**Local Government Commission**
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**What does affordable housing have to do with climate change?**

## Statewide forum explores connections – and solutions – between our housing crisis and the growing community impacts of climate change

SACRAMENTO – Throughout California, we are seeing two critical priorities converge: affordable housing and climate resilience. While daunting on their own, these intersections may offer helpful direction about how we might solve both problems.

Adequate supplies of high-quality affordable housing and climate resiliency are inextricably linked. Any efforts to address housing demand will fall short over time unless we simultaneously ensure that housing development considers climate impacts, is responsive to security risks, and factors in climate-related economic consequences.

**The third biennial California Adaptation Forum**, hosted by the [Local Government Commission](http://lgc.org) and the State of California, comes to Sacramento on August 27-29. More than 750 policymakers, business leaders and practitioners in attendance, will take a closer look at the various ways that California communities can exchange knowledge and identify collaboration opportunities to address its housing crisis while responding to the impacts of climate change. The Forum is an affiliate event of the [Global Climate Action Summit](http://www.globalclimateactionsummit.org), an international convening to raise ambition for climate action.

The Forum program will include a discussion of the latest climate research from [California’s Fourth Climate Change Assessment](http://www.climateassessment.ca.gov/), which will be released on the first day of the Forum.

“We need to put billions of dollars into addressing California’s housing crises, if we don’t want to make the problem worse, we will have to integrate and adopt a holistic, equitable approach that considers climate, so we can get the smartest and most sustainable results from those investments,” said Kate Meis, executive director of the Local Government Commission, which organized the forum in partnership with the State of California. “The same is true the other way: We need to scale our climate response, but if we’re not thoughtful about how our solutions affect housing, we will only make the housing crises worse.”

As we maintain and grow our housing stock, existing buildings, should be retrofitted to be more resilient to heat and sea-level rise, and new developments should be sited in low-risk areas. Transit-oriented housing can serve as an important strategy for making communities more climate-resilient while enhancing low-cost transportation options. Increasing the resiliency of our housing is particularly critical in lower-income neighborhoods and underserved communities who have historically lacked adequate housing – because of long-term social disinvestment – and are at greater risk from climate-change impacts.

Adding to our housing stock in ways that are climate-resilient can help reduce energy- and transportation-related pollution, slowing the effects of climate change and increasing resiliency to climate impacts, including extreme heat, while reducing economic burdens for residents.

The city of Santa Rosa, in Sonoma County, alone lost 3,000 homes – fully 5% of its housing stock – in the Tubbs Fire. Thousands of residents remain displaced, and many are not sure where they will end up or whether they can continue to afford living in the region where housing is expensive and in chronically short supply. As the region rebuilds, the City are offering incentives for homeowners to build more resilient, zero-net energy homes through a partnership with Sonoma Clean Power, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

By 2030, 60% of the world’s buildings will be new or rehabilitated construction, creating a significant opportunity to develop buildings that are more resilient to extreme heat, drought and storm events by using technology and design techniques to capture stormwater, reduce the urban heat island effect and conserve energy and water.

“Climate change can seem like a distant threat for many people, and the idea of making communities more climate-resilient may seem a bit abstract compared to more tangible demands to find safe, affordable housing, reliable transportation, healthy food, clean air and water, and jobs that can sustain a family,” Meis said.

“Climate change is a ‘threat multiplier’ that exacerbates equity issues already faced by people of color and immigrant communities as the result of long-standing economic, social and racial factors,” said Kif Scheuer, the LGC’s climate-change program director. “Housing disparities are potentially the single most dramatic example of where these inequities have taken root. As a new set of climate-adaptation policies are being developed and large investments are being made to build more housing, we have a unique and urgent opportunity to create new policies that strengthen our housing options both the building of climate resiliency and social equity.”

A [McKinsey Global Institute](http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/urbanization/closing-californias-housing-gap) report estimated that California must build 3.5 million new housing units by 2025 to satisfy pent-up demand and meet the needs of its growing population.

The housing shortage generates a housing affordability problem, exacerbated by growing income disparities. Nearly 6 million Californian households are unable to afford the cost of housing. In every metropolitan statistical area at least 30% of households (as high as 60% in some regions) cannot afford the cost of housing.

 “The good news is that communities across California are creating viable models that can be replicated and expanded,” Scheuer said. “These projects are not only reducing pollution and increasing resilience to extreme heat and other climate impacts but they’re also providing for people’s basic housing, transportation, food and work needs.”

**On the agenda:** This year’s forum integrated will examine the housing-climate connection in great detail in several sessions as well as offer relevant tool demonstrations, local tours and related workshops throughout the program.

The plenary on “Building Blocks for an Uncertain Tomorrow: Policymaking in an Age of Climate Risk” will feature a discussion with local, regional and state policymakers about the complex terrain of building solutions that strengthen climate resilience while also addressing our affordable-housing crisis. The panelists, including Sonoma County Supervisor James Gore, who also chairs the National Association of Counties’ Committee on Resiliency, will examine political considerations, emerging solutions and lessons learned for responding effectively and nimbly to current crises while at the same time preparing for future risks.

In the “Partnerships to Advance Equitable Housing Opportunities for All Californians” session, several strategies and resources will be highlighted to help achieve these goals, including existing grant programs and financing mechanisms that can be leveraged to address the affordable housing crisis while integrating climate-smart solutions. A panel of housing, finance and equity experts will demonstrate how low-income residents must be part of California’s transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient future, and how partnerships and resources can be leveraged to respond to the concurrent issues of affordable housing and climate resilience.

The “Creating Equitable Outcomes: Lessons from The Residential Building Sector” session will feature three diverse perspectives on building envelope technology, residential building policies, and housing inequality. This conversation will describe how we can better take advantage of promising innovations in the residential building sector in ways that increase climate resilience and maintain the character of California communities. The panel will bring to light the importance of climate-smart solutions and investments in residential building stock, as well as address hard questions such as inequitable application of solutions and investment-induced gentrification.

The residential experts will also share lessons learned from the Senate Bill 350 Barriers study, an analysis of new building-envelope technologies and policies, and offer insights about what local investments and policies would enable climate-smart housing while ensuring that affordable housing is available to those most in need of it.

The “Buildings Are for People: Engaging Low-Income Multifamily Building Occupants” session will explore opportunities to support resilience in affordable housing – from both a building-system’ and residents’ perspective. Lessons learned from a diverse set of projects will be explored, including strategies to engage residents, ways to combine funding sources, and tool options to support resilience in our most vulnerable populations.

Elsewhere in the forum program is a Tool Demo on the “Urban Footprint,” addressing the challenges of sustainable urban planning. Among the tours of local projects, the adaptation-accelerator tour on “Clean Energy for Resiliency: Multifamily Housing” explores another aspect of the housing-climate connection.

The Forum program features an interdisciplinary mix of over 250 speakers and more than 70 sessions and plenaries focused on emerging trends, model projects and approaches, financing, tools and implementation strategies. The forum is made possible through [sponsorship](http://www.californiaadaptationforum.org/forum-sponsors/) by the [Bay Area Air Quality Management District](http://www.baaqmd.gov/), [Edison International](https://www.edison.com/), and dozens of additional organizations leading climate change response efforts. For more details about the agenda and forum sponsors: [CaliforniaAdaptationForum.org](http://californiaadaptationforum.org/)

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