Re: Senate Bill 50 (Wiener) OPPOSE

Honorable President Pro Tempore Atkins and Committee Members:

The Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations, Inc., founded in 1952, represents 43 homeowner and resident associations with approximately 250,000 constituents spanning the Santa Monica Mountains. At its meeting of January 21, 2020, the Hillside Federation voted to OPPOSE revised Senate Bill 50 (Wiener).

This current version of SB 50 is a minor revision of the original. It would remove sound planning and turn it over to developers. It would eliminate our ability to comment on proposed development as there would be no public hearings and a very short time between an application for a project and project approval. It does not provide for any significant additional affordable housing, which is a real problem for working Californians. Our housing crisis will not be solved by allowing developers to build more luxury units. The State should follow the lead of cities like Los Angeles in requiring more affordable housing, not less.

All of our constituent organizations’ members live in hillside areas of the City of Los Angeles, and particularly in the Santa Monica Mountains. Virtually all of this area falls within state-designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. VHFHSZ areas require special consideration to mitigate ever-increasing fire risk and should be entirely exempt from the...
proposed bill. Recent notable wildfires, such as the Getty Fire in the Santa Monica Mountains west of the 405 freeway, have destroyed many hundreds of acres and dozens of local homes, in addition to devastating local habitat areas. State and local agencies studying the effects of climate change on wildfire universally conclude that wildfire seasons are expected to lengthen and the effects of devastating wildfires will continue to worsen.

As currently drafted, SB 50 is grossly inadequate to protect the lives and property of Los Angeles residents in hillside areas or important habitat and recreation areas of the City and neighboring county lands, all in service of market-rate residential density increases made without respect to impacts on local infrastructure and public safety agencies. These sorts of impacts are ordinarily considered during the environmental review process, but SB 50 exempts eligible projects from those requirements.

In addition, a proposed two-year window to allow cities to adopt a revised housing plan in order to preserve local control over their zoning and land use planning is obviously insufficient for a large and complex city such as Los Angeles, and ignores that the City has already implemented a number of planning initiatives to increase affordable housing that are already paying dividends. And developers will not continue to build actual affordable housing projects under existing programs if in two years they will be able to build larger, entirely market-rate projects through a ministerial process on the same parcels instead.

The Hillside Federation strongly OPPOSES SB 50, and we urge you to vote NO.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Charley Mims