

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.0 Overview

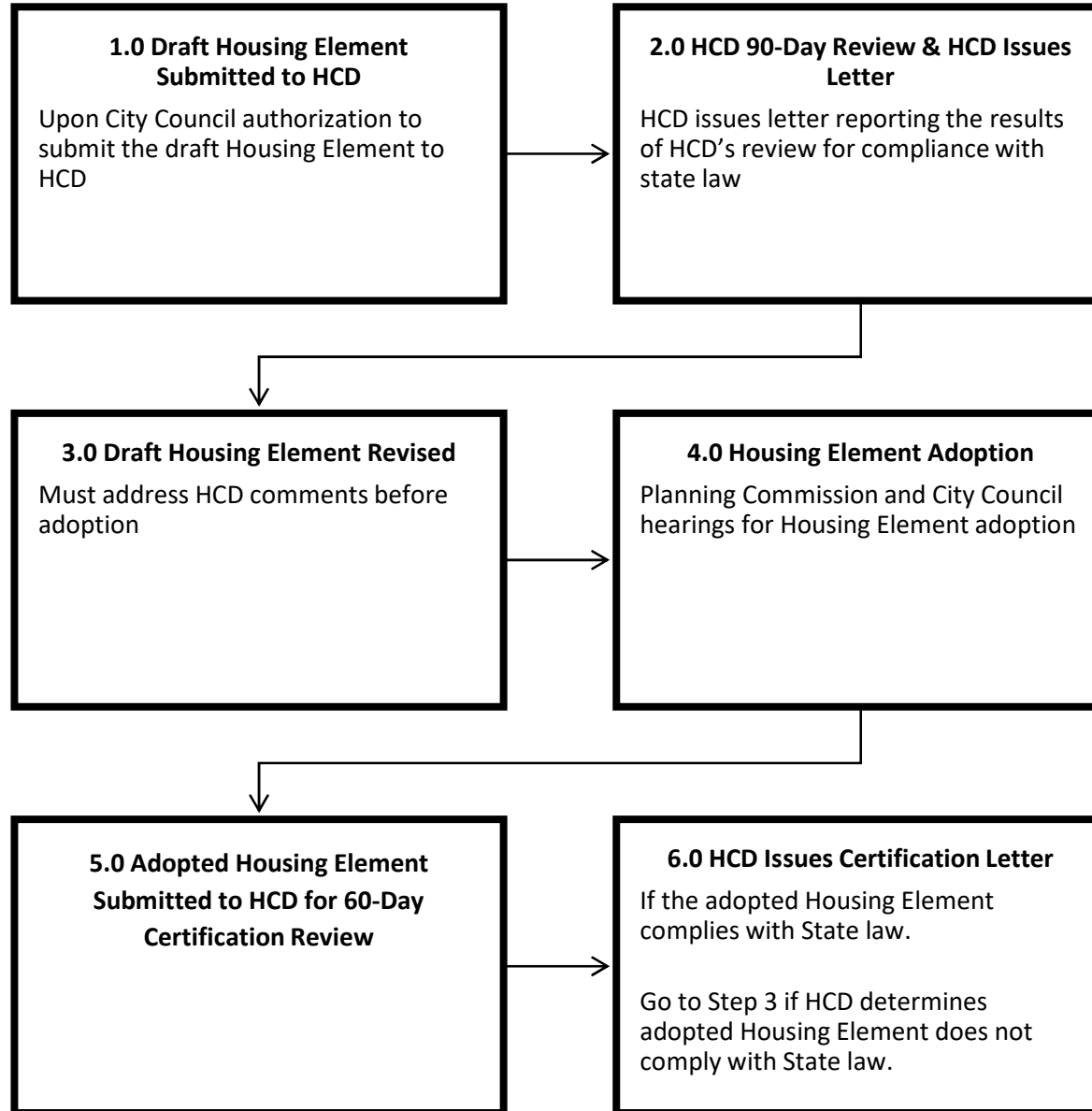
State Housing Element law recognizes that in order for the private sector to address housing needs and demand, local governments must adopt land-use plans and implement regulations that provides realistic opportunities for housing development and does not unduly constrain the production, preservation, or improvement of housing for households at all income levels.

As such, Housing Elements are subject to detailed statutory requirements. Unlike other general plan elements, Housing Elements are subject to review and approval (referred to as “certification”) by the State every eight years. The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) reviews every local government’s Housing Element and determines whether it complies with State law. Because the Housing Element is part of the City’s General Plan, obtaining housing element approval from HCD is critical for maintaining the City’s General Plan compliance. Moreover, there are State funding programs for transportation, infrastructure, and housing that require (or consider) a local jurisdiction’s compliance with Housing Element Law. Figure 1 below illustrates the process of Housing Element preparation and adoption and HCD’s role in this process.

For this reason, the Housing Element is a mandatory element of the Blue Lake General Plan. State law requires that each city and county accommodate its fair share of affordable housing as an approach to distributing housing needs throughout the State. The Element establishes the City’s housing policies and implementation priorities for the 2027–2035 planning period and provides the framework through which the City will plan for its housing needs.

The Housing Element is a policy document that identifies Blue Lake’s existing and future housing needs and establishes proposed actions to facilitate the provision of housing to meet those needs for all income levels. The Housing Element’s policies and programs in Chapter 2 reflect a combination of the concerns of the local Blue Lake community along with new State housing mandates.

Figure 1: Housing Element Preparation and Adoption



2.0 Purpose

The purpose of the Housing Element is to establish specific goals and policies relative to the provision of housing for all income levels, and to adopt a series of programs to accomplish the City's housing goals and policies. In addition, the Element identifies and analyzes housing needs and resources and constraints to meeting those needs. State Housing Element Law requires cities and counties to adequately plan for their share of regional housing needs and to provide realistic opportunities for the development, preservation, and improvement of housing for people at all income levels.

This is Blue Lake's seventh Housing Element and it plans for the years 2027-2035. State law (Government Code §§ 65580 through 65589) mandates the contents of the Housing Element. By law, the Housing Element must contain all of the following:

- An analysis of housing needs of the city's population and to adequately plan to meet the existing and projected housing needs, including the jurisdiction's share of the regional housing needs allocation (RHNA).
- An inventory of land suitable for residential development, including vacant sites and sites having the potential for redevelopment.
- An analysis of housing constraints that impact housing production that identifies and analyzes potential and actual governmental constraints to the maintenance, improvement, or development of housing for all income levels, including housing for people with disabilities.
- Programs that implement the city's housing policies. Each jurisdiction must identify specific programs in its housing element that will allow it to implement the stated policies, and achieve the stated goals and objectives.
- An analysis of the jurisdiction's progress to implement the housing programs of the previous housing element, and the effectiveness of the programs.
- Actions that meaningfully promote and further fair housing opportunities in the community.

The Housing Element must also identify adequate residential sites available for a variety of housing types for all income levels; assist in developing adequate housing to meet the needs of very low-, low-, and moderate-income households; address governmental constraints to housing maintenance, improvement, and development; address the conservation of the existing affordable housing stock, and how the condition of the existing housing stock in need of improvement will be achieved; and promote housing opportunities for all persons.

Even though the focus of the Housing Element is on lower- and moderate-income households, the Element must address the housing needs and policy issues for the entire community and be consistent with the adopted policies of the rest of the General Plan.

Preparation and adoption of the Housing Element does not approve individual housing developments or require the City to construct housing. Rather, it establishes the land-use framework, policies, regulatory actions, and other local measures needed to provide meaningful opportunities for housing development and to reduce identified barriers to meeting the community's housing needs.

3.0 General Plan Consistency

State law requires that “the general plan, its elements and parts thereof comprise an integrated, internally consistent, and compatible statement of policies.” The Housing Element is an integral component of the Blue Lake General Plan and must be internally consistent with the goals, policies, and land-use framework established by the other General Plan elements. The City reviewed the existing General Plan as part of this update to identify any inconsistencies and to determine whether amendments to other elements are necessary. Section 3.1 and Section 3.2 below describe general plan updates that are linked to housing element updates. To the extent feasible, Program HI-17 commits the City to reviewing and updating the current Safety Element and Conservation Elements as necessary to incorporate all State law changes, including applicable laws and any additional requirements and General Plan guidelines from the State of California Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation.

3.1 Safety Element Updates Linked to Housing Element Updates

In accordance with Government Code § 65302(g)(3), at the next revision of the Housing Element after January 1, 2014, the Safety Element must be reviewed and updated as necessary to address the risk of fire for land classified in State Responsibility Areas (SRA), as defined in Section 4102 of the Public Resources Code, and land classified in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, as defined in Section 51177.¹ State Government Code § 65302(g)(4) requires that the Safety Element be reviewed and updated as necessary to address climate change adaptation and applicable resiliency strategies beginning on January 1, 2022, or upon the next revision of the local hazard mitigation plan. Government Code § 65302(g)(6) requires that the Safety Element be reviewed and updated as needed upon each revision of the Housing Element or local hazard mitigation plan, but not less than once every eight years. Government Code § 65302(g)(5) requires that on or after January 1, 2020, the Safety Element be reviewed and updated as necessary to identify residential

¹ The City does not have any SRA. CalFire's 2025 Recommended Fire Hazard Severity Zones for Local Responsibility Areas (LRA) mapping do not show any land classified in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

developments in any hazard area identified in the Safety Element that do not have at least two emergency evacuation routes.

3.2 Conservation Element Updates Linked to Housing Element Updates

Blue Lake's Conservation Element is incorporated into the Land Use Element. Government Code § 65302(d)(4) requires that, on the next revision of the housing element on or after January 1, 2028, the conservation element is to be updated to identify and analyze existing and planned wildlife passage features and connectivity areas, permeability, and natural landscape areas within the jurisdiction as those terms are defined in Section 158 of the Streets and Highways Code, and wildlife passage features within the connectivity needs of the state highway system as those terms are defined in Section 158 of the Streets and Highways Code.

Written Public Comments Received

During the first and second 30-day public review periods, the City received letters from a Blue Lake resident expressing concern about the consistency of the 7th Cycle Housing Element with the City's existing General Plan. Both comment letters specifically mention the Circulation Element which was last updated in 1986.

Response: the 7th Cycle Housing Element Update does not approve specific development projects or increase development beyond what is already planned under the General Plan. Rather, it identifies sites that are already designated and zoned for residential development and accommodates the City's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). While policies could require amendments to the Zoning Ordinance or result in actions of the City that could cause a physical change, the proposed policies and programs would not result in specific physical changes to the environment.

Additionally, any amendments to the Zoning Code would be subject to project-specific environmental review pursuant to CEQA. Moreover, the City has a track record of requiring projects to be consistent with the policies of the Circulation Element by implementing its policies: design and construction of a private internal access road meeting emergency access standards and pedestrian improvements where the private access road encroaches onto City street (Greenwood Avenue) were requirements for the approval of minor subdivision.

The City will maintain internal consistency as the General Plan and Housing Element are implemented. Future amendments to the General Plan or Housing Element will be

evaluated for consistency with all applicable elements, and the City will complete any related updates required by State law.

4.0 Regional Housing Needs Allocation

The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) is a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) composed of Humboldt County and the cities of Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell, and Trinidad. In addition to its regional transportation responsibilities, HCAOG serves as the council of governments responsible for administering the Regional Housing Needs Allocation process for the Humboldt County region. Pursuant to State Government Code § 65584, the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) determines the existing and projected housing need for distinct regions in the state. HCAOG then develops and adopts a Regional Housing Needs Allocation Plan, in consultation with HCD and its member jurisdictions, that distributes the regional housing need among Humboldt County and each incorporated city.

The HCAOG Board adopted the seventh-cycle allocation methodology on December 18, 2025. Following HCD's review of the methodology and completion of the statutory appeals process, the HCAOG Board adopted the final 2026 Regional Housing Needs Allocation Plan on May 21, 2026, through Resolution 26-12. The allocation identifies the number of housing units for which each jurisdiction must plan, organized by income category. The seventh-cycle projection period begins December 31, 2027, and extends through August 31, 2035. Blue Lake's assigned allocation establishes the minimum housing capacity the City must accommodate through appropriately zoned sites, development standards, and implementation programs during the planning period.

Table 1: Regional Housing Needs Allocation Humboldt County, 2027-2035

Income category	Units
Acutely low income	3
Extremely low income	7
Very low income	4
Low income	8
Moderate income	4
Above moderate income	15
Total	41

Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development

5.0 Data Sources

Preparation of the Housing Element relied on a combination of federal, State, regional, and local data sources. Principal sources included the decennial United States Census, the

American Community Survey (ACS), the California Department of Finance (DOF), data provided by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), and locally available information from the City, Humboldt County, regional agencies, housing and service providers, and community outreach activities. Using multiple sources allows the City to compare datasets, identify trends, and supplement statewide information with local knowledge of Blue Lake's housing conditions.

The US Census, which is completed every 10 years, is an important source of information for the community profile. It provides the most reliable and in-depth data for demographic characteristics of a locality. The ACS is conducted by the US Census Bureau and provides estimates of numerous housing-related indicators based on samples averaged over a five-year period. The Housing Needs Assessment reflects the data provided from HCD and the 2015-2019 ACS data. It is important to note that the ACS data can have a large margin of error for a community as small as Blue Lake, so the data may not always be accurate.

The California Department of Finance is another source of valuable data and is more current than the census. However, the Department of Finance does not provide the depth of information that can be found in the US Census Bureau reports. Whenever possible, Department of Finance data and other local sources were used in the Housing Needs Assessment in order to provide the most current profile of the community.

HCD also provides standardized data and mapping resources to support preparation of Housing Elements. These resources include demographic, housing, economic, and land-use information, as well as materials developed for the assessment of fair housing.

6.0 Analysis of the Previous Housing Element

An important aspect of the Housing Element is an evaluation of achievements from the implementation of programs included in the previously adopted Housing Element. The evaluation provides valuable information on the extent to which programs have been successful in achieving stated objectives and addressing local needs, and the extent to which these programs continue to be relevant in addressing current and future housing needs in Blue Lake. The evaluation also provides the basis for recommended modifications to programs and the establishment of new objectives in the Housing Element. Chapter 2 – *Goals, Policies, and Programs* contains the City's objectives and programs for the past planning period (2019-2027).

Blue Lake's recent Housing Element history provides important context for this evaluation. Before the sixth cycle, the most recent Housing Element adopted by the City was the fourth-cycle Housing Element, adopted in 2009 for the 2007–2014 planning period. The City prepared a fifth-cycle update for the 2014–2019 planning period, but the update was not ultimately adopted by the City Council.

The City Council adopted the sixth-cycle Housing Element, covering the 2019–2027 planning period, on July 22, 2025, following a duly noticed public hearing. The City subsequently adopted Ordinance No. 546 on December 23, 2025, to implement Program HI-14 by completing required rezoning and establishing by-right procedures for qualifying multifamily development. On December 30, 2025, the California Department of Housing and Community Development determined that the adopted Housing Element, together with the completed rezoning, substantially complied with State Housing Element Law.

Because the 6th Cycle Housing Element was adopted relatively late in the 2019–2027 planning period, many of its programs had only a limited period for implementation before preparation of this seventh-cycle update began. The evaluation therefore considers both whether each program was initiated or completed and whether it established an effective foundation for continued implementation. Programs that remain relevant and have not yet had sufficient time to demonstrate measurable results may be continued or modified with updated objectives, schedules, responsible parties, and performance measures.

7.0 Looking Ahead

During the 2027–2035 planning period, Blue Lake will continue to address housing needs through locally appropriate actions and regional collaboration. Although housing conditions and development opportunities vary among Humboldt County jurisdictions, many challenges extend beyond individual city boundaries. Housing affordability, limited housing availability, infrastructure capacity, access to employment and services, and the need for specialized housing resources are regional issues that benefit from coordinated solutions. Also, there are many small jurisdictions in Humboldt County and bringing the resources to bear to prepare a legally sufficient housing element is overly burdensome, and for that reason prior to the start of the 8th cycle, the City would appreciate the Department of Housing and Community Development being willing to support the preparation of a regional housing element for the Humboldt county region.

The City will pursue opportunities to coordinate with Humboldt County, neighboring cities, tribal governments, regional agencies, nonprofit housing organizations, and service providers when collaboration can improve program effectiveness or expand access to housing resources. At the same time, Blue Lake will continue to tailor its housing policies and programs to local conditions, community priorities, and available infrastructure.