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California Urban Housing Market Plagued by Higher Rents, Lower Wages, and CEQA

By Lindsay D. Puckett

The economic and social impacts of the California Environmental Quality Act are significant enough that the worldwide publication, *The Economist*, recently reported that the law's liberal standing requirements "allow[ing] almost anyone to sue to block any development" have contributed to a substantial affordable housing shortage in Los Angeles.

Reliance on CEQA by NIMBYs to block high-density housing, combined with anti-development zoning laws and lower wages compared to other major urban cities in the United States, has not only hindered affordable housing but also the environment that CEQA is designed to protect. Developers are forced to scale back high-rise projects near public transit that would otherwise encourage more walking and alternative transportation, resulting in fewer air emissions. Whether proposed amendments to the state CEQA Guidelines under SB 743, legislation signed into law in 2013 requiring a new metric for measuring traffic impacts to facilitate infill development, is enough to alleviate at least some of the housing obstacles faced by Los Angeles and other metropolitan areas is still being determined.

Note: This article originally appeared on the now-defunct BBKnowledge blog, where Best Best & Krieger authors shared their knowledge on emerging issues in public agency law.

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