, it's time to step up and show the way forward on two of the biggest challenges we face: housing affordability and climate change. Innovation in housing policy will strengthen our community and keep the Bay Area at the leading edge of sustainable development.

# **RECRUITING COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Every resident will have their own priorities for housing policy — the message guidance above is meant to provide a range of options that can be adapted to suit those goals. Some folks are already feeling the strain of high housing costs, while others are inspired by a vision of a more equitable and sustainable future, or any combination of factors.

But no matter what motivates a desire for change, there are two essential truths that someone must believe before they will get involved. Participation needs to feel *accessible* and *meaningful*.



## Making participation accessible

- **Communicate essential information about the process, especially timeline and location.** If your city collects online feedback on its draft plan, promote the URL and deadline to submit throughout your messaging. If there is a public forum, display the time and location prominently.
- **Provide clear guidance on what to say.** The rest of this guide provides sample language and key messages. Be sure that community members are comfortable communicating their personal message.

## Making participation accessible

- **Address barriers to participation.** Some residents may have concerns that they will not be able to participate in the process. Messaging should actively engage with these concerns. For example:
  - Develop multilingual messaging (including promotional materials as well as guidance on process and community input). If your jurisdiction will accept comments in languages other than English, say so.
  - Public meetings can present a challenge for residents with different work schedules or childcare needs. If written testimony is an option for those who can't attend in person, promote that option.
  - Make it clear if public meetings will take place in person or virtually. If in person, mention COVID policies and precautions.

## Making participation accessible

- **Overcome anxiety about the process.** For many people, giving public testimony can be stressful, and even submitting written testimony can be unfamiliar or intimidating. Messaging should consistently emphasize that getting involved is easy, quick, and open to all. While housing policy may be complex, residents are experts in their own lives. Calls to action should emphasize these elements, with language like, “Telling your point of view is a simple way to make sure our city gets it right.”

# Making participation meaningful

- **Be direct.** Tell residents, “This is the most effective way you can affect housing policy.”
- **Talk about time.** Be clear that there are deadlines, and residents who do not speak out in time will miss their chance to influence housing policy. And, repeat facts about the Housing Elements cycle: this only happens once in a decade, so what we do right now will have an impact for years to come.

# Making participation meaningful

- **Include legal requirements.** Make it clear that this is not an optional process for jurisdictions. The law requires that this process be completed on a given timeline, and also includes requirements such as AFFH. These requirements work with personal messaging: Community voices provide accountability, and the law requires that jurisdictions consider this input.

# Making participation meaningful

- **Place the resident within a community and a movement.** Nobody will believe that their voice and their voice alone will determine policy — but they are part of a community that is coming together to demand better housing options. We have a chance to get this right, if we come together to shape the future of our community.
- **Share success stories.** Talk about families that have benefitted from stable, affordable housing. Show how existing density around transit hubs helps communities thrive. Show how momentum is on the side of people who eagerly support better housing options.

# **SAMPLE POLICY LANGUAGE**

# Developing policy support messaging

- 1-3 sentences explaining the goal or problem, emphasizing the human/community impact
- 1-3 sentences making a direct, actionable call for a specific policy proposal
- Use values-driven, person-centered language
- 3Ps language can be included, but should not be the focus
- Whenever possible, use personal stories and experiences to ground policy language. “This has happened to me” or “This is what my family needs” are powerful starting points.



## Just Cause/Rent Control

People who live in our community right now need **stability** — and that means **protections** like rent control and just cause policies for eviction. With the costs of housing rising so fast, families who are forced out of the homes they live in face an impossible situation.

Our community needs a housing plan that **protects** residents from harassment, eviction, and out-of-control rent hikes. That's the only way we can care for our families, plan for our futures, and build the kind of **stability** that will enable us to **thrive** over the next decade.

## TOPA/COPA

When a landlord decides to sell a multi-family building, that creates **a sudden emergency** for every person who calls that place home. Their lives are upended, and even if they're **lucky** enough to find a new home they can afford, they are forced to pay all the costs of moving and starting over.

Tenant/Community opportunity to purchase policies would prevent this kind of disruption when a building is sold. These are **simple, effective** policies that **protect** renters and create the kind of **stability that improves our whole community**. When our community is able to invest in itself, we all benefit.

# Community land trust

The people in our community — **working people, seniors, students, families with kids** — should be the ones who decide what our future looks like. But for a long time, that hasn't been true. Investors and corporations have bought up just about every bit of land, and **banks have discriminated** against people of color when it comes to loans and financing.

This housing policy is a chance to level the playing field and **allow our community to invest in itself**. We need to fund community land trusts to purchase land and build new homes that **people can afford for the long term**. Community land trusts mean that the public investments in housing will stay in our community, will benefit our community, and will **lift up our community** for years to come.

## Inclusionary zoning

Building new housing will **strengthen** our community — but only if it isn't used to **push out the people** who already live here. It will give families the **options** we need — but not if every new home built is out of reach for most people. We need to make sure that any new housing includes a **range of options**, so we can **include and support the kind of diverse community** that makes this such a **special place**.

The housing plan must include **strong requirements for inclusionary zoning**. That means that new housing will include options that are affordable for people with lower incomes, for young families just starting out, and for seniors who want to stay in **the community they love**. Inclusionary zoning is how we can **move forward together without leaving our neighbors behind**.

## Additional tools and materials

- Digital organizing training (May 17 and May 26)
- Future Messaging training—invite your colleagues! (May 5)
- Video(s)
- Additional creative collateral that will include:
  - Social media templates and sample copy
  - Sample email copy
  - Fliers
  - Multilingual options



*Draft social graphic*

**QUESTIONS?**