

THE BOOKS ARE COOKED.
THE NARRATIVE IS FALSE.
THE PUBLIC IS BEING PLAYED.

Housing affordability is a real and urgent challenge for many San Franciscans. But instead of addressing the root causes, San Francisco State Senator Scott Wiener, backed by lobbying group CA YIMBY and flush with real estate and tech cash, has promoted a false narrative: that deregulation, demolition, and luxury development will somehow deliver “housing for all.”

The reality? Speculation, displacement, and an explosion of luxury towers we do not need.

This is not about affordability, equity, or good planning. It is about power, profit, and propaganda. The proposed changes represent one of the largest transfers of wealth in our city’s history, from working people to big real estate and investor pockets.

Let’s trace how we got here.

The Numbers Do Not Lie — But Made Up Numbers Do!

It began with a flashy headline: California needs **3.5 million** new homes. That number did not come from a state agency, but from a report by mega consulting firm McKinsey & Company. McKinsey is a private firm with no oversight, public process, or accountability. They are also the fine folks who helped create the opioid crisis, outsourcing, and the gutting of the middle class (do a Google search for “McKinsey and Co scandals,” it is eye-opening). These realities did not stop politicians from using the study to push aggressive deregulation.

When researchers and watchdogs like the Embarcadero Institute exposed the flaws, the state quietly reduced the number to **2.5 million**. There was no explanation, no accountability, and the crisis narrative remained intact.

Notably, Freddie Mac reports a nationwide housing shortfall of only **1.5 million** units—so did they forget to include California? Or are we being intentionally misled?

Then came the state RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Allocation) mandates. The nine-county Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) divided up their **441,000** portion of the new housing unit burden through a process where every county had just one vote, regardless of population, existing housing capacity, or infrastructure. San Francisco got the bulk of it: a whopping **82,069** units, later ballooning to **94,300** with a 15% buffer added by

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the state's Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). Why the extra buffer? "Just in case." There was no data-driven rationale.

What should be relevant is that San Francisco already has nearly **70,000** units in the development pipeline, and current zoning allows for **141,000** more units, together far exceeding what is required. Yet what kind of plan puts at risk existing tenants and businesses to satisfy an outdated, excessive mandate that does not in any way guarantee affordability, because the plan requires demolition to get anything new in place. It's absurd from the start. We're the second most dense city in the country - adding 200,000 more is reckless and does nothing to provide affordability thresholds, even if they have already been approved.

In addition, City Hall has also failed to convince HCD to recognize a reasonable percentage of the 400,000 units of capacity already created through 4- and 6-plex zoning passed in 2023. If even a small portion of those were credited, the city's net mandate of 36,000 units would drop significantly, reducing the need for this excessive upzoning.

So therefore, San Francisco must find another source for the balance of **36,300** new units by 2031 (94,300 mandate minus 58,000 recognized). This demand is absurd and everyone knows it. San Francisco has been set up for failure.

And here is the real problem: these RHNA mandates were set before the pandemic—using outdated assumptions that no longer reflect San Francisco's population trends, economic conditions, or existing pipeline.

The Department of Finance expects only modest growth of 17,000 new residents by 2050, far below the assumptions behind these targets. The mandate is inflated, obsolete, and increasingly detached from reality.

Manufactured Capacity, Disconnected from the Facts

Rather than question the state's deeply flawed housing math, local officials have doubled down. Mayor Breed's commercial corridor upzoning was said to create capacity for **140,000** additional units, primarily luxury housing, with no affordability requirements. An aside, this contributed to her defeat in November of 2024.

Now, according to statements from city officials and Planning staff, Mayor Lurie's upzoning map would increase that number even further, up to **800,000** units, by increasing heights and/or density to nearly every property on the west and north sides of the city.

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Add in the speculative bonuses allowed under the State Density Bonus Law (Wiener, SB 35), and San Francisco may be facing a buildout capacity of over **1.2 million** units, **nearly half of the entire state's RHNA target!**

Why? To meet an imaginary shortfall of 36,300 units, a threshold that an earlier rezoning had already met. Local law, signed by Mayor London Breed in 2023, created capacity for 400,000 units through fourplex and sixplex legislation.

So here we are: awash in theoretical capacity, but still being told we must upzone even more, or face punishment. This is not planning. It is fiction. This is a weaponized numbers game that penalizes San Francisco for failing to fulfill targets that were never rooted in reality from the start.

State Laws Keep Cities on Their Knees

While the state's housing mandates and theoretical capacity projections may look like numbers on paper, they result in permanent changes to local zoning, removing community input, locking in developer giveaways, and reshaping our neighborhoods for generations to come.

Under current law, these impacts are not hypothetical, they are enforced through a series of rigid, punitive state policies that strip local governments of the power to adapt, respond, or push back:

- Cities cannot downzone, it is illegal, even if upzoning leads to abuse or displacement. (Wiener, SB 330)
- RHNA mandates cannot be revised, even in the face of population decline, shifting economic conditions, or a global pandemic. (Wiener, SB 828)
- If a city is found "non-compliant," the Builder's Remedy kicks in, allowing developers to ignore local zoning. (Wiener, SB 35)
- State funds for affordable housing and transit are held hostage, contingent on submission to HCD's unchallengeable authority. (Wiener, SB 6, 35, 828)

This is not balanced policymaking. It is a coercive framework that prioritizes production quotas over people, and profits over planning.

The Developer Class Is Not Going to Save Us

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Developers do not build to meet needs. They build housing to chase returns. Without strong affordability requirements, incentives, and subsidies, they will never deliver the kinds of homes working people can afford. Our current pipeline proves this: it is overflowing with luxury units while real affordability remains a mirage.

Upzoning only fuels this cycle. By increasing land values, it invites speculation, which leads to the sale and demolition of existing buildings and displaces long-time tenants and small businesses that make neighborhoods livable.

Instead of asking, “What do communities need?” Sacramento has asked, “What do investors want?” or “What do the YIMBY tech libertarians want?” The answer: a blank check. Deregulation. And that is exactly what they are getting.

Even the building industry is expressing doubt. In a recent San Francisco Chronicle article, Sean Keighran, president of the Residential Builders Association, made it clear that upzoning alone won’t solve the problem:

“San Francisco does not have a zoning problem,” Keighran said. “The builders of San Francisco have economic problems, and zoning will not fix it.”

He noted that most RBA members, once responsible for thousands of new units, are no longer active in San Francisco:

“Nobody is even in the locker room. The cheerleaders can practice their cheers and one day it will be important, but right now they are just cheerleaders practicing. It’s not going to lead to housing.” [San Francisco Chronicle](#), April 3, 2025, J.K. Dineen

The Real Crisis Is a Crisis of Leadership

We must stop pretending this is about solving a housing shortage. It is about state overreach, erasing local voices, and reducing planning to a spreadsheet, no matter who gets displaced in the process.

Mayor Lurie’s upzoning map is, in truth, a demolition plan. It threatens existing homes, small businesses, and rent-controlled units across entire neighborhoods, without a clear path to affordability. Nearly 400,000 residents and businesses could be affected, most without knowing what is coming.

This is not just about zoning. It is part of a broader push for deregulation, echoing patterns we are seeing play out nationally. Housing policy is simply the front line of a much larger agenda.

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Mayor Lurie has an opportunity to break from this legacy, resist pressure from the state bullying and YIMBY lawsuit threats, and lead with a vision rooted in transparency, fairness, and genuine affordability.

He can protect what makes San Francisco unique: its diverse neighborhoods, historic fabric, and vibrant small business corridors by ensuring that growth is thoughtful, inclusive, and shaped with, not against, the people who live here.

This is not just our fight. A growing, united front, made up of neighborhood associations, tenants, small businesses, nonprofits, affordable housing advocates, is demanding a different path forward. Together we can not be ignored.

Related article: [Daniel Lurie's YIMBY Long Game](#), Lincoln Mitchell, April 2025